PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1987-88

COMPRISING PERIOD
8 FEBRUARY—19 FEBRUARY 1988

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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

THIRTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

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Monday 8 February 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords]*
Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

WALES

Regional Aid

1. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much grant he expects to pay out in *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* regional selective assistance in Wales in 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Walker): Planned expenditure on the two schemes in Wales is £98 million in 1987-88; £109 million in 1988-89; £94 million in 1989-90; and £89 million in 1990-91. Added to those two schemes is the very substantial increase in expenditure for the Welsh Development Agency—to £113 million gross in 1988-89—and the benefits that will be obtained from the three new regional investment, innovation and business development grants.

Mr. Morgan: Will the right hon. Gentleman consider making regional selective assistance tax free, which would put it on the same basis and give it the same incentive value as RDG, which is being phased out?

Has the right hon. Gentleman considered the call of the Confederation of British Industry Wales for a longer period for phasing out RDG, so as not to destroy the incentive for industry to move to Wales?

Mr. Walker: Taxation is, of course, a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. However, it is very much taken into account when setting the level of RSA grants.

I considered the CBI Wales proposal, but rejected it because, between now and the end of March, any firm in Wales with a project that might attract RDG could produce it. Indeed, the Welsh Office, through a whole range of agencies, has made great efforts to communicate with Welsh firms to ensure that that happens.

Mr. Raffan: Will my right hon. Friend suggest to the Opposition that, as part of their "Labour Listens" campaign, they lend an ear——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's question must be related to the main question.

Mr. Raffan: Will my right hon. Friend remind the Opposition——

Mr. Speaker: That is no good.

Mr. Raffan: Is it not the belief of the Welsh Trades Union Congress that the automatic nature of RSG has led to a wasteful allocation? Does it not strongly favour a much greater selectivity to improve the cost-effectiveness of our regional policy?

Mr. Walker: Certainly the TUC document mentioned that it wished to move towards greater selectivity. However, I am unwilling to make suggestions to the Opposition because I am very happy with the way that they are behaving.

Mr. Livsey: When the right hon. Gentleman visits Mid-Wales Development tomorrow, will he note that it has benefited considerably from RDG? Is he aware that that organisation is worried about the Government's regional policy? What does he intend to tell it about the Government's regional policy?

Mr. Walker: I had discussions with the chairman of Mid-Wales Development last week, and he shares our delight about the considerable increase in regional aid for

Wales. I very much look forward to visiting the organisation tomorrow and seeing Newtown and the activities there.

Dr. Thomas: Will the right hon. Gentleman assure us that in the areas recently affected by Dairy Crest closures—at Llangefni in Ynys Môn and Felin Fach, in the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) and for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones)—the full armoury of regional policy will be available to provide alternative employment in those areas?

Mr. Walker: I can give that assurance because this is an instance of where organisations such as the Welsh Development Agency and Mid Wales Development can move in quickly. I understand that the WDA has today announced a joint programme to find alternative food businesses for Ynys Môn. I have also decided that, under the urban aid programme, I shall proceed with some new workshops in that locality in the near future.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: When considering regional assistance, what account does my right hon. Friend take of the achievement of private investment, which, in some parts of Wales, has been very successful?

Mr. Walker: I am delighted to say that as areas of Wales have an expanding economy and prosperity improves it is easier to gear up and get far more private investment. A great deal of investment is taking place in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Mr. Alan Williams: Will the Secretary of State bear in mind that the increased WDA figure that he pleaded in aid in his opening answer will still be below the level of 1978-79 Government funding? If the Welsh Office is so committed to selective assistance, because that leaves the decisions in the control of the Secretary of State, how does he explain the fact that, since 1978-79, regional selective assistance in Wales has fallen by virtually 50 per cent., giving us a cumulative loss of £330 million, whereas in Scotland it has doubled? The Secretary of State for Scotland has obviously been looking after Scotland's interests far better than the Secretary of State for Wales has been looking after Wales' interests. In the final analysis, on the projections which he has just given of his spending on combined regional grant for the next three or four years, the figure for each year is virtually £100 million less than was being spent in 1978-79.

Mr. Walker: The right hon. Gentleman suffers because his only source of political originality is a research assistant who finds him a base year on which to connect and reject figures. As I have learnt that technique, I can assure him that when the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs meets later this week I shall project, on a similar basis, all the health figures for the period in which he was in government. It is a bogus method of presenting figures. The Labour party is alone in Wales in regretting the enormous increase in regional aid that will take place.

Labour Statistics

2. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total of unemployed in Wales in February 1979 and to the latest recorded date in the current year; and what the increase in unemployment represents as a percentage figure.

Mr. Peter Walker: The seasonally adjusted number of unemployed claimants in Wales in February 1979 and December 1987 were 75,000—6 per cent.—and 140,300—11·7 per cent. which figure, I am pleased to say, has decreased by 20 per cent. over the past 19 months.

Mr. Jones: In order further to rebuild the economy on Deeside, will the right hon. Gentleman consider vastly improving road access to the very fine Deeside industrial park? Does he understand that the communities of Shotton and Connah's Quay want to be bypassed by a new crossing of the River Dee so that their lives can be made much better by getting the traffic out of the streets? The great worry of Alyn and Deeside council is that, despite its good plans for jobs, it cannot get hold of the site of the Connah's Quay power station, which is now redundant. Will the right hon. Gentleman discuss these matters when he visits Clywd later this month?

Mr. Walker: Yes, I shall be happy to discuss any matters when I make that visit. I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the appearance of the entrance to the industrial park. It is partly a question of land ownership and current usage there, but I hope that those concerned will have urgent discussions so that the situation can be improved.

Mr. Foot: Was the right hon. Gentleman aware of the shudder of dismay throughout the coalfields in Wales last week at the fresh or projected redundancies in that industry? Will he tell us whether British Coal consulted him before those announcements were made, and will he confirm that urgent consideration will be given to Abernant colliery and all the other projected rundowns? It is a serious situation and I hope that the Government will not have allowed British Coal to embark on this programme without consulting them first.

Mr. Walker: As the right hon. Gentleman knows full well, this is a matter for British Coal. I am pleased to say that when I was responsible for these matters, I laid down a new procedure which allows an independent examination of any application. If the mines concerned wish to go through that procedure, they will be able to do so. That procedure is a considerable improvement on that operated in Wales between 1964 and 1970, when 32,000 miners lost their jobs as a result of pit closures.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the steadily falling trend of unemployment, while in perfect contrast to the rising trend of the Labour Government, has still not gone far enough, that we must continue to accord the highest priority to combating unemployment and that this will be best served by a positive approach to the jobs created for industry and the potential for even more jobs in Wales?

Mr. Walker: Yes, Sir. Some staggering achievements are taking place. In the past year a record number of factories led to record inward investment and a record drop in unemployment. I hope that that trend will continue.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Does the Secretary of State appreciate that, since his appointment, he seems to have been engaged in spreading synthetic optimism? The reality of the Welsh situation was symbolised by the 2,000 job losses in our coal industry last week. Is there not every sign that job

prospects for 1988 are worse in Wales than for any other region? In regard to pay levels, we are simply at the bottom of the league.

Mr. Walker: Prospects for the coming year are better for Wales than for most parts of the country. The facts will show that to be the case. I noticed the hon. Gentleman's jubilation at the announcement that the Trustee Savings Bank is going to Newport and the optimistic and cheerful notice that he put out. I am happy for the Labour party to be the party of pessimism and for the Conservative party to be the party of optimism.

Heads of the Valleys

3. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he proposes to take in the light of his recent visits to and tours of the Heads of the Valleys communities.

21. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he proposes to take following his recent visit to the Valleys area of South Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: My recent visits to the Valleys communities have helped to clarify the shape of the major programme that I am devising.

Mr. Rowlands: Will the Secretary of State's new Valleys initiative include additional resources for the Health Service in our communities? In particular, will it include sufficient resources to reopen the high-dependence units in St. Tudful's hospital? That hospital was opened only six months ago by the Queen Mother and was shut at the new year as a result of lack of resources. It has resulted in £120,000 worth of extremely good equipment lying idle.

Mr. Walker: I am having consultations on the initiative with Valley health authorities, and I am looking at the manner in which the particular medical and health problems of the Valleys should be considered in such a programme.

Mr. Ron Davies: Opposition Members regard the Secretary of State's answer with some scepticism. There are many promises, but not much is delivered. During his visit to the Valleys, did he understand the anger and bitterness at the continued underfunding of the National Health Service? Is he aware that, this week, nursing and ancillary staff at Caerphilly miners' hospital will work for 200 hours on a voluntary unpaid basis to make up one day's shortfall between what the hospital needs and what it gets? In the circumstances, as his Government have been so quick to criticise nurses who withdraw their labour, will he offer his support to the staff at Caerphilly miners' hospital?

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman must feel pretty ashamed at asking such a question, when he considers the level of nurses' pay when we came to office and how, during the period of the Labour Government, it went down in real terms. Under our Government it has substantially increased. On the general matter of promises, most of the people whom I met on my visit were delighted at the Valleys factory building programme that was announced during the past week.

Mr. Rogers: Does the Secretary of State accept that the proposed colliery closures will be a tremendous blow to Valley communities of south Wales? Rather than scoring political points, will he address the queston that was asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) about what proposals he had to provide work for those who will be put out of work?

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman will know that British Coal has categorically stated that there will not be a single compulsory redundancy.

Mr. Alan Williams: The Secretary of State said that, as a result of his recent tour, we got the commitment to the Valleys initiative. We welcome that. Will he confirm also that table 2.2 of the public expenditure White Paper clearly shows that the total spend in Wales will fall by £6 million next year and £54 million over the next three years? They are the Government's figures in their own White Paper. As he has told us that his Valleys initiative is included in the diminished figures, will he confirm also that, therefore, instead of extra money being available for it, the initiative is to be wholly funded by cuts in other Welsh programmes? As he does not like my statistics, although they have stood up to close examination somewhat better than his own have, will he publish in *Hansard* a list of the cuts that will fund his initiative?

Mr. Walker: I repeat that the right hon. Gentleman should decide to find a new research assistant who will not cause him such political embarrassement. I am delighted to say that once again his figures are incorrect. I have already announced a most enormous increase in regional aid for Wales, which will benefit the Valleys.

School Meals

4. **Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to improve the quality of school meals in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Mr. Wyn Roberts): Responsibility for the provision of school meals, including their quality, rests with local education authorities. A recent Government survey indicates that school meals provide adequate amounts of essential nutrients.

Dr. Marek: Nevertheless, is the Minister aware of the research carried out at Darland high school in my constituency into students and children eating junk food and therefore not attaining their full academic potential? Is he concerned at the results of that research? Will he ensure that further research is carried out to confirm or rebut the results of the research at Darland high school and, as this is clearly a serious matter, which cannot be left to local education authorities, will he set in train processes to re-establish nutritional standards at all our schools in Wales?

Mr. Roberts: Of course I am aware of the experiment carried out at Darland high school in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, which, incidentally, is very well reported in the *Lancet* of 23 January. The conclusion of that research was that in most cases the average intake of vitamins was close to the recommended daily allowance, although for a minority the intake was low. We always consider dietary studies of this kind, but whatever school meals are supplied the choice whether to take them lies with the children concerned.

Mr. Raffan: Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating Clwyd health authority and Clwyd local education authority on their joint campaign "Healthy

Eating—the Clwyd Way"? Will he suggest to the Welsh Health Promotion Authority that it takes up this admirable initiative to teach schoolchildren about healthy eating through school meals with the correct foods and at a low price?

Mr. Roberts: My hon. Friend will be interested to know that the preliminary results of a DHSS survey into the diets of schoolchildren in Britain, published in April 1986, showed that school meals provided adequate amounts of all the essential nutrients, although intakes of fat were found to be too high. My hon. Friend is right in saying that all efforts to improve the quality of diet for schoolchildren should be welcomed, including the efforts of Clwyd.

Trawsfynydd Power Station

5. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from local residents seeking the abandonment of the experiment being planned for 12 February at Trawsfynydd nuclear power station.

Mr. Peter Walker: I received a number of representations, from north Wales and elsewhere, expressing concern about the proposed test. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Central Electricity Generating Board has decided to postpone the test.

Mr. Williams: May I express my relief and delight that the CEGB has decided to postpone the test? However, is the Secretary of State aware of the concern felt by people in that area and all over Wales that the test could still take place and might be carried out in secret, as happened at Hinkley Point in 1965 and again in 1985? Will the Secretary of State seek assurances from the CEGB that the test will not take place — we want it cancelled rather than postponed — and that it will certainly not take place in secret?

Mr. Walker: I can certainly give an assurance that no such test will take place in secret.

Dr. Thomas: Has the Secretary of State brought his views on nuclear power with him from his previous incarnation?

Mr. Walker: Yes. I am aware of the concern and I am also well aware that no such test could take place without the full agreement of the independent Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, which would not agree unless it knew that the test was completely safe.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: If that is the case, why were the people of Cumbria not told that a similar test was to take place at Sellafield?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Unfortunately, that is not part of this question.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Is the Secretary of State not concerned that the decision to carry out this frightful experiment was made with no proper consultation with the fire service, teachers organisations or farmers unions? In view of the outrage generated, will he accede to the request of my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams), who calls not for postponement, but for the cancellation of the experiment?

Mr. Walker: It may well be that the communications to those concerned about the nature of the test were not sufficient. Therefore, those who wished to put over wholly unfounded propaganda about the lack of safety and the nature of the test succeeded in doing so. I hope that before any such test takes place the CEGB will carefully communicate the basis of the test.

Gwent

6. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to improve primary health care in Gwent.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ian Grist): Primary health care in Gwent, as in other parts of the Principality, will benefit from the implementation of proposals set out in the Government's White Paper entitled "Promoting Better Health".

Mr. Murphy: Does the Minister agree that there is great unease in Wales about the proposals that are set out in that White Paper? When he and his right hon. Friend begin their survey of Valley health, including the points that the Secretary of State made a few minutes ago, will they ensure that extra resources are given to primary health care in Wales? Will he give an undertaking to the House that there will be more general practitioners, especially in the Valleys of south Wales?

Mr. Grist: Yes, I think that I can give much of the assurance for which the hon. Gentleman asked. If he reads the White Paper he will see that special attention is to be given to the Valleys and that the number of general practitioners in his constituency has increased by about 10 per cent. under this Government. We look for a further improvement in the years ahead.

Housing (Multiple Occupation)

7. **Mr. Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress he has made in his consideration of policy towards houses in multiple occupation.

Mr. Grist: My consultation with local authorities, fire authorities and other interested bodies is now complete and I have set up a working party with their representatives.

The consultation showed that local authorities felt inhibited by the mandatory grants for houses in multiple occupations. As a result, the Government intend to make grants to houses of multiple occupation landlords discretionary.

Mr. Anderson: Do the Government not recognise the facts of the situation — the squalid and dangerous properties and the fire tragedies that have occurred — and that the guidance that was promised as long ago as 1980 is still only in draft form? I welcome what the Minister said, so far as it goes, but, because of the facts, should there not now be mandatory powers for local authorities if the Government are serious about the position and about seeking to provide proper protection, at last, for tenants?

Mr. Grist: The hon. Gentleman will know of my personal constituency interest in this problem. I think he will understand that in the consultation process local authorities showed that they wished to have flexibility in their responses.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned fire problems, and he will be interested to know, as will other hon. Members,

that in consultation with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for the Environment, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is considering further guidance to establish a national advisory standard for fire safety measures in houses in multiple occupation.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Does my hon. Friend accept that there will be a great deal of satisfaction with his original reply and his supplementary answer? However, can he allay my fears that the one contribution that the community charge will make to this problem wil be to encourage owners of houses in multiple occupation to push a number of their tenants out on to the pavement?

Mr. Grist: I am a little bewildered by that question, because they will pay the collective charge anyway.

Mr. John: Will the Minister publish the criteria upon which the discretion for grants for houses in multiple occupation will be paid?

Mr. Grist: Details will be made available in the Housing Bill that we shall promote in the next Session.

Labour Statistics

9. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest unadjusted figures for unemployment in *(a)* Newport, *(b)* Gwent and *(c)* Wales; and if he will give the equivalent figures for 1979 on the most nearly comparable basis.

Mr. Peter Walker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 18 January.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Secretary of State appreciate that good communications are vital for attracting new jobs to areas such as Gwent? Does he also appreciate that the Severn bridge has been paid for many times over? If £180 million can be wiped off the Humber bridge debt, surely there is now a strong case for toll-free motoring on the M4, or is the Secretary of State going along with the Secretary of State for Transport, who now seems intent on imposing tolls on so much of our road network?

Mr. Walker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not like the tolls on the Severn bridge to be increased to the level of those on the Humber bridge, but if he would, he should make that clear. The tolls on the Humber bridge are much higher than those on the Severn bridge. I should add that the tolls on the Severn bridge were imposed during a period of Labour Government and were maintained by the previous Labour Government. Therefore, I find it rather bogus for the Labour party now to say that they should be abolished.

Mr. Coleman: The Minister will be aware of the blow dealt to my constituency by the announcement of the closure of Abernant colliery, and the considerable unemployment that it will bring if it goes ahead. The NUM has invoked a procedure that will mean a delay of nine months. Will the Minister use those nine months to secure for the Abernant valley alternative and adequate employment?

Mr. Walker: Certainly. I have already announced a programme of additional factory building and massively increased regional aid that is to take place in the next three years. That will be considerable help in job creation in those areas. I am glad to say that the local authority leaders in those areas very much appreciate that.

Mr. Ray Powell: Will the Secretary of State take note that earlier today I attended the UK 2,000 celebration in Cardiff, where I was presented by Richard Branson with a certificate from the Community Activities Training Organisation, of which I am chairman. Will he take note that, perhaps because he is a stranger to Wales, he has omitted the whole of the Ogwr borough and the valley from the Valleys initiative? Unemployment in Ogwr has increased from 3·7 per cent. in 1979 to 18·7 per cent. at present. Despite that increase, the Secretary of State and his Department have omitted the Ogwr valley from the Valleys initiative.

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman should await the announcement of the areas that are to be designated for the Valleys initiative.

Sir Raymond Gower: Bearing in mind the comments of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) to the effect that the Severn crossing is a vital lifeline for Welsh industry, may I ask whether my right hon. Friend is satisfied with the progress being made to achieve a second crossing? Does he agree that it is most necessary?

Mr. Walker: Yes. It is important that the second crossing is in place by the mid-1990s. All projections have estimated that it will be in place by then. I am delighted that consultants have been appointed on a contract that has been made aimed at speeding up their decisions and their advice. It is vital for Wales that the Severn crossing is in place in good time.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Secretary of State aware that the worst unadjusted unemployment figures in Wales last month were for Pwllheli, which has a rate of 24·7 per cent.? Yet Pwllheli is not even a development area. While welcoming the announcement of the reaction to the redundancies at Llangefni, may I ask the Secretary of State to say what steps will be taken by the WDA and by his Department to overcome the regular and cyclical unemployment that exists in places such as Pwllheli?

Mr. Walker: I am anxious that positive steps are taken in such areas, such as those I have discussed with the WDA and the Mid-Wales Development. A combination of those in the more rural areas of Wales will lead to a range of policies that add to the momentum of new business initiatives.

Mr. Riddick: Does my right hon. Friend agree that unemployment in Wales could be reduced still further if the NUM were to accept a six-day working week, so that British Coal could proceed with the £90 million investment in the new coal mine at Margam?

Mr. Walker: I am pleased to say that the announcements made last week by British Coal made it absolutely clear that it was prepared to go ahead with Margam and all the jobs that that would create. It expressed the hope that the NUM will quickly agree to negotiate a six-day working week. If that does not take place there will be a sad and unnecessary loss of jobs to Wales.

Mr. Flynn: Is the Secretary of State aware of the reported delegation led by the hon. Member for Macclesfied (Mr. Winterton) to the Department of Trade and Industry to plead against the relocation of Government jobs to Wales? What action does he intend

to take to ensure that the opposite view is presented to the Department of Trade and Industry, so that the jobs are relocated in Wales to give that area a boost in jobs?

Mr. Walker: Not for the first time, I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). I can say only that we have pointed out the considerable advantages to Wales and to all the people who work there.

Craft Industry (Report)

10. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has received the independent report prepared for his Department on the craft industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have received the report and will be speedily considering its recommendations with the main bodies involved.

Mr. Carlile: I am sure that the Secretary of State will accept that there is considerable nervousness throughout the craft industry in Wales about changes that may be made in future. Will he ensure that whatever changes are made, they fit into the marketing calendar in such a way that they do not disrupt the normal pattern of business?

Mr. Walker: Yes, I shall certainly consider that point. If I may say so, as one of the few people who has read the report, the points made by the hon. and learned Gentleman in his submission to Tony Ball on this were fully considered and are dealt with in the report. I can assure the hon. and learned Gentleman that my objective is to ensure that the marketing of craft products in Wales is much improved.

Welsh Arts Council

11. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the chairman of the Welsh Arts Council; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I met the chairman of the Welsh Arts Council in January, when we discussed a variety of issues relating to the arts in Wales.

Mr. Thomas: Does the Minister consider that it is an acceptable formulation for arts policy in Wales to be handled by the Arts Council of Great Britain and then by the Welsh Arts Council, rather than that the affairs of the Welsh Arts Council should be handled entirely by his Department, so integrating arts policy with cultural and other aspects of education policy which are already part of his Department's activities?

Mr. Roberts: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows the position of the Arts Council in Wales, and he will be aware of the considerable liaison between the Welsh Office and the Arts Council. I hope that we both take account of what the other is doing.

NHS Administrators

15. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what change he expects in the number of National Health Service administrators in Wales over the coming year.

Mr. Grist: Information from health authorities about projected staffing levels for 1988-89 will not be available until the end of March.

Mr. Butler: My hon. Friend will remember that eight years ago the Conservative party manifesto promised to reduce the level of administration in the Health Service. Is it not scandalous that the administrative staff in the Health Service in Wales has increased by 14 per cent. since then, at a time when resources are stretched in the NHS?

Mr. Grist: My hon. Friend should bear in mind that a large proportion of the administrative and clerical staff are involved in the provision of direct patient care. They are, for example, medical secretaries, ward clerks and health education staff. But the proportion of total costs in the Health Service in Wales taken up by management has decreased from 5·2 to 4·2 per cent.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister accept that the increased number of administrators certainly has not done much to cut the waiting time for many services, for example, cervical cancer tests? Some people in Gwynedd have had to wait 10 weeks for the result of a smear test. Surely that is unacceptable. The Welsh Office, as the responsible body for the activities of health authorities, must carry the can for that.

Mr. Grist: The hon. Gentleman will know that that was a regrettable lapse of time and that the target time is no more than eight weeks. His question is not in line with the initial question.

Wales Railway Centre

16. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on progress at the Wales Railway Centre; and if he has any plans to pay a visit there.

Mr. Peter Walker: With financial assistance from various public bodies, locomotives have been purchased, and work is under way on site security and other improvements at Bute street, Cardiff. Other commitments mean that I will not be able to visit the centre when the first locomotives are due to arrive later this month, but I hope that a ministerial visit can be made as soon as possible. I am sure we all recognise the contribution that my hon. Friend has made to this project.

Mr. Adley: In thanking my right hon. Friend for that reply, will he, for me, please thank everybody in his Department, the WDA, the South Glamorgan county council, the Welsh Industrial and Maritime museum and all those involved? Is he aware that this is an outstanding example of co-operation between a whole range of public bodies? Can he please assure the House that he will continue to keep a close eye on its progress?

Mr. Walker: I think that the project will be successful, and I agree that great collaboration took place and brought about its success.

Mr. Michael: In welcoming the Secretary of State's answer, may I ask him whether he recognises that the centre is located in the area of highest unemployment in the South Glamorgan area, indeed such as to make Pwllheli, which itself has an unacceptable level, seem fairly reasonable? Will he bear that in mind in ensuring that employment opportunities for the people of that locality are concentrated on?

Mr. Walker: Yes, Sir.

Rating Reform

17. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the community charge for caravan sites; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: I have received a number of representations about the application of the standard charge to caravans in Wales. In the light of those representations I have decided that the maximum multiplier for caravans should be set at the same level in Wales as is proposed for England.

Mr. Bennett: Is my hon. Friend aware that that answer will bring great delight to caravan site owners in Wales, because it will bring them into line with owners in England? As this is the number one industry in Wales, will caravan park owners continue to receive a rebate for collecting money on behalf of local authorities?

Mr. Grist: It is proposed that they will have a charge that they can make.

Sir Raymond Gower: Is my hon. Friend aware that the general impact of the proposals will have a devastating effect on all caravan parks? Will he reconsider this matter, because many of the people concerned with the management of the caravan parks are extremely anxious?

Mr. Grist: I do not believe that my hon. Friend should be so evidently alarmed. The multiplier will be in the hands of the local authority, and if it believes that the tourist potential and importance of caravans in its area are as great as my hon. Friend makes out, it is quite free to levy a multiplier of zero if it so wishes.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Bury

30. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last visited Bury in his official capacity; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John Butcher): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. and learned Friend has not paid a visit to Bury in his official capacity, but hopes to visit many of the metropolitan boroughs of Greater Manchester during his period of office.

Mr. Sumberg: Is the Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend aware that Bury is currently celebrating the 200th anniversary of the birth of one of its most famous sons, Sir Robert Peel? Will my right hon. and learned Friend send a message of good wishes to the people of Bury for the success of those celebrations? Does he agree that the Peelite legacy of social reform and radical Toryism is still alive and well in the modern Conservative party?

Mr. Butcher: My hon. Friend has a lot in common with Sir Robert Peel—Sir Robert was a redhead, as is my hon. Friend. Of course, my right hon. and learned Friend will send a message of congratulations to the people of Bury, who are celebrating the birth of their favourite son. Any examination of the Tamworth manifesto will show that those same principles are alive and kicking in the present Conservative party.

Mr. Favell: Will my hon. Friend ask my right hon. and learned Friend to reflect, when he next visits Bury, on the 4,000 job losses from Manchester city council? Many council employees live in Bury. On his way back to the airport or the railway station, will my right hon. and learned Friend call in at Manchester town hall to tell that authority that council overspending invariably ends in tears?

Mr. Butcher: I am not sure that that is entirely a matter for the Chancellor of the Duchy, whose prime responsibility is for the appointment of magistrates in Bury. However, I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend will take careful note of my hon. Friend's comment.

Mr. Foot: Is it not a fact that the greatest historical achievement of Sir Robert Peel was to split the Tory party from top to bottom? Is it not the case that the miserable squealing lot of today have not the guts to do the same?

Mr. Butcher: The right hon. Gentleman and you, Mr. Speaker, are great afficionados of political history, and I thought that the House might be interested in the following comment in a biography of Peel that describes the opposition to him:

"the opposition resorted to all the obstructive devices which the lax rules of the House allowed . . . the behaviour of the Commons, never noticeably decorous, rapidly degenerated. Shouting, groaning, hooting, stamping of feet and beating of sticks on the ground, became a regular accompaniment to debate; and it was said that there was one set of opposition MPs who were making a deliberate attempt to 'bellow Peel down'."

Peel was a brave man and you, Mr. Speaker, probably more than any other person in this House are probably thinking, "plus ca change."

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Redundant Churches

31. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement about the Commissioners' current policy for dealing with redundant churches.

Mr. Michael Alison (The Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing Church Commissioners): The commissioners' policy is governed by the Pastoral Measure 1983, which provides for the future of a redundant church to be settled by a suitable alternative use: preservation by the redundant churches fund; care and maintenance by the diocesan board of finance on specified terms; or demolition. The Measure lays emphasise on finding a suitable use for the church, if at all possible, and that is what is most commonly achieved.

Mr. Thurnham: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the need for decisions to be speedy enough to meet the needs of congregations once they have made the difficult decision that a church should go?

Mr. Alison: The statutory procedures enshrine the right of anyone—the clergy, patrons, local authorities and heritage and environmental groups — to make representations against draft schemes. That consideration determines the speed at which things happen. Much also depends upon the nature of the building. In simple cases, where a building is felt to lack distinction, its future can often be settled relatively quickly in a matter of months.

In more complex cases, where different views are held about the most suitable use, it may take longer to find the right solution. I fear that Holy Trinity, Bolton is a case in point.

Mr. Tony Banks: As the right hon. Gentleman is the nearest connection that we have to the Almighty in this place, will he say how it is possible for a house of God to become redundant?

Mr. Alison: The direct connection is a bipartisan one. I did not understand the exact point of hon. Gentleman's supplementary question, but I should say that the redundant churches fund, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-east (Mr. Thurnham) asked, is responsible for many churches, and many find an alternative use after a reasonable lapse of time.

WALES

Hospital Waiting Lists

18. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many out-patients in Wales were on hospital waiting lists in December 1987 for *(a)* hip replacement operations, and *(b)* cateract operations; and what were the corresponding figures for December 1986.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ian Grist): Waiting list information held by the Welsh Office is on the basis of specialties, not individual procedures. In the year to March 1987, in-patient waiting lists in Wales in trauma and orthopaedics and ophthalmology decreased by 0·7 and 10·4 per cent. respectively.

Mr. Livsey: Is the Minister aware that some of my constituents have been waiting for up to two years for cataract operations? Is that not disgraceful? What will he do about it? Will he allocate more funds for such bread-and-butter operations rather than the high-tech operations?

Mr. Grist: The hon. Gentleman will know of the £1 million which was made available in the current year and in the preceding year to help with that problem. He will also know of the extra funding which Powys health authority has used to purchase, for instance, operations at the Agnes Hunt hospital for residents of north Powys. It is now looking for similar places to purchase for residents of south Powys.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Is my hon. Friend aware of the dependence in north Wales on facilities outside Wales for many operations? Is he aware of the problem at present because of the almost complete closure of the hospital at Gobowen, because of difficulties in the neighbouring health authority? Does he have measures in mind to deal with the problem?

Mr. Grist: That case is the responsibility of Shropshire health authority and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services. But we are keeping an eye on the matter.

Privatisation

20. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of responses to the consultation documents on the privatisation of local authority leisure and sport services was in favour of privatisation and what percentage was against.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend issued a consultation document last September proposing that the management of local authority sport and leisure facilities should be subject to competitive tendering. The responses are being considered and it is hoped to make an announcement soon.

Mr. Flynn: Is the Minister aware of the magnificent record of Newport and Gwent councils in providing generous leisure services and the fact that they have been especially successful in providing leisure services to disadvantaged groups, including disabled and unemployed people? Is he also aware of the widespread dismay that those universally popular centres are likely to be handed over to people whose motive is not to give the community the leisure services that it desires, but to make money?

Mr. Grist: I think that the hon. Gentleman is slightly confused. These centres will not be handed over. The intention is that the running of some of them should be put out to tender. The hon. Gentleman should await the final decisions in this matter before he speaks of the disadvantaged groups losing out.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Minister agree that it would be nonsensical even to consider privatising sports centres that are situated on school premises? Does he recognise that in Powys there has been enormous success with local authority-run joint-use facilities, the result of which has been a trebling in the use of those facilities as compared with other areas in which there is no joint use with the local community?

Mr. Grist: We are giving deep consideration to that matter at the moment. I accept the hon. Gentleman's point.

Common Agricultural Policy

22. **Sir Raymond Gower:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with farming unions in Wales with regard to those sectors of Welsh agriculture most affected by proposed reforms of the common agricultural policy; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Walker): I and my officials have regular consultations with both the farming unions in Wales on all matters affecting Welsh agriculture.

Sir Raymond Gower: Does my right hon. Friend recall that when milk quotas were introduced there was a general feeling among farmers that that had been done after inadequate preparation and with inadequate warning? Will he therefore examine the possibility of outlining the effects that will be certain to ensue if changes are now to affect other parts of farm production?

Mr. Walker: There are certain difficulties about that. The ultimate decisions are taken by the Council of Ministers in Brussels, and we do not know the final terms that will be agreed on any particular topic. Through the Welsh Office we endeavour to have the closest possible communication with the farming unions and all farmers in the Principality.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Library (Purchasing Policy)

33. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will raise with the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) the question of guidance to the Librarian on the purchase for the Library of books which are the subject of court injunctions; and if he will make a statement.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): No, Sir. I am satisfied that the Librarian has available to him any guidance he may wish to seek from the Library Sub-Committee of the Services Committee in carrying out his duties.

Mr. Dalyell: As the whole point of slapping injunctions on Wright was not about the national security of our country, but about domestic politics and people bugging and burgling their way through London; and as the whole point of slapping an injunction on Cavendish was, again, not about national security but about the smears on Harold Wilson, on Ted Short and on the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), are not those additional reasons why the House of Commons should have injuncted books available and should not have to rely on hon. Members presenting them to the Library? The Library should have the ability to purchase them.

Mr. Wakeham: Acquisition of books for the Library is a matter for the Librarian and not the Government. The Librarian is responsible to you, Mr. Speaker, and ultimately to the House as a whole. I understand that the Librarian would not seek to purchase or borrow any book that is the subject of a legal ban on sale or publication.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: If the Librarian would not seek to purchase or borrow any book that was the subject of a ban, why was he willing to accept a copy of "Spycatcher" from me, with my compliments, and place it in the Library?

Mr. Wakeham: I understand that the Librarian was offered a copy by the hon. Gentleman and decided that the proper course was to make it available for reference to hon. Members only. He did that in view of the Government's declaration that, legal claims apart, they would not seek to prohibit the book's circulation or import into this country.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that when a book of considerable public interest is being debated on an almost daily basis, and can be bought across the counter in Camden Passage, for example—I saw it there a couple of weeks ago—it is nonsense that it should not be available in the Library?

Mr. Wakeham: I repeat that the acquisition of books for the Library is not a matter for the Government, but for the Librarian—and ultimately, for Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Marlow: Will my right hon. Friend accept from me that many Conservative Members would find it deeply distasteful if such a book as "Spycatcher" were bought at public expense and placed in the Library of the House?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise the strength of what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Skinner: It seems to me that there is more freedom in the Library than under this Government, despite the fact that the Government—and the right hon. Gentleman—were elected on the basis of freedom. We never stopped hearing about it in 1979, 1983 and 1987. The Prime Minister rabbited on about freedom, yet the Government do not even have the guts to authorise a book being placed in the Library for everyone to read.

Mr. Wakeham: I do not think the hon. Gentleman could have been listening carefully. I said that it is not a question of the Government authorising anything.

WALES

Hospital Beds (Occupancy)

23. **Mr. Coleman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the percentage of bed occupancy in Welsh hospitals in January 1979; and what was the position in January.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ian Grist): The information is not available for the dates requested, as bed use data are collected quarterly. The figures for the quarters ended 31 March 1979 and 31 March 1987—the latest date for which information is available—were 78 and 79 per cent. respectively.

Mr. Coleman: Does the Minister agree with the quotation:

"The health of the people is the highest law"?

If the hon. Gentleman does agree, does he also agree that the modernisation and building of hospitals would assist with bed occupancy? Will he instruct those who plan hospital building services that they should take account of the environmental factors just as much as of economic and accountancy matters?

Mr. Grist: The matter that those people should take into account first and foremost is the provision of health care for patients.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Will my hon. Friend take into account the enormous disparities between different districts in Wales as to the proportion of money that is spent by those authorities and the return that they get on that money, and make sure that the best authorities' practice is copied by those with the worst practice?

Mr. Grist: It is our intention that authorities that are less efficient should follow the most efficient. My hon. Friend will be aware that capital and revenue finances are being equated throughout the Principality, to the advantage of his own health authority.

Manufacturing Industry

24. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he proposes to take to encourage the development of home-grown manufacturing industry *(a)* in Wales and *(b)* in Cardiff, in respect both of new starts and of expansion by existing firms; and what targets he has set for each of the next five years.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Walker): I announced on 13 January my new programme of support for industry in Wales. It included a very large increase in the funds available and the introduction of a number of new initiatives and grant schemes, all of which are

available to indigenous Welsh industry. I am confident that the programme will have a major impact on the development of industry and business in Wales as a whole and in Cardiff as a major industrial and commercial centre in the Principality.

Mr. Michael: Will the Secretary of State ensure that the initiative to which he referred is complementary to rather than competitive with locally based initiatives, which have had such a success over recent years? Does he accept that locally based initiatives have proved successful and that the efforts by individuals and groups in small initiatives are deserving of nurture and assistance?

Mr. Walker: Yes, I do. When, recently, I saw the enterprise centre with the hon. Gentleman, I thought that that was a classic example of that initiative being put into practice, with considerable impact. One or two of the biggest successes that we have had recently in inward investment have been due to the combination of local and central Government initiatives, so I intend to do what the hon. Gentleman says.

Health Authorities (Funding)

25. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent representations he has received concerning the levels of funding of the Welsh health authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: I and other Ministers have had meetings with health authority chairmen, Gwynedd Members of Parliament and Welsh Labour Members of Parliament and with the Minister of State. We have also met a deputation of members of Gwynedd health authority. On those occasions, along with other matters, the funding of health authorities was discussed. I have also received a number of letters from various organisations and members of the public commenting on the funding of health authorities.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Secretary of State accept that much of the concern about the closure of small hospitals in Gwynedd and elsewhere has arisen because of the lack of capital for building new, modern community hospitals, and that were those hospitals available there would be much less feeling about some of the changes that are now being proposed? Is the right hon. Gentleman prepared to consider proposals from Gwynedd health authority for such a capital programme, to bring community hospitals into the 21st century?

Mr. Walker: I have to consider any proposals made by any health authority, on any topic. With regard to the capital programmes, this year district health authorities received £24·5 million capital funding for their discretionary use, an increase of 14 per cent. on 1986-87. The allocation for 1988-89 will be £29·5 million, an increase of nearly 21 per cent. over 1987-88.

Severn Crossing

26. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on recent progress in planning for a second Severn crossing.

Mr. Peter Walker: The consultants for the project, W. S. Atkins and Maunsell, are making good progress, and commencing on 9 February exhibitions showing plans of the route of the crossing will be held at various venues on both sides of the Severn estuary. The Government remain confident that the crossing can be provided by the mid-1990s.

Mr. Jones: I am pleased to hear my right hon. Friend's commitment to the earliest completion of the second crossing, but may I urge him to give the earnest consideration to exhibiting the proposals in Cardiff, as is presently being done in the Chepstow area, because they are of at least as much interest to the people of Cardiff and the many commercial organisations that are centred in the capital city?

Mr. Walker: Yes. That is a perfectly good, positive suggestion, which I shall take up.

British Coal

Mr. Ray Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the chairman of British Coal; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Peter Walker: I met the deputy chairman of British Coal on 21 January. We discussed a range of issues affecting the south Wales coal industry.

Mr. Powell: Did the Secretary of State discuss the new mine at Margam? It is an issue that Labour Members have championed since 1979. In my area alone, 4,500 miners are out of work as a result of the pit closures that have taken place since 1979. The provision of 800 jobs in Margam would be ideal for those people, and I ask the Secretary of State to take action to get that mine started.

Mr. Walker: One of the matters that I discussed with the deputy chairman of British Coal was whether British Coal still wanted to proceed with Margam, as there had been speculation that it did not want to do so. He confirmed that it wished to proceed with Margam. It hopes that agreement will be reached with the unions for six-day working, in which case it would be a viable proposition. I very much hope that those negotiations will take place and that they will be successful.

Air Traffic (Air Misses)

3.30 pm

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the near miss that took place on Saturday between a British Airways Tristar and a Bulgarian airliner.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Paul Channon): There was an air miss between a British Airways and a Bulgarian airliner on Saturday 6 February over Kent. The Civil Aviation Authority is investigating this incident. In view of the seriousness of the matter, my chief inspector of accidents has also begun an inspector's investigation. I can assure the House that the inspector's report will be published.

Mr. Dicks: I thank my right hon. Friend for that statement. I am grateful for the fact that he has taken the unusual precaution of involving the air accident investigation branch in the matter. Will he ensure that there is a speedy outcome to the inquiry in order to allay public concern about safety in the skies?

Mr. Channon: We shall try to make the report as quick as possible. Evidence must be taken from a number of people—it cannot be done in two minutes. We shall try to make it as quick as possible, and it will be available for all to read. If the House wants copies placed in the Library, I shall be glad to arrange that.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Does the Secretary of State recall that in a speech last October I raised this matter because of my concern, as a regular user of the air space, about growing air traffic control delays, and that he accused me of irresponsible scaremongering? Will he withdraw that accusation and pay serious attention to the growing anxiety about the number of air traffic controllers who have left the service recently, and to the problems over the transition to new technology? Will he take on board the suggestion of the American Federal Aviation Administration that anti-collision warning devicies should be fitted in cockpits?

Mr. Channon: Anti-collision warning devices are being investigated, and I hope that during the course of the year decisions will be arrived at. It is important to have an international agreement on the matter, otherwise there will be a ridiculous state of affairs.

With respect to the right hon. Gentleman, I cannot withdraw what I said about his remarks last October, which were extremely unfair and unreasonable. I hope the House understands that the number of commercial aircraft involved in air misses in this country fell from 45 in 1977 to 16 in 1986, despite a large increase in traffic over the same period. The provisional number for the first four months of 1987 is four.

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): Will my right hon. Friend not merely refuse to withdraw what he said about irresponsible scaremongering, but repeat it in spades today? Will he further undertake that the inquiry into this extremely unusual occurrence, and into an extremely well-run air traffic control system, will not be unduly hastened by irresponsible scaremongering demands, but will be thorough and clear? I congratulate my right hon. Friend on saying that he will publish the report in full as soon as it is available.

Mr. Channon: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend. I can give him the undertaking that he asked for in the last part of his question. It will be a full, clear and throrough report, and it will be published in full. This is a very unusual step to take, and I hope the House appreciates that I am taking this matter extremely seriously. The House must understand that this is an exceptional measure to take, but it is worth it in the circumstances.

As to the first part of my right hon. Friend's question, I adopt the formula that he used.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the Secretary of State agree that there is an anomaly in all these matters, in that the body set up to operate air traffic control — National Air Traffic Control Services — is responsible to the Civil Aviation Authority, which is responsible for making judgments in these matters? Is it not time to re-examine the basic legislation so that the confidence that the public and the House wish to have can be demonstrated?

Mr. Channon: I do not see any need to change the legislation at present. The duties are absolutely clear. The CAA is responsible for aviation safety. As the hon. Gentleman rightly points out, National Air Traffic Control Services is responsible jointly to the CAA and to the Ministry of Defence, but responsibility for aviation safety rests with the CAA. I am concerned that the highest standards should be applied by the CAA in carrying out that function. The figures that I have given for the past few years, which show a considerable reduction in the number of air misses despite an enormous increase in traffic, lead one to believe that that responsibility has been carried out well. However, let us see how the inquiry reports—I rule out nothing at this stage.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): Is not the risk of such incidents increased by traffic congestion on existing routes across the English Channel? Will my right hon. Friend therefore consider additional routes? In particular, will he consult his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to see whether the considerable restrictions currently placed on cross-Channel routes can be removed?

Mr. Channon: I do not think that the CAA takes the view that air space capacity in this country is overstretched. Nevertheless, I will consider the point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), who, I know, has a particular constituency point in mind.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is the Secretary of State aware that the air traffic controllers have expressed great concern to the CAA about staff shortages? As a concrete example, will he consider why just one air traffic controller at Edinburgh airport is expected to deal with, on average, 24 incoming flights between 10 pm and 7 am? What happens if that one man is suddenly taken ill? Is it satisfactory that at a major airport such as Edinburgh one person must carry that responsibility for nine hours without even being able to go for a cup of tea?

Mr. Channon: I think that that goes a little wide of the question, but negotiations are taking place between the CAA and the trade unions on the subject of working practices for shift-working staff in the National Air Traffic Control Services. I am extremely concerned that all who are involved in this very important work should feel that

[Mr. Channon]

their worries and grievances are carefully considered. I believe that that is happening. I am sure the House will agree that in general the work of the air traffic controllers of this country has been superb.

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): As the incident took place on the border of my constituency and that of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), we are greatly concerned about the situation in the future. Is my right hon. Friend aware that I thoroughly endorse the sense of proportion that he has shown, as this is just one incident in an outstanding record by air traffic controllers and by pilots flying over this country? Although we wish to ensure that the report is made public, I hope that that sense of proportion will be maintained in relation to the high standards of safety, on which there is no compromise.

Mr. Channon: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend, who makes a valid point with which I entirely agree. I have discussed the matter with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). He was most anxious that the results of any investigation should be published, and I have managed to satisfy that wish, too.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Is the Minister aware that if the EDRP project—the European demonstration reprocessing plant—goes ahead, there will be a further 200 flights per year carrying plutonium from France to Dounreay, involving a double risk from nuclear waste and additional flights? If he wishes to increase public safety, he should help to stop that project. If it goes ahead, what guarantees can he give?

Mr. Channon: That is an entirely separate matter. As I have already said, responsibility for aviation safety—the only part of the hon. Gentleman's question that is relevant to my Department—rests with the CAA, which will obviously take great care to ensure that all flights are safe. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to raise specific points, such as that which he mentioned today, perhaps he will get in touch with the chairman of the CAA.

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): I heard what my right hon. Friend said about the statistics on near misses, but is it not a fact that the incident over the weekend was only one in a sequence, and that that has brought some justifiable concern among the public? I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's decision to set up a separate inquiry. I suggest that until public concern can be allayed any future near miss incident be subjected to the same procedure.

Mr. Channon: I am sure my hon. Friend is aware that, in the various categories of near misses, the ones that are most worrying to the public are those where there is a definite, or possible, risk, rather than those in which it is later discovered that there was no risk whatsoever. As I have told the House, there has been a massive reduction in serious incidents over the years. I hope that that trend is continuing. I shall bear in mind what my hon. Friend said about the general question of near misses. I have told the House that this is a serious matter, and that is why I have taken this unusual course today.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Will the Secretary of State take it from me that it does not help to allay public anxiety about near misses if he continually says that it is scaremongering if people raise serious issues about air traffic safety and air traffic control? Is it not the case that this matter is so serious that he has taken this unusual step?

Is not the fact that the CAA is investing more money in equipment a vindication of claims that the existing equipment is not up to scratch to face the future? Will the Secretary of State take up the air traffic controllers' offer to discuss matters with him and the CAA, as it is clear that there is concern about the number of air traffic controllers on duty and the amount of work that they have to do in the time available? In addition to publishing his inspectors' report, a proposal which I welcome, will the Secretary of State publish the CAA report? Will he make sure that these matters are published swiftly? What guarantee has he that we can get access to the foreign pilots, who may not be available to give their evidence direct?

Mr. Channon: That is something that my air accident investigation branch will have to pursue. I see no reason to assume that that is at all likely.

As to the question of equipment and investment by the CAA, we are appraising a particular scheme. We have authorised massive investment by the CAA. Aviation safety is a paramount objective, and I shall go on authorising sensible investment in order to improve the situation still further. That is the crucial point.

As to "irresponsible scaremongering" I have not accused the hon. Gentleman of that. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would care to read the speech of the right hon. Member the leader of the Liberal party to see whether he agrees with me or not. I did not raise that matter this afternoon, the right hon. Gentleman did, and I had hoped that it was an incident long since forgotten.

This was a serious incident, which is why it is right that the public should have the full facts placed in front of them. The air accident investigation report will provide a useful public service. We shall have to wait and see what it says, and if it does allay public anxiety, as I hope it will, that will be good. If there are reasons for public anxiety, they must be tackled and dealt with.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I will take points of order afterwards.

Mr. Rogers: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Private notice questions are an extension of Question Time. We will take points of order at the proper time.

Mr. Rogers: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I am not taking it now. The hon. Gentleman can raise his point of order at the proper time.

Mr. Rogers: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is a Front-Bench spokesman. He knows that we take points of order at the proper time, and today that is after the Standing Order No. 20 application.

Ford Dispute

3.43 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the Ford dispute.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Norman Fowler): The House will be aware that a dispute is currently taking place at the Ford motor company. The resolution of the dispute is a matter for the company, its employees and their union representative.

Mr. Meacher: Is the Secretary of State aware, first, that this dispute would now be settled if the Government's anti-union laws had not required a final ballot? Is he aware that "ballotitis" can block solutions which would otherwise have been achieved by patient, work place negotiations?

On the substantive issue of pay, is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the company is now forecasting a 10 per cent. increase in productivity this year? Is it not therefore reasonable that Ford workers should participate fully in the benefits of their own efficiency?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the paintshop and assembly workers, who comprise the majority of Ford workers, have had a real pay increase of only 3 per cent. since 1979, when average real earnings in industry as a whole have risen by 18 per cent.? Is he further aware that, by contrast, in 1986 — the last year for which information is available—Ford directors paid themselves a 19 per cent. increase, the Ford chairman had a 41 per cent. increase over the two years before that, and Ford shareholders had a rise of 206 per cent.?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that average earnings at Ford, currently £193 a week, are far below the national male average wage of more than £224 a week? Is he also aware that Ford's latest offer would lead to falling unit labour costs, so that the deal would be self-financing? Clearly, there is more money available.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that productivity at Ford is now rising very fast—it was 8 per cent. over the past two years—and would fully cover the extra costs of the deal? Does he accept, therefore, that the Ford workers' claim is far from excessive, and that the 7 per cent. pay offer means that, compared with directors and shareholders, they are not being offered a fair share in the company's rising prosperity?

Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House whether there have been any Government communications with the Ford motor company, telling it not to budge? Will he now use his influence urgently to get both sides back into negotiations? Does he accept that passively to allow this strike to proceed would be the biggest abdication of responsibility on the industrial scene for many years?

Mr. Fowler: I wish again to emphasise that there is no ministerial responsibility in this dispute. The responsibility lies with the company, the employees and the unions. Individual pay negotiations are matters for the parties concerned.

The hon. Gentleman's point about industrial relations ballots is, quite frankly, absurd. A ballot gives immunity if strike action is taken; there is no compulsion to take strike action following a ballot. Indeed, in this instance, the national union negotiators recommended acceptance of the revised offer.

The one matter about which we can be absolutely clear is that the public do not want a return to the days bequeathed to us by the last Labour Government.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): Will my right hon. Friend accept from me, as someone who represents many Ford workers at Dagenham, that the position outlined by the Government is absolutely right? There has been a welcome increase in productivity during the past 10 years, but even now Ford lags behind equivalent works in Europe. Will not the consequences of the dispute be, sadly, the loss of both money and work for this country? Component manufacturers will also be affected and our country's competitiveness will be damaged.

Mr. Fowler: I very much hope that all the parties involved will take account of what my hon. Friend has said. I repeat that I do not believe that it is either sensible or helpful for me to intervene.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the only way that the antediluvian practices of confrontation can be put behind us is by having more democratic practices in companies such as Ford, where workers really can have a share in any increased profits? Does he realise that that is the only way to put the days of the cloth cap behind us?

Mr. Fowler: The dispute is entirely a matter for Ford, the employees, the unions and the negotiators.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is sad to see us going back to the times when Ford workers were more concerned with exporting their jobs than exporting cars?

Mr. Fowler: There is, of course, always that risk. Industrial disputes destroy jobs. We all know the consequences of strikes, but, as this is the first day of the dispute, it is too early to make assessments.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Is it not clear that the Government insisted that there should be a ballot before workers took action? The workers have had two ballots and have decided to take action. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members have always insisted that it should be placed in the hands of the workers and not of the trade union bureaucrats. As the workers have said that they do not even like the settlement put forward by the trade union leadership and are not prepared to accept it, why do the Government complain? This is the action of the workers themselves and I support them in their struggle.

Mr. Fowler: The responsibility for industrial action lies entirely with those people taking industrial action. The first ballot gave immunity if strike action was taken. There was no compulsion to take such strike action and the national union negotiators recommended the acceptance of the revised offer. The second ballot is entirely unaffected by industrial relations law. To do this by plants, which was the previous way, is a very precarious arrangement for deciding these things.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that Ford was right to try for a three-year wage deal and that other motor manufacturers would be right to try for that too, because it brings a period of stability? Further, it ought to be easier to achieve because of low inflation. As the Government are an employer, should we not all move towards three-year wage deals?

Mr. Fowler: We must aim for more flexibility in these arrangements, but it is a matter for the parties concerned. Ford should aim for the stability to which my hon. Friend refers, as should any other company.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Does the Secretary of State accept that it is perfectly reasonable for a group of workers, who have done so much to increase productivity at Ford and the total profits of Ford worldwide, by the contribution from the United Kingdom, to press for a fair share of the profits? I do not see why Conservative Members should disagree with that.

Mr. Fowler: I hope that those who take that view will also take into account the likely profits over the next few years and the impact of industrial disputes on those profits.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): Does my right hon. Friend recall that, on previous occasions, when hon. Members on both sides of the House have attempted to put questions to the Prime Minister, for which she has no ministerial responsibility, those questions have been disallowed? Is my right hon. Friend not astonished that he should be answering a question today for which he has no ministerial responsibility?

Mr. Fowler: I have said that I have no ministerial responsibility for this, but the rest of the question is not a matter for me.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Secretary of State aware that this is like a rerun of a 10-year-old film? In 1978, the Ford workers were after 17 per cent. The right hon. Gentleman and his hon Friends, headed by the Prime Minister who was then Leader of the Opposition, tabled a motion. The Ford workers ought to get 17 per cent. now. The Secretary of State says that it has nothing to do with the Government, but they have already put up the bank rate by 0·5 per cent. and the chances are that it will go up even more if the Ford strike lasts seven weeks, as it did in 1978.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Briefly.

Mr. Skinner: The stock exchange has lost 40 points today. It has much to do with the Government. They were responsible way back.

Mr. Fowler: The comparison with 1978 is absurd, for the reason that, in 1978, we saw total chaos, with unions attacking the last Labour Government's pay policy. One thing that we have learned, and that the public will want, is not to go back to the days of 1978 and, indeed, the days of the last Labour Government.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): Is it not ridiculous for Opposition Members to raise the matter in the fond hope that the era of beer and sandwiches will return to my right hon. Friend's Department? Would not Opposition Members be far better employed in condemning the strike and using what little influence they have in trying to get the work force back on the job?

Mr. Fowler: As my hon. Friend said, they would be far better involved in trying to reach some sensible conclusion to the dispute.

War Crimes

3.55 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hurd): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about war crimes committed during the second world war.

The House will be aware of recent allegations that suspected war criminals have found haven in this country. Lists of names have been sent to us by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre and others. Inquiries conducted by my Department suggested that some of the people named are still living in this country, and we undertook to consider what action, if any, should be taken.

The legal position is as follows. We would normally deal with alleged crimes in foreign countries by way of extradition. However, all the cases in question relate to crimes committed in territories now controlled by the Soviet Union, with whom we have no extradition treaty. Nor do the courts in the United Kingdom at present have jurisdiction to try offences of murder and manslaughter committed abroad when the accused was not a British citizen at the time of the offence. If we were to prosecute in these cases we should need to legislate to extend the jurisdiction of our courts.

The passage of time does not lessen the horror with which we now read about wartime atrocities, but it does inevitably complicate the investigation of any allegations that might be made.

I decided that it was impossible to take this issue forward without a better idea of what evidence existed. I asked the Simon Wiesenthal Centre to provide evidence to substantiate the allegations. In July of last year the centre provided us with a large quantity of documentary material. This material contained serious allegations against a number of people. It was carefully considered within Government. Our conclusion was that, as it stood, the material would not be sufficient to support a criminal prosecution, even if there were jurisdiction.

In the circumstances, it is clear that further work has to be done. I have therefore decided to appoint an independent inquiry to examine material relating to the allegations, to conduct interviews — possibly including interviews in the Soviet Union — and to consider the likely value of the evidence that could become available to United Kingdom court proceedings. In the light of its assessment, the inquiry team will advise whether the law should be amended to take jurisdiction over crimes allegedly committed overseas by persons now resident in this country.

In the event of such a change it would, of course, be for the prosecuting authorities to decide, after such investigations as they may think necessary, whether any action should be taken in individual cases. I have placed the inquiry's full terms of reference in the Library. I am grateful that Sir Thomas Hetherington, the former Director of Public Prosecutions, and Mr. William Chalmers, the former Crown Agent in Scotland, have agreed to undertake the inquiry.

All of us who have considered these matters recognise that they are intensely difficult. The allegations are serious and must be pursued, but I do not believe that the material now before us would justify me in proposing to Parliament a change in the law. The inquiry that I have announced will enable us all to form a clearer view of the weight to be

given to the allegations, and will enable us to determine whether it would be right to propose a change in the law to extend the jurisdiction of the courts.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): I offer the Home Secretary our general support for what he has proposed. He is right to emphasise that the passage of time does not lessen the horror of wartime atrocities, but he is equally right to say, or to imply, that the passage of almost half a century raises problems of principle and of practice which clearly require him and the Government to proceed with care.

I ask the right hon. Gentleman three specific questions and make it clear that they do not in any way imply that we disagree with the general course of action that he has proposed. First, will the Home Secretary explicitly confirm that the only option that he is considering is prosecution in British courts, not extradition?

Secondly, will the right hon. Gentleman explain the rules of evidence under which statements to the inquiry are to be made, because, presumably, some of the people who make statements may—at least in theory—eventually be subject to prosecution? Thirdly, will the right hon. Gentleman give us at least a tentative assessment of how long he expects the inquiry to take?

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's general support. Normally, for crimes committed abroad, the remedy that we would seek to apply would be that of extradition. However, as the right hon. Gentleman implies, there would be great difficulties in this case, as we have no extradition arrangements with the Soviet Union, as the crimes alleged were committed in territory over which the Soviet Union now has control and as no other country appears to have a standing in this matter. That is why we have taken this course of action. This is not a statutory inquiry or an inquiry in which rules of evidence apply. It is an inquiry outside the ordinary process of investigation to allow the Government and Parliament to decide whether there is a case strong enough to justify changing the law. The inquiry will start reasonably soon and, although it is for the inquirers to decide—I have not fixed a strict time limit—I think that it will take them about a year.

Mr. Iver Stanbrook (Orpington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that this is a bad decision and is likely to lead to what others would call a witch-hunt? Is he aware that British courts have never sought to try alleged crimes committed long ago by foreigners in foreign countries, for the very good reason that such evidence would be inadmissible by ordinary standards? Therefore, is it not very wrong for the Government to attempt to make special arrangements for a special class of people accused of having committed offences a long time ago, which the British people would far rather not pursue? Is my right hon. Friend not surrendering to a lobby whose main motivations are hatred and revenge?

Mr. Hurd: I do not think that my hon. Friend's last point is fair. However, I am aware of his general approach, with which I know many people agree. I do not believe that with the present state of our information I would be justified in coming to the House to propose a change in the law to assert jurisdiction. However, I would say to my hon. Friend that very serious allegations have been made. Although the passage of time makes it more difficult to deal with those allegations, many people would not be at all happy if we followed a quite different course from that followed by Australia and Canada, for example, and said, "We really cannot be bothered to find out any more about it."

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Is the Home Secretary aware that the all-party group on war crimes, of which I am chairman, will welcome his statement? May I take this opportunity publicly to thank him and his Department for the help that they have given us during the past year?

Will the information that is coming in about the murder of RAF aircrew in prisoner-of-war camps and the murder of Marine commandoes be considered relevant, or will it be missed out from the terms of reference?

On paragraph 3 of the terms of reference—the right hon. Gentleman mentioned Australia and Canada—will he point out to the two distinguished members of the committee that it would be worthwhile visiting Canada and Australia because they have done a great deal of work on this matter in the past year? Will the report be published, and will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the final decision on the changes will be for him and for the House?

Mr. Hurd: The terms of reference, which are being placed in the Library, ask the inquirers

"to obtain and examine relevant material . . . relating to allegations that persons who are now British citizens or resident in the United Kingdom committed war crimes during the Second World War".

There follows a definition of what that means. It would be open to the inquirers to visit Australia or Canada, although they could probably obtain the information that they needed without doing so. I think that their main job —although it is for them to say—is to get to grips with the allegations that have been made.

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether the report would be published. That rather depends on the detail that it goes into. As my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) pointed out, there might be relationship with possible further proceedings. Therefore, I should not like to guarantee that. The whole purpose of the exercise is to enable not just the Government but the House to reach an informed conclusion.

Mr. John Wheeler (Westminster, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that many will welcome the course of action that he has proposed to the House today, not least because of the horrific nature of the allegations and because persons resident in the United Kingdom may be associated with those allegations? Will he confirm that the two distinguished gentlemen who are to carry out the inquiry will not be inhibited from going anywhere in the world to test the evidence for the allegations and interview witnesses?

Mr. Hurd: They wil not be inibited by me, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. As he knows, given that serious allegations have been made, we have been caught in something of a vicious circle. We cannot learn more about the allegations through the ordinary processes of investigation, because we have no jurisdiction, but I do not think that I can justify taking that jurisdiction until we know more. The purpose of this proposal is to break out of that vicious circle.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): I welcome the decision to have this rather unusual form of inquiry. Will the Home Secretary tell us whether it is possible to extend such an inquiry to cover the case of the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Kurt Waldheim, which is a matter of great concern in this country? It is patently obvious that Mr. Waldheim lied about his involvement with SS commandoes.—*[Interruption.]* This is a matter that I believe should be looked into. We are talking about the person appointed Secretary General of the United Nations——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is rather wide of today's statement.

Dr. Owen: Would the Home Secretary be prepared to consider finding some way in which the British interest in the allegations associated with Mr. Kurt Waldheim could be inquired into?

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman knows better than to suppose that that is a matter for me or or the inquiry.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Will my right hon. Friend accept the thanks of all of us for his genuine concern and determination to ensure that this matter comes to a reasonable conclusion? However, does he agree that time is of the essence, and that as long as we will not amend the law to provide the procedures other countries will not provide us with the necessary evidence? Does he agree also that while we say that we will not amend the law until we have that evidence we are locked into a completely unproductive spiral that will gladden the hearts of Nazi sympathisers everywhere?

Mr. Hurd: I very much hope that we have found a way of breaking out of the spiral and that all those who may have evidence that is relevant will co-operate with the inquiry so that at the end of the day—I hope that that will not be too far distant — the Government and Parliament will be able to decide whether to make the very serious decision to extend our jurisdiction.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Does the Home Secretary accept that that is precisely why we welcome the inquiry? However, it is important that the timing should not be such that the inquiry is allowed more than the reasonable time that it will need to get information. Would it not be possible for us to examine the question of jurisdiction and of changes in the law while the inquiry is taking place? If there were a second period, after the completion of the inquiry, we could be talking about a time span of two years. Given the number of years that have already passed, is that not too long?

Mr. Hurd: I examined that possibility carefully, but I concluded that I simply did not have the wherewithal—and that the House would not have the wherewithal—to make an informed decision on a matter of very great importance about which many hon. Members would have misgivings, as has become clear from some of our exchanges today.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, although it is welcome that there should be a legal structure to deal with cases that took place in the past, it is also highly desirable that we should have legal powers to deal with such matters should anything unfortunately arise in the future? Can my right hon. Friend tell us the number of names on the list that might give rise to action in the future?

Mr. Hurd: There were 17 names on the Simon Wiesenthal list. We believe that 10 may be alive in the United Kingdom. There were 34 names on a list provided through Scottish Television plc, of which we think that seven may be alive in the United Kingdom.

The British courts have jurisdiction over British citizens who have committed manslaughter or murder abroad, but do not have jurisdiction over people who may now be British citizens, or who may now live here and have done so for some time, if the allegations relate to events before they became British citizens or before they came to live here.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I welcome the Home Secretary's announcement that there is to be an evidential inquiry into these cases, but does he accept that it is rather odd to say that a decision on the jurisdiction principle will be made only when the evidence against individuals is assessed? Will he assure the House that if the inquiry shows that the normal DPP criteria apply and that there is more than a 50 per cent. prospect of success in any prosecution, he will personally support jurisdictional changes?

Mr. Hurd: The first thing is for the House to judge, on the basis of the report, the wide question whether it wishes to change the law. As I have said——

Mr. Carlile: It is the right hon. Gentleman's decision.

Mr. Hurd: It is not my decision. It would be a decision for the House. I do not think that that matter is at all straightforward, for the reasons that I have often given. Therefore, it is for the House to decide, when we are more fully informed.

As I said in my statement, there must be a clear distinction between any decision to change the law, which is a matter for Parliament, and any decision by the prosecuting authorities to prosecute in a particular case.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): May I caution my right hon. Friend to remember that, while those who have been active in this issue have been jumping up to praise him today, a large number of his hon. Friends will be deeply suspicious of and concerned about such retrospective legislation? Will my right hon. Friend tell the House how far such retrospective legislation would go? Would we, for example, find ourselves prosecuting the Israeli soldier who savagely beat to death a 15-year-old Palestinian boy if that soldier later came to stay in this country?

Mr. Hurd: The answer to the second question is clearly no. My hon. Friend is leaping ahead a long way. I am not proposing any legislation, retrospective or otherwise.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that I, and, I believe, most other hon. Members, not only appreciate his own determination to see that justice is done and that evil monsters who may be among us are prosecuted, but totally reject what lay behind the odious question from his hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow)? Does the Secretary of State not understand that some of us are deeply anxious about the consignment of urgent and anguished questions to a committee, however distinguished, because the distance between a committee and a pigeon hole is sometimes very short? Is he not able to give us some indication that we may have at least an interim report and statement before the summer recess? Could he,

at least, assure the House that a report will be made about what is happening? Why has he omitted from his legal possibilities that which lies in his hands, namely, the stripping of British citizenship from people who obtained it by fraud, when it is in the common interest and the public good so to do?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. and learned Gentleman, whose zeal in such matters is well known, rather underestimates the seriousness of the problem. He was unfair to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow). What lay behind my hon. Friend's question—not his second supplementary question, but his first—was a perfectly reasonable concern about the issues involved. I do not think that this is a matter on which interim statements or reports would make a great deal of sense.

The question of depriving someone of British citizenship is, of course, open, but it does not meet the point, one way or the other. I certainly do not exclude it as a possible measure, although it would not really satisfy anybody.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): I join other right hon. and hon. Members in welcoming today's announcement, but may I offer a word of caution on two issues? One is the time scale. One wonders whether an inquiry lasting a year will merely put the whole issue on the back burner for another 12 months and, thereafter, when the committee reports, the matter will go into the pigeon hole that the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) suggested.

My second word of caution relates to my right hon. Friend's apparent reluctance to guarantee publication of the document when it is finally produced. One of the difficulties that has faced the all-party war crimes group is that a document that was shelved in 1948 has only recently come to light. We do not want that to happen again.

Mr. Hurd: Everyone is advising me to be cautious. I do not think that I need that advice, because I think that I have been very cautious, and with good reason.

I understand my hon. Friend's point about publication, but he will understand that I do not know how the inquirers will frame their report or how much detail they will want to go into. Obviously, there is a connection between the amount of detail in the report and possible later proceedings. That is why I cannot give an absolute guarantee this afternoon about publication. The whole point of the exercise is to enable the House in particular, Parliament in general, and the public, to come to a more reasoned and informed view than they can at the moment.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I am sure that the Home Secretary will welcome the support of the Opposition in saying that murder, genocide and manslaugher have no statute of limitations against them. Therefore, we welcome his statement. We also welcome the fact that he is preparing to change the law of the land to accommodate a trial, should that be necessary. However, will he answer the two specific questions that my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) asked about the rules of evidence at the inquiry? Will there be rules of evidence at the inquiry, and, if so, how will they apply? Will statements made to the inquiry be admissible in evidence? Will the right hon. Gentleman not exclude extradition where that might be feasible?

Mr. Hurd: I should correct the hon. Gentleman. I am not preparing to change the law of the land. I am setting up an inquiry to see whether those who have greater access to the facts than any of us have at the moment would feel, on the basis of that inquiry, that there is a case for changing the law of the land. This is not a judicial inquiry or evidential in that sense. Therefore, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's second point arises.

The hon. Gentleman's third point was about extradition. I have explained the difficulties. Choosing my words with care, I do not think that it would be suitable to arrange for extradition to the Soviet Union in these respects. Neither Israel nor West Germany, nor other countries which have been mentioned from time to time in this context, seems to fit the case.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Following the reference to witch-hunting by my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook), is my right hon. Friend aware that whatever else witches might or might not have done they did not murder 6 million people? Will my right hon. Friend remind the House that we are talking not about one murder, six, 600 or 6,000 murders, but about 6 million cold-blooded murders of men and women, including about 1 million children?

Mr. Hurd: It is because of the intensity and enormity of the total war crimes that they continue to arouse this kind of response, which is entirely understandable. That is a reason for not saying, "It is all too difficult. We must forget and do nothing about it." Equally, my hon. Friend will recognise the difficulties of changing the law in this regard, which is why we need to proceed steadily.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Why should it be considered by some of the right hon. Gentleman's critics to be a matter of revenge that those who are alleged to have been responsible for some of the worst crimes and atrocities ever committed should be brought to justice? Surely it is justice, not revenge, that we are concerned about. Does the Home Secretary agree that the serious allegations made against individuals who are now living in Britain, the allegations against the President of Austria and the one or two other cases that have come to light illustrate that what the allies did not do at the end of the last war, but what they promised to do when the extermination policy was being carried out, was to carry out a de-Nazification policy which would have meant that those who were responsible for the crimes to which I have just referred, as have some Conservative Members, would have been brought to justice much sooner? They should have been brought to justice much sooner. Indeed, that should have happened during the first few years after the war against Hitler had ended.

Mr. Hurd: I do not want to go into that. That is raking over history. We are concerned with a number of serious allegations against a small number of people who have been living in Britain for some time. In deciding whether to change our law, an important aspect is that we are dealing with very serious allegations.

Mr. Tom Sackville (Bolton, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that before contemplating changing our law we should hesitate to pursue cases for which a large part

[Mr. Tom Sackville]

of the evidence will necessarily come from a doubtful source, namely, the Soviet Union, whose judicial and human rights record must be viewed with the strictest reservations?

Mr. Hurd: That is why I made specific reference to the inquirers getting to grips with the evidence in the Soviet Union. They will want to assess that evidence.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Does the Home Secretary accept that those hon. Members who have had constituency cases and have discussed those cases with Mr. William Chalmers, as the Crown Agent, have the highest regard for his intelligence and integrity? How on earth will he set about disentangling such immensely complicated matters? One case, highlighted by Scottish Television, meant disentangling events in Riga in 1944. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that in the Polish 1st Armoured Division, many of whose members settled in my constituency, there were Latvian, Ukrainian and Polish groups? The complexities of the internecine strife that took place nearly half a century ago are enormously difficult to disentangle.

What facilities is Mr. Chalmers to have? Is he to go to the Balkan republics with interpreters? Will the Russians co-operate, and who exactly will he see? What is the Russian view of all this?

Mr. Hurd: The professed view of the Soviet Union has been that throughout it has been as anxious as anyone to establish the facts and to bring to justice people who are alleged to have committed serious crimes. There is no question about the principle. The inquirers will find out for themselves how it will work in practice. The hon. Gentleman is perfectly right in saying that the job of disentangling such a mass of information that is now so old will be extremely difficult. They will have to establish whether they think an inquiry is feasible. They will have to report to us so that we can judge whether the prospect of and the need for an inquiry would justify a change in the law.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): May I pursue the point made by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile)? If the inquirers produce evidence that will create the probability of convictions in a British court—I share the reservations about whether that will be possible—why has my right hon. Friend not undertaken to bring legislation before the House to give the courts jurisdiction? If he is not prepared to give such an undertaking, what is the point of an inquiry in the first place?

Mr. Hurd: At the moment I do not have the wherewithal to persuade the House that it would be right to change the law. When the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, in response to my invitation, provided further material in July last year, we sent it to the prosecuting authorities, who examined it and came to the conclusion that they could not proceed any further because they did not have the jurisdiction, and that the material would not be sufficient to support a criminal prosecution. That is why we need to learn more and to set up an inquiry to establish whether there is a case for changing the law. After that it would be a separate matter, not for the House, but for the prosecuting authorities, to decide whether to bring prosecutions in individual cases.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): The Home Secretary said that 17 individuals could possibly be subject to that evidential inquiry. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have expressed anxiety that the inquiry will be a pigeon-hole operation. The Home Secretary denies that, but what means of monitoring the movement of those 17 individuals are to be employed in case the birds fly the coop and establish themselves in someone else's pigeon hole in the meantime?

Mr. Hurd: There are no grounds or scope for doing that.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Is there not a dilemma, in that if the House is to make up its mind about the inquiry, the report must be published in full? If it is published in full and someone is prosecuted, the person accused would be able to argue that the publication of the report had prejudiced his fair trial.

Mr. Hurd: I have made that point twice in less elegant language. My hon. Friend will have to leave the matter to me. He will be able to twist my tail about it later. It may well be difficult to decide how much should be published. It may well be that the inquirers will produce their report in a form that can be published.

British Petroleum plc

4.25 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the need for action to prevent further purchase of shares by the Kuwaitis in BP, Britain's largest oil producer."

The matter is urgent because the British Government are standing idly by while Arabs buy up Britain's oil industry and North sea operations. The Arabs, by close of play on Friday, owned nearly 20 per cent. of BP. To avoid generating public hostility they have been busily buying BP shares through London broking houses. The Government should act urgently to prevent the sell-out of Britain's interests. We need action now because the undertaking given by the Kuwaiti investment authorities that they have no ambition to control BP has not prevented them from approaching the figure of 30 per cent. of the shares when a full bid would be triggered.

The OFT has not acted because it is powerless to do so. The matter is important because the Government's negligence in allowing that development to take place should be exposed. The Government created the special conditions in which an increasingly unnecessary privatisation on the back of a collapsing stock market could be used by the Kuwaitis to pick up Britain's oil assets on the cheap. Furthermore, the Government have been prepared to stand idly by and allow City underwriters to offload their BP stocks on to the Kuwaitis, enabling the Government to avoid the embarrassment of having to buy back shares under the infamous Lawson agreement.

If the Kuwaitis had not bought the shares, the Government now would be making excuses for a failed privatisation. In effect, they have used the Kuwaitis to save their political skin. The matter is specific because the Government should be required to give a clear statement as to why Britain's national interests are to be sold.

The other week, Britoil was calling for a white knight to save them from the predatory actions of BP. Today, I am asking the Government to act as a white knight to save BP from the predatory actions of the Kuwaitis.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"further purchases of shares in BP by the Kuwaiti Investment Office."

I have listened with care to what the hon. Member has said, but I regret that I do not consider the matter that he has raised can be considered under Standing Order No. 20. I cannot therefore submit his application to the House.

Air Traffic (Air Misses)

4.28 pm

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"Issues arising from the statement by the Secretary of State for Transport today about air misses."

I could not give you notice, Mr. Speaker, before you took the Chair today, because I did not know what was going to be in the statement.

I regard the serious air miss as an event which would have resulted in a collision had at least one pilot not taken avoiding action without the instructions to do the same from air traffic control. Today the Secretary of State for Transport gave the House only the number of serious air misses without giving the number of passengers exposed to risk in each event. The true measure of danger surely should be a compound of the number of serious air misses, as I define them, coupled with the number of passengers and crew put at risk in each event.

As time passes the size of aircraft is increasing and so is the number of passengers in many cases carried in them, even if the load factor is not. Therefore, it is not adequate to be complacent because the number of events of serious air misses may reduce, if the total number of passengers at risk on the formula which I have described is either static or increasing. It is that which needs to be examined. Had the British Airways pilot not taken avoiding action uninstructed by air traffic control, there would have been the greatest number of passengers killed in British air space ever.

Finally, the Secretary of State did not say that the inquiry has power to compel evidence on oath or affirmation from the Malev pilot who was within British air space then, but probably will not be when the inquiry takes place.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the issues arising from the statement by the Secretary of State for Transport about air misses."

Again, I have listened with concern to what the hon. Member has said, but I regret that I do not consider that the matter he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20. I hope that he will find other opportunities to raise this matter in the House.

Orders of the Day

Employment Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New Clause 3

ASSISTANCE BY THE COMMISSIONER IN ACTIONS AGAINST EMPLOYERS

'Provisions analogous to those made by section 19 of this Act (Assistance by the Commissioner) shall apply to—

(a) proceedings in an industrial tribunal brought by a union member against his employer under section 58 of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 as amended (complaint by an employee of unfair dismissal by reason of trade union membership, activities or non-membership); and

(b) proceedings in an industrial tribunal brought by a union member against his employer under section 23 of the said Act of 1978 as amended (complaint by an employee of action short of dismissal by his employer for the purpose of deterring him from becoming a union member or taking part in trade union activities or in order to compel him to remain or become a union member, or for the purpose of penalising him for doing one of the above or for non-membership of a union).'.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.31 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause relates to the new so-called commissioner for trade union members and it aims to provide a right to assist union members to enforce certain rights against employers, in a Bill which is drafted to limit the target to trade unions.

Obviously, the title of commissioner for the rights of trade union members is a misnomer if the commissioner exists solely for the purpose of enforcing rights against trade unions. By itself that role would scarcely provide the commissioner with even a part-time job. In Committee we argued that if the evidence of union abuse was as extensive as the Government's paranoia would suggest, union members would be beating down the Certification Officer's doors with complaints. As it is, we read with a slight sense of anti-climax in paragraph 6 of the Green Paper that the total number of cases since 1984 in which the Certification Officer has issued a decision is a mere 19. The total number of cases in which unions have been found not to have met their statutory duties is precisely 10. If the Certification Officer has not been beating back hordes of vexatious litigants, or any litigants, the courts, which are the second avenue of redress, have been even less overburdened. Paragraph 6 of the Green Paper admits that not a single union member has sought a declaration or enforcement order from the courts. That compares—this is the whole purpose of our amendment—with the 30,000 complaints of unfair dismissal made every year against employers, one tenth or 3,000 a year of which are upheld by tribunals.

If the Government are genuinely solicitous about the rights of trade union members, why will they not extend the powers of the commissioner to help union members enforce their rights against employers? Is not the right not to be unfairly dismissed extremely important? Why should the commissioner not help a trade union member enforce what is perhaps the most basic employment right of all: the right to uphold the contract of employment under which the employee earns a living? What about the collective rights to consultation and information about redundancies or proposed takeovers, and the job losses that might be involved? What about the right to be a member of a union in the first place? What about the right to have recognition of a trade union representative to look after the interests of trade union members in respect of health and safety? It is well known that many employers ignore their statutory responsibilities in that area, which is a major reason why in recent years there has been an increase in serious injuries at the work place.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): For example, King's Cross.

Mr. Meacher: King's Cross is certainly one example and there are many others in the construction industry and in many areas of manufacturing.

Perhaps the commissioner could have played a useful role in supporting court action over GCHQ. What better example could there be of the need for a commissioner to protect trade unionists against their employer? There could not be a better case for the involvement of the commissioner than when the Government, as the employer at GCHQ, sought abitrarily and unilaterally to remove the right of employees to be a member of a union. From the Carlton club memoirs it seems that the Government may intend to consider some sort of unilateral removal of trade union rights in respect of union members in the National Health Service.

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that the commissioner could have assisted trade union members or their families who died as a result of the sinking of the Herald of Free Enterprise, which was owned by P and O? Is it not interesting to note what difficulties those people have had, while P and O can snap its fingers every five minutes and summon judges to slap injunctions here, there and everywhere against the National Union of Seamen.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. P and O, which is held responsible for the Zeebrugge disaster, with the loss of nearly 190 lives, is now in dispute with the seamen, insisting on changes in working conditions which, I understood, include lengthening work shifts by 50 per cent. from 12 to 18 hours, allowing a maximum of five hours which must be taken in two shifts — not as a continuous period — for sleep before the seaman must start another shift. In other words, P and O is using Tory anti-union laws to enforce changes in working practice which put at risk the health and safety of seamen. It is precisely in that area that workers need the support of a commissioner against such aggressive and perhaps hazardous demands of employers. Anyone who is relatively unbiased cannot but conclude that the Government's concern for the rights of trade union members is just a little selective.

In our first sitting in Committee we moved an amendment to clause 1 to make it unlawful for employers to interfere with ballots on industrial disputes. The Government refused to accept it, showing, as they did so often in Committee, where their true interests lie. If such

an amendment succeeds in another place—I certainly hope that it will—surely the commissioner should help to enforce that right.

Clause 6 gives union members full access to all union accounting records. Why should we not have a right of access for all union members to the accounting records of their employer? Surely the commissioner should help to enforce that right. If the Government are really concerned about the rights of trade union members they should realise that union members would be much more interested in that information.

Clause 15 concerns the improper conduct of union ballots on political funds. We believe that the commissioner should play a role in ensuring that companies ballot their shareholders before forking out vast sums to the Tory party or some shady group of industrial spies such as the Economic League. There are many other examples that I could give.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that the lack of response in Committee from Conservative Members was because, in the main, those Conservative Members who are involved with a company do their utmost to ensure that either there is no trade union in that company or, if there is one, to try to minimise its activities? Time and time again one comes across Conservative Members with vast interests in the City and elsewhere and it is clear that there is no trade union organisation in the places where they have a substantial commercial interest.

Mr. Meacher: It is difficult to make an assessment of the attitude of the Conservative Members on the Committee because they sat there like a lot of sitting ducks and never said anything. They virtually never contributed to the debate except to stick up their hands when the Whip snapped his finger.

I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) is right in his general presumption that the attitude of the Government is that they would, first of all, prefer to reduce the number and effectiveness of trade unions—this is the fourth Bill in eight years to try to do so. If they have to put up with trade unions they are seeking to institute a new commissioner. They have the gall to describe the commissioner as "the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members" but that commissioner is a commissar whose purpose is to reduce the power and effectiveness of the trade union as an effective organisation for working people. No doubt the commissar will aid and abet organisations such as the Freedom Association to take out actions against union members and to do as much damage as possible.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Does my hon. Friend agree that, if such a commissar for trade unions is introduced, his first case should be British Coal? British Coal is denying members of the National Union of Mineworkers in Nottinghamshire the right to vote on pit premises like anybody else in the coal industry. Elsewhere British Coal has provided the facilities for that voting, but NUM members in Nottinghamshire were denied those facilities. Why should British Coal interfere with trade union ballots?

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend eloquently makes the precise point that I made a few moments ago.

One of the objectives of the amendment that we moved in Committee was precisely that employers should not have the right to interfere in industrial dispute ballots or any other union ballot. In recent weeks, British Coal, to name one employer, has certainly interfered in respect of miners in Nottinghamshire. British Coal has denied them the right to vote at the workplace and that is just the kind of interference that should be a matter for the commissioner. If the commissioner acted against such interference that would improve the rights of trade union members but, of course, the Government intend no such thing. The Government are concerned not about the rights of trade union members, but about the rights of employers.

4.45 pm

We also believe that the commissioner could play a useful role in the jurisdiction of the industrial tribunals. Obviously, we favour the industrial tribunals in principle, but access to them and the speed and exercise of obtaining rights from them is often not what it should be. The tribunals concern equal pay, health and safety at work, sex discrimination, employment protection, race relations, transfer of undertakings as a result of a take-over or merger, and industrial training. They relate to key areas of importance. It is interesting to note that clause 3 is the only clause that gives union members new rights against their union, and the commissioner cannot be involved. It relates to the notorious and iniquitous provision that minorities shall have the right of protection to opt out of majority decisions.

Mr. Skinner: The "Owen" clause.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend was not on the Committee, but he obviously heard about our description of the clause. With due respect to the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), the clause was known as the "David Owen view of industrial relations—if you cannot win the ballot or the game, walk off with the ball." That is also the way in which the Government believe disputes should be undertaken. The important thing to note is that clause 3 is the only clause wherein such rights are enforced through tribunals rather than through the courts. In Committee we argued that that rather curious omission had been made for a rather subtle political reason.

Mr. Skinner: Since my hon. Friend mentioned the alliance in a manner of speaking, I wonder whether he can tell me if the commissioner would have any powers to deal with mergers, break-ups and so on, taking into account that the alliance has not got any representatives here again today? I know that it is called the party that dare not speak its name, but it should be present to take part in the debate.

Mr. Meacher: It is true that the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith), a member of the so-called alliance—I am not sure what those members now refer to themselves as; they are anything but an alliance—came to part of the first sitting of the Committee—I believe that there were around 25 in all—but, as far as I can recall, never appeared again. Certainly it would be difficult to miss the 22 stone of the hon. Gentleman if he were here. His absence and that of other Members, for whatever reason, illustrates the total lack of interest or concern on the part of the Liberals or that other party with regard to the central issues of employment and industrial relations.

It is clear that clause 3 is the only clause wherein the rights of trade unionists are enforced through tribunals

[Mr. Meacher]

rather than the courts. In Committee we argued that that decision had been made for a certain political reason. Once the Government conceded that the commissioner might have a role to play in the tribunal system as a result of clause 3 it would be impossible for them to resist the conclusion that he might have a role in the jurisdiction of other tribunals. That would involve rights against the employer. That is the key to the argument. However, Ministers hotly denied that, particularly the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, and they argued that the commissioner was concerned with cases of public rights. They claimed that tribunals were all about private grievances.

The Government also argued that the legal aid system, by which applicants get such a bad deal in comparison to those to be helped by the commissioner, dealt only with private rights. That argument, which was retailed at some length in Committee, is wholly bogus. The Committee rapidly exposed it. Legal aid is available in many cases of judicial review that involves public rights of the first importnce. All the alleged rights that the commissioner will assist in enforcing will contain elements of private grievance. For example, under clause 1, the applicant may be a trade union member claiming that he has been denied his personal right to ballot. However, perhaps that rather technical legal argument is best left to another place.

Much more important are the moral objections to the Government's position. Do they believe that cases brought by employees against employers raise no moral issues? What about dismissal for trade union membership? What about sex and race discrimination? What about cases where the employer unfairly dismisses workers on the transfer of an undertaking after takeover or merger?

Even if the Government will not allow the commissioner a role in the industrial tribunal system, he could play a role in enforcing rights against employers in the courts. If the Bill was fair—by that, I mean even-handed between unions and employers—that is exactly what he would do. That is what the new clause proposes.

None of us who sat through the dozens of hours in Committee will be in any doubt about the outcome. The Government will have none of this. They have no intention of giving the commissioner any power over employers. They are not truly interested in the rights of trade union members; rather they are interested in the rights of employers, or in tilting the balance in favour of employers and against trade unions. In that battle, it suits Ministers' purposes to use surrogates. It would not pay them to go into the political front line and admit what they are up to. They would rather sit back in their Tothill street staff headquarters and give the hospitality cabinet a bashing while their infantry — the dissident union members whom the Bill is designed to encourage—go over the top.

But as the Bill ground its weary way through Committee, the Government's true purpose became more evident. Trade union members and the wider public will greet the new commissioner with contempt. His title, "Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members", will pass into the limbo that awaits failed political euphemisms, hotly following the phrase "community charge". "Commissar for Keeping Trade Unions in their Place" would be more apt. Considering the current industrial scene, it does not seem likely that he will succeed in doing that.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Patrick Nicholls): I was unable to convince the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) about many of these matters on previous occasions and, although hope springs eternal, I am not sure whether I can convince him now. But I will do my best.

The hon. Gentleman used a wide range of examples, but he asked one question which he will concede goes to the heart of the debate: if the Government are prepared to extend powers to the commissioner to help in cases against trade unions, why not extend powers to trade unionists to use against their employers? The question is perfectly fair. The answer amounts to this: as in so many of the areas which the hon. Gentleman mentioned, workers or trade unions already have recourse against their employers, and the main way is through the industrial tribunal. This is neither the time nor the place to set out the history of industrial tribunals, but it is generally recognised that they provide a cheap, efficient and expeditious way for trade union members to air a wide range of grievances against their employers. As for the matters that the hon. Gentleman has in mind in the new clause, often trade union members who are thinking of going to an industrial tribunal might have the assistance of their trade union in doing so.

This is the key to the entire debate. We wish to set up a commissioner for the rights of trade union members because there is a gap in the present system. A person who wished to exercise the rights given to him under clause 19(7) would not have available to him the remedies that are available to a trade union member who wished to go before an industrial tribunal.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Does the Minister concede that there is a great range of powers in the courts and that the Certification Officer also exists? The Minister's comments are almost an insult to the Certification Office, implying that it could not take on the added responsibilities to which he referred. There is provision, or the law could be so amended, for the office to take on the role that the Minister mentioned, so there must be other reasons for the introduction of this trade union commissar.

Mr. Nicholls: That point has been made by the hon. Gentleman's colleagues, and I shall certainly answer it later in my speech. If I do not, no doubt the hon. Gentleman will ask me to give way again later.

The rights with which the trade union commissioner will be helping people start in the High Court, not in the industrial tribunal. I do not wish to shoot down one of the hon. Gentleman's favourite and sincerely held points so glibly, but clause 3 rights are private rights which belong properly within the province of an industrial tribunal. The powers of the trade union commissioner, as set out in subsection (7), are exclusively matters which start from the High Court. Therefore, it is appropriate that the commissioner should give some assistance in respect of them.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West said that we should not draw a distinction between public and private rights. He said that that might not be a matter for us to clarify today, but that it might be a matter for another place. I like to agree with the hon. Gentleman when I can. I am sure that he is right to say that such considerations

will exercise the members of another place in detail, but there is no doubt that the legal aid system is designed to take care of the enforcement of private rights. It is not there to take care of the enforcement of public rights. In a previous incarnation, I, with other members of my profession, exercised considerable ingenuity to pretend that what were essentially private rights had a public dimension to them so that one could bring them within the ambit of judicial review. The legal authorities where judicial review seems to be biting on private rights are usually a tribute to the lawyers conducting the case who tried to construct the matter in that way.

I return to my central point: the commissioner is all about the enforcement of public rights, so analogies with industrial tribunals cannot be appropriate.

Mr. Meacher: The Under-Secretary has not answered my central point that legal aid is available in many cases of judicial review which involve public rights of the first order. Many of the rights which the commissioner will help to enforce will have elements of private grievance. How can he continue to make the distinction and try to prevent the commissioner from taking on the role in respect of the employer?

Mr. Nicholls: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. I concede that, at first sight, the authorities on judicial review show that it is available only for private matters. But that usually represents a distortion—sometimes a successful distortion—of the law by the lawyers who are trying to assist that person.

There will be grey areas where matters are finely balanced and where one can argue that one is dealing with a public or a private right. In practice, if it is more private than public, one can tack enough private elements on it to bring oneself under the scope of the law. That is the middle ground. But if one considers the rights that the commissioner might be called upon to enforce, for instance under clauses 1, 6, 9 or 15—hon. Gentlemen may disagree with my opinion—it is highly unlikely that anyone interested in enforcing those sorts of rights would be able to find a sufficiently private element in them to be able to use the legal aid system. So if there is not something like the commissioner, there will be rights without those affected by them being able to have them enforced. That is why we believe it is necessary to have a commissioner.

I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman has always been four square against the Bill in general and its provisions in particular—and against the role of the commissioner. However, even if he is not prepared to accept all the Bill's implications, I hope that he will accept that there is a grey area here. When dealing with rights that are wholly public, the legal aid system cannot possibly be an appropriate vehicle.

5 pm

The hon. Member for Oldham, West, gave other examples and talked about some sort of unilateral alteration of the terms and conditions of employment of people employed by P and O. It would be quite inappropriate for me to judge those sorts of matters here and now. One aspect, however, shows why the hon. Gentleman cannot rely on his analogies. If someone's terms and conditions of contract are being unilaterally altered—if he is essentially saying that his contract has been broken—he has his remedies. No doubt he will have assistance from the trade union of which he is a member, and he may well be able to bring himself within the scope of legal aid. So in such cases remedies already exist. We say that a commissioner is necessary because, without him, there will be no appropriate mechanism for enforcing these rights.

I come to the point that the hon. Gentleman made about industrial tribunals and the reason why clause 3 rights will not do. Clause 3 deals with what is essentially a private right, which should not properly fall within the commissioner's scope. It is all too easy to miss the following essential points. The hon. Gentleman and his Friends are convinced that there is something sinister about the trade union commissioner and the role he will play. Two points about that must be made time and again. First, the commissioner cannot act on his own volition but only if asked to do so by a trade union member. I do not know whether we should call him a black or white knight—he cannot canter around looking for agro. He must be brought in by a trade union member.

Secondly, except in the single case of the finding of a certification officer, the commissioner has complete discretion about whether to lend his assistance. So the hon. Gentleman's concern about the commissioner going out and looking for trouble, and his—possibly justified—concerns about the tiny minority of vexatious, frivolous people who may try to make trouble for a trade union, can be put aside. The commissioner cannot act unless brought in by a trade union member and that member cannot demand the commissioner's help. The commissioner has the discretion to extend or not to extend his help.

Mr. Allen: I want to bring the Minister back to the central point of why we need a commissioner, because he has not answered that satisfactorily. The Certification Officer has all the qualities that the Minister has mentioned, with the added advantage of a long tradition of being perceived as relatively neutral. Does the Minister agree, therefore, that the Certification Officer would be the ideal person to whom to extend the powers? That would certainly be preferable to the imposition of a commissioner, which comes with all the rest of the dogma in the Bill. He will not be trusted by the majority of trade unionists, and will be used only by those seeking to cause trouble for trade unions.

Mr. Nicholls: I concede at once what the hon. Gentleman said is arguable. I appreciate the way in which he put his point. Without being unduly pessimistic, it is safe to say that it was always a reasonable bet that the Labour movement would not be too keen on the commissioner and all his works. One did not have to be a clairvoyant to spot that. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) graciously and fairly paid tribute in Committee to the work done by the Certification Officer and his staff. There is obviously a good working relationship between them and the trade union movement.

Given the misgivings that some people in the Labour movement would have about the role of the commissioner, would it be a good idea to tack these powers on to the Certification Officer? In one sense it would have been logical and tidy, but it would have driven a wedge—I use the word in a non-pejorative sense—between the trade union movement and the Certification Officer, which would have done no good. So the hon. Gentleman's point is arguable, as is my response to it.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): The Minister should know that we do not believe the Government's protest that the commissioner is merely to assist trade union members, and I shall explain why not. The Government have run down the wages inspectorate, which is supposed to enforce legal standards in low-paid sectors. They do not care whether the law is enforced in that area. The Health and Safety Executive has too few officials, so there are more and more accidents and deaths in British industry. The Government do not care about that or about the law being broken. Suddenly, however, they can find resources for a new official who can back dissident trade union members who want to cause difficulties for their trade unions in this way, rather than taking up the issues in a democratic way through the movement.

Mr. Nicholls: I am not sure how far you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will allow me to get away with broadening the debate into one about wages councils or the Health and Safety Executive. In passing, on the subject of the number of fatalities, I ask the hon. Lady to have another look at the figures for industrial fatalities, which are now at an all-time record low.

Ms. Short: No.

Mr. Nicholls: The figures speak for themselves. I wonder how far I shall be allowed to go down this road — the hon. Lady can go off and check the rate of industrial fatalities——

Mr. Meacher *rose*——

Mr. Nicholls: I can understand the misgivings of the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends, but I made the point that the commissioner does not act on his own volition and has the discretion about whether to render assistance, and I hoped that that would go a long way to satisfying the hon. Lady's concerns.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend made an important point about the need for protection because of the Government's poor record on health and safety at work——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Perhaps we have gone far enough down that road. New clause 3 deals with proceedings in industrial tribunals, and we should get back to that.

Mr. Meacher: The Minister said incorrectly that the number of industrial deaths had fallen; it has not. It has been roughly stationary for the past four or five years, and the number of severe accidents and maimings has been rapidly increasing. That would be affected by a commissioner who could take up the lack of the provision of health and safety measures by an employer on behalf of his employees.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's point has nothing to do with clause 3. I hope that both Front Benches will agree to differ and return now to new clause 3.

Mr. Nicholls: I hear what you say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I know what is good for me.

The issue comes down to whether one believes that if these rights exist they should have a proper mechanism for enforcement. We believe that they should, and we have to be able to satisfy the world at large—if not the hon. Member for Oldham, West and his hon. Friends—that there is nothing sinister about the role of the commissioner. Given his discretion and the fact that he cannot act of his own volition, I believe that we have got the balance right, and I hope the House will reject the new clause.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): I should like to preface my remarks by saying that the Government have not produced a shred of evidence that there is a need for the commissioner for the rights of trade union members, whereas there is ample evidence of the need for the protection of the rights of employees. It is obvious to the most casual of observers that the creation of the commissioner is to facilitate deliberately proved actions sometimes by politically motivated organisations such as the Right-wing Freedom Association, and sometimes by employers, against trade unions and their officers.

An example of what I mean can be found in Sir Ian MacGregor's book, "The Enemies Within", when he refers to the Gulliver concept, wherein his hired agent David Hart was used to organise so-called dissident members of the National Union of Mineworkers to institute waves of legal proceedings against the union because

"each one of the many actions tied another tiny legal rope around the NUM until it woke up one day and couldn't move."

The encouragement of such tactics is what the creation of the commissioner is all about. If it is not, we look forward to the Minister telling the House that he can accept new clause 3. The Bill deals with the so-called rights of union members only in so far as they relate to the union. The same members will not be able to avail themselves of the services of the commissioner in relation to any matters connected with their employment or their employer.

Mr. Allen: Is it not a fact that David Hart performed those duties in a privatised manner, and all that the Government are doing are nationalising the services of Mr. Hart? He may be the first commissioner.

Mr. Clelland: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point.

The legal aid that the commissioner will willingly provide for action against the union will not be available to assist in any action against the employer. The resources of the taxpayer, to the tune of some £1·5 million per year, are to be made available to those who wish to take issue with their union, while at the same time the same Government are planning to save about £10 million per year on the legal aid system, which is there to help those who cannot afford the legal costs involved in obtaining justice on a host of infinitely more important, more legitimate and more personal issues.

The Government's Legal Aid Bill, currently going through its parliamentary processes, is in sharp contrast to the measures proposed in the Employment Bill, and clearly shows the prejudiced nature of the Employment Bill and the Government's determination to pursue their political enemies at the taxpayers' expense, while cutting back on public expenditure for more creditable and essential services, and services in more demand. It is also in sharp contrast to the rights of employees that the Government have whittled away during the past eight years.

If the Government are really interested in fairness and justice, let Ministers explain why employees' rights have been eroded to such an extent. Let them explain why there is no proposal to give the "commissar for trade union

harassment" the power to help members unfairly disciplined by their employers. Do not let Ministers tell us that the unions should give legal assistance to such members. We know that they do. That is one of the major benefits of trade union membership. We also know that the Government — by this measure and in every Act concerned with trade unions—have deliberately set out to weaken the ability of trade unions so to do.

What about those who are not trade union members, those whom the Government have done everything in their power to discourage and dissuade from trade union membership? What about their rights? Who is to assist them if they are unfairly disciplined by their employers? Why should not the commissioner be able to help those people, too, to take action against unfair employers? The reason is that the Bill is not about fairness or justice; it is about encouraging litigation against unions. It is about giving state support to the Gulliver concept, so that unions will be further weakened and unable to give proper representation and protection to their members. The fact that the commissioner for the rights of trade union members will not be empowered to assist those union members against their employers is ample proof of that. However, if further proof is necessary, it lies in the extent to which the proposal goes to see to it that nothing stands in the way of encouraging action against trade unions.

5.15 pm

I return to the legal aid system, to compare its provisions with the proposals in the Bill to demonstrate the Government's double standards and hypocrisy. Clause 19(4) states:

"The matters to which the Commissioner may have regard in determining whether, and to what extent, to grant an application under this section shall include, in particular—

(a) whether the case raises a question of principle;"

I should have thought that there was plenty of room for manoeuvre there. Subsection (4)(b) states:

"whether it is unreasonable, having regard to the complexity of the case, to expect the applicant to deal with the case unaided;"

Again, that is completely at the discretion of the commissioner. Paragraph (c) states:

"whether, in the opinion of the Commissioner, the case involves a matter of substantial public interest."

That is interesting because I can imagine that if a trade union member wanted to take action against the shop steward that would not be particularly interesting to the public, but if he wanted to take action against Arthur Scargill that would be very interesting to the public and the commissioner might think that it was in the public interest.

I should like to refer to part IV of the legal aid regulations, headed, "Determination of Applications". The regulations make aid conditional and refer to financial eligibility and eligibility on merit. They also refer to

"Refusal where advantage trivial or proceedings simple".

The regulations refer to refusal where other facilities are available.

The regulations on financial eligibility state:

"(1) Where the assessment officer determines that an applicant has disposable income of an amount which makes him ineligible for legal aid, the [secretary](s) shall refuse the application.

(2) Where the assessment officer determines that an applicant, having disposable income of an amount which makes him eligible for legal aid, has disposable capital of an amount which renders him liable to be refused legal aid, the [secretary] . . . shall refuse the application if it appears to [him] . . . that the probable costs of the applicant in the proceedings in respect of which the application was made would not exceed the maximum contribution payable by the applicant under the Act."

Then the applicant has to satisfy eligibility on merits:

"Without prejudice to the generality of section 7(5) or (5A) of the Act (which provides that a person shall not be given legal aid unless he has reasonable grounds for taking, defending or being a party to proceedings, and may also be refused legal aid if it appears unreasonable that he should receive it in the particular circumstances of the case), an application for a certificate, shall not be approved except after consideration by the [secretary] . . . of all questions of fact or law arising out of the action, cause or matter to which the application relates and the circumstances in which it was made."

The regulation headed:

"Refusal where advantage trivial or proceedings simple"

states:

"Without prejudice to regulations 29 and 33 an application may be refused where it appears . . . that only a trivial advantage would be gained by the applicant from the proceedings to which the application relates, or that on account of the simple nature of the proceedings a solicitor would not ordinarily be employed."

Then we come to the regulation headed:

"Refusal where other rights or facilities available."

It states:

" — (1) Without prejudice to regulations 29 an application may be refused where it appears . . . that the applicant has available rights or facilities making it unnecessary for him to obtain legal aid or has a reasonable expectation of obtaining financial or other help from a body of which he is a member, and has failed to take all reasonable steps to enforce or obtain such rights, facilities or help including permitting the [secretary] . . . to take those steps on his behalf.

(2) Where it appears that the applicant has a right to be indemnified against expenses incurred in connection with any proceedings, it shall not, for the purposes of paragraph (1), be deemed a failure to take reasonable steps if he has not taken proceedings to enforce that right, whether for a declaration as to that right or otherwise."

Therefore, financial aid through the legal aid system is complicated. Legal aid is also means tested to the extent that valuation is made of the capital available to the client as well as of the annual income that is available to him. Nor is it open-ended assistance, unlike that provided by the commissioner for the rights of trade union members. Where a solicitor feels that more advice or assistace would go over the limit already granted, he must not give it without going back to the board. Recipients of legal aid, unlike recipients of aid from the commissioner, must pay a contribution. It is calculated first on the basis of capital. That is not only cash savings but sums that could be borrowed against insurance policies, jewellery, caravans, and so on, but excluding household furniture and the value of an owner-occupied house. The assessment is made by the DHSS. If disposable capital is over £4,850, legal aid will probably be reduced.

The DHSS also looks at disposable yearly income. It is assessed as weekly household income, net of tax and national insurance, and must include child benefit and family income supplement if applicable. Then reasonable expenses must be deducted — travelling to work, trade union dues and weekly rent or mortgages—and there is a deduction for dependants. For those aged 11 it is £13, for those aged 11-15 it is £19·50, for those aged 16-17 it is £23·40 and for those over 18 it is £30·45. That gives the weekly disposable income, and it is multiplied by 52 to give the yearly income. Over £5,585 is not eligible for legal aid and under £2,325 is eligible. If income is between those two

[Mr. Clelland]

figures, £2,325 is deducted from yearly disposable income and the remainder is divided by four to give the maximum contribution out of income.

It will be easy to be in a position whereby an applicant on family income supplement will have to make a contribution. Only those in receipt of supplementary benefit will not have to make a contribution. No such tests will apply to those seeking help from the commissioner.

Another interesting comparison between the legal aid system and the operation of the commissioner is malicious representation—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The speech that the hon. Gentleman is making might be more appropriate if the Question before the House were that the clause stand part of the Bill. That is not the Question, nor is it likely to be. The hon. Gentleman should direct his remarks to the new clause, which seeks to extend the provisions of clause 19 to proceedings before an industrial tribunal.

Mr. Clelland: I accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am trying to draw a comparison between the legal aid system and the operation of the commissioner. To some extent, there must be a parallel — the inherent unfairness of what will be provided under the commission compared with the more serious cases under the legal aid system. I am trying to show the need to make the operation of the commissioner fairer by the inclusion of the new clause.

There are qualifications with regard to certain cases that can be funded under the legal aid system. Aid to pursue cases relating to unfair action by employers through industrial tribunals is such an example. That is the point of new clause 3.

In contrast, clause 19(7)(e) says:

"such other proceedings, being proceedings against a trade union, an official of a trade union or the trustees of the property of a trade union, as may be specified in an order made by the Secretary of State."

With regard to the operation of the commissioner, the only qualification is that the Secretary of State will be unable to order assistance in cases against employers. No doubt that is protection against some sudden brainstorm. The commissioner will be almost unfettered in taking any action or pursuing any mischief at the taxpayers' expense, so long as it is in pursuance of a trade union or a trade union official, but not against an employer.

In Committee we argued strongly that there was no case for the introduction of such a service. Even if the Government came up with the slightest evidence that there was, there is no case for it taking priority over the many injustices in society on which the Government turn their back.

If, as it would appear, the Government are determined to press ahead with this dogmatic nonsense, the least that they could do would be to give some balance to the service and give equal rights to trade union members pursuing cases of injustice at the hands of their employers.

I hope that the Minister will be able to say that he will accept new clause 3.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): Most hon. Members who listened to the Second Reading debate realised what a disgraceful Bill it was and how it had been devised to hit the trade union movement when the Government thought that it was down. That was its sole purpose.

I recall a precedent for a Government behaving in such a manner. Just after the general strike the Government thought, "We have got them down and we will kick them as hard as we possibly can. We will deprive them of rights that they have held since 1906, or rights that they have held since Disraeli's first trade union legislation. We shall take away those rights, and now that they are down we shall kick and fetter them even more."

No doubt my hon. Friends strove as hard as possible in Committee to overcome and to expose the difficulties, but the Bill has returned in almost as bad a shape as it was when it went into Committee. The Minister tried to adopt a perfectly reasonable manner when he put his case, but he did not deal with the realities. We are faced — the country should know this — with a bad Bill. It is a vindictive Bill and it will produce bitter reaction throughout the trade union movement. Far from assisting in overcoming industrial disputes or difficulties, it will add greatly to the dangers of industrial disputes over the next four or five years.

The proposition with regard to a commissioner will add to those difficulties. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) referred to David Hart. His appointment is not a fanciful proposition. Whom will the Government appoint to do the job? Do they think that any reputable trade unionist, or any reputable civil servant, will take the job of commissioner, particularly if they reject the proposition in the new clause, which is making a belated attempt to restore some semblance of balance to the operation that the commissioner will have to undertake? Apparently, even that will be rejected out of hand.

The commissioner will be established for the purpose of causing trouble for individual trade unions. As soon as the commission is in operation there will be trouble. The Government need not think that the trade union movement will be as fettered as it has been in the past. More serious fetters have been placed on the trade union movement. Over the past five or six years the greatest fetter placed on it has been that of unemployment. It weakens trade unions and prevents them overcoming their difficulties.

What has always happened in British industrial history when a malicious and vindictive Government, such as this one, have sought to impose legal fetters on trade unions and bind their hands to prevent them from protecting their members is that eventually the trade unions have worked their way out of it and managed, once again, to stand up for their rights.

Whoever is appointed as commissioner by the Government will be an industrial buffoon. He will be laughed at from one end of the country to the other. The idea that he will be able to assist in dealing with industrial disputes is nonsense.

Mr. Allen: My right hon. Friend should be informed that in Committee the bets were even between Sir Ian MacGregor, Lord Frank Chapple and John Moore, who came in as a late runner as a possible appointee to the job.

Mr. Foot: I think that David Hart is the man. He is the most likely appointee. I agree that it will be a strong competition. Perhaps the Government will introduce a

clause in the House of Lords for the appointment of two or three commissioners—they want the matter covered properly.

It is especially disgraceful — my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North underlined this fact—that money should be available for such a post when less money is being provided for the essential services that are trying to operate health and safety procedures throughout British industry. It is being done at a time when the number of inspectors is nothing like it should be or what it was when we started the operation. The need for health and safety inspectors is constantly increasing because of the growing mechanisation of British factories and because of the greatly extended health and safety provisions. I do not need to say this in your presence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because nobody played a greater part in passing those procedures, when we had a decent House of Commons, than you did in a previous office.

We always envisaged that if that task were to be done properly there would have to be a proper provision of assistance and that there would have to be a number of inspectors. There would have to be proper support over an increasing period, because the demand would be increased. Instead, the Government, who have been such skinflints in these matters, are prepared to provide funds for someone to do this squalid little job for them. It is utterly disgraceful and it will never succeed. They have contrived a strike at Ford's which derives essentially from the rigid ballot provisions imposed by the Government. The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) should get the bill for the £17 million per day that it costs, unless it can be shared properly and fairly among the sycophants who supported him in taking that measure through the House.

5.30 pm

The Minister has sought to appear reasonable today. He may also have done so in Committee. In a few years' time, however, every Member who has been associated with the Bill will be utterly ashamed of it. There will have been the first industrial dispute associated with the commissioner's operations. The commissioner may think that he is protecting someone's rights, but his activities will rightly be seen as a deliberate attack by the Government on the trade union movement. The best thing that the Minister could do would be to knock this miserable bit out of the Bill or to accept the new clause. As that would make a mockery of the Government's intentions, I do not suppose they will agree to it. I hope that the Minister and his colleagues will consider what will happen to them when the trade union movement recovers its strength and self-reliance and turns to rend those who attacked it in its moment of weakness. When the movement has regained its strength it will deal with those who have introduced squalid, miserable measures such as this.

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): I am pleased to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot). He has a distinguished record in these matters and speaks with passion of the iniquities and inadequacies of the Bill.

With regard to the role of the commissioner, I wish briefly to take up some of the points that were raised in Committee but received no response from the Government. This measure is profoundly prejudiced and fundamentally flawed. The provision for the commissioner is merely a further attempt to hogtie the trade union movement under the bogus guise of extending individual freedom. It is just one more step down the road towards the strangulation of our trade union movement. The Under-Secretary of State laughs, but that is nothing new —he did the same in Committee.

New clause 3 seeks to bring some balance to an absurd measure. It is nonsense to suggest that trade union members should have such enormous powers to tackle the trade unions but very little assistance in tackling difficulties caused by employers. The Government's proposal is over the top and has nothing to do with industrial relations. It is political prejudice masquerading as practical policy. We mounted a lengthy attack on these provisions in Committee. Today I shall highlight various key issues to which the Minister has failed to respond, either in Committee or today.

The Green Paper contained a long section on the benefits of the work of the Certification Officer, but no case was made for a commissioner to handle trade union members' difficulties and especially the interface with the court system. Paragraph 6.9 of the Green Paper gives the game away. It states:

> "However, it has also become apparent that the present arrangements are deficient or inadequate to some extent. The Certification Officer's powers are not comprehensive and the courts are not being used."

The sole criterion for the Government's proposal is that there is too little court involvement in trade union affairs and the work of the Certification Officer. That shows why the proposal is being introduced and it belies the arguments of fairmindedness, evenhandedness and the extension of individual rights that are constantly pushed down our throats by a Government who daily abuse all those concepts.

My second point relates to costs. It was argued in Committee that if the commissioner's role was so vital, the £1·2 million or £1·3 million cost of setting up that office would be justified. Yet when we asked exactly what the commissioner's role was, on no occasion was an answer given. Ministers merely parroted the claim that there was a deficiency and the courts were not being used, so there must be a commissioner to satisfy the Government's prejudices. It is extraordinary that we are expected to accept a proposal involving public expenditure for which no justification has been given.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has said, the Bill is the fourth instalment of the Government's attempt to dismember the trade union movement. Although we disagree with the malice and vindictiveness behind it, we might have expected the Government to produce some reasoned justification for this intrusion into trade union affairs and industrial relations. Sadly, the Government have so little pride in their political craft that they have failed to produce any justification for this unsavoury contribution to the sea of flawed argument represented by the Bill.

Mr. Allen: I am pleased to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish). It is also a privilege to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), whose work in this area is well documented and widely respected. As a new Member, I find many unfamiliar things in the Chamber and some that are familiar. One unfamiliar sight is the faces of Back Bench Conservative Members who were on the Standing Committee. For three months, I saw only the piles of correspondence with which they were dealing during the Committee stage rather than the fresh, charming faces

[Mr. Allen]

before us today. It is a delight to see them. It is also a delight to see the Secretary of State, albeit somewhat late —we were used to that in Committee, so, again, it is something familiar to make one feel at home.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Perhaps the Secretary of State has been on the picket line at Ford's.

Mr. Allen: That may be so. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) may also have been there, as he used to work at Ford's. I picked up that morsel of information on the one occasion when the hon. Gentleman spoke in Committee. Whether the number of industrial disputes at Ford has gone down since the hon. Member came to the House, or whether all these disputes are the result of his absence from Ford, we cannot really say.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot see the relevance of what the hon. Gentleman is saying to the new clause that we are debating. Perhaps he will look at the new clause and direct his remarks to it.

Mr. Allen: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was referring to the familiar points in this debate. The unfamiliar point about the debate is that there is an SDP-Liberal alliance Member here today. There may even be two. I am trying to be charitable, but on the occasion when the alliance was represented in Committee it may have looked as though there were two of its members present when there was only one. Unfortunately, that was just for two or three hours of one Committee sitting.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I doubt whether the Committee debated new clause 3, and perhaps we ought to be debating it now.

Mr. Allen: There is little logic in this clause. The powers given to the new trade union harassment officer are powers that could have been made available to the Certification Officer. As I have said, this is a slight upon those who work in the Certification Office, and I have had some dealings with them over a number of years with some tricky and delicate industrial relations matters. The Certification Officer has always proved to be an extremely reliable person in dealing with such queries. Such an office will always be accused of being biased in one way or another, but, in general, the Certification Officer has always proved that that is a worthy office. In my view, and that of many other Members, that office would have been the appropriate place to which to extend these powers. The fact that the Government have chosen to separate the Certification Officer from the new trade union harassment officer demonstrates the dogma that lies behind this clause. They could not bring these powers to bear with the Certification Officer——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been speaking for six minutes. The new clause before the House refers to extending the provisions of clause 19 to "proceedings in an industrial tribunal".
I have yet to hear him comment on that matter, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will address his remarks to that.

Mr. Allen: Thank you for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This refers to the assistance by the commissioner. The thrust of my argument is that the commissioner need not be the person who gives this assistance. That power could go to the Certification Officer, were it not for the dogma of the Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I point out to the hon. Gentleman that that is not contained in the new clause that the House is debating. The new clause contains nothing about transferring to the Certification Officer the responsibilities that are proposed for the commissioner. The hon. Gentleman would do well if he would quickly glance at new clause 3 and address his remarks to it.

Mr. Allen: The new clause relates to assistance by the commissioner in actions against employers, and those matters were previously dealt with by the Certification Officer. I feel that it would be in order to ask, when talking about this new trade union harassment officer and the commissar who will take on this role, whether we shall be at liberty to hear how this person will be appointed to carry out the duties in the clause. What will the wages of this person be, and what qualifications will he have?

Mr. Dixon: How will he be appointed?

Mr. Allen: As my hon. Friend says, how will he be appointed?

In Committee, we were endlessly told that any person who exercises any responsibility in the trade union movement, even down to giving minor advice at an executive committee meeting, should be elected. There is no provision for that democratic process to be applied to this person. Therefore, it may strike people as being a little humorous that David Hart, or Ian MacGregor, or even John Moore if he falls out of favour, or any number of people, will be put up for this job. The job is completely within the gift of the Secretary of State. He may choose to give away one of these "jobs for the boys" to people such as Ian MacGregor or someone whom he feels deserves a little sinecure.

5.45 pm

We also need to be careful about unfair dismissals. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent said earlier that there is little that the trade union commissioner or commissar or harassment officer can do on behalf of a member to secure redress for unfair dismissal. The unfair dismissal that is relevant to this clause is the potential unfair dismissal of, God help him, the trade union commissar. Schedule 1 (2)(3) says:

"If, when any person ceases to hold office as the Commissioner, the Secretary of State determines that there are special circumstances which make it right that he should receive compensation, there may be paid to him a sum by way of compensation of such amount as may be determined."

That can be read in two ways. Either the person, being an acolyte of the Secretary of State, could be thrown out on his ear, or he could be the beneficiary of a tremendous golden handshake. However, the clause says nothing about his taking on these other, more important and relevant duties.

Many of my hon. Friends have referred to the number of cases laid before the Certification Officer. There is not enough for a trade union harassment officer to do unless he goes out on his white charger to try to find work. Nothing in the clause says anything about that. The Certification Officer has had just a handful of cases on such matters as political funds. Those cases could be dealt with by the Certification Officer, and cases arising out of the clause may also be dealt with in that way. Therefore, a new office is undesirable.

We have heard a lot about performance-related pay from the Government, and I have asked the Minister—

and I ask him again — whether, if the trade union harassment officer deals with just five or six cases a year, that will affect his pay. Will the Minister undertake to review the value for money that the trade union harassment officer is giving the Government after his first year? The legislation gives the Government the power not to reappoint this trade union harassment officer.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. All this is of great interest to the House, but has nothing to do with the subject under discussion. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will start to address himself to clause 3, or resume his seat.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Allen: I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for that advice, supported by Conservative Members. It is nice to hear that they are in good voice because we were a little worried that they had nothing to say. These clauses are put forward out of malice. They are yet another attempt to stir the pot——

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Would the hon. Gentleman like to remind the House who put forward this new clause?

Mr. Allen: The new clause relates to the trade union harassment officer. That may not be within the hon. Gentleman's knowledge, but that is what we are talking about. He was not on the Committee, so I understand his lack of knowledge.

This is another attempt to stir the pot and incite individual dissident trade union members to take action against trade unions. As such, it is undemocratic, it is uncalled for and unnecessary. I hope that we shall throw it out.

Mr. Haynes *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman intends to address himself to new clause 3.

Mr. Haynes: I resent that remark, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When you called me, I was about to say that I intended to address myself to clause 19, which deals with assistance by the trade union commissioner——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is just what I feared. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the House is considering new clause 3.

Mr. Haynes: All I said was that clause 19 deals with assistance by the commissioner. I hope that I shall not say anything that may tempt you to tell me to sit down, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall kick off by saying, in passing, that I notice that not many of the Conservative Members who served in the Committee are on the Benches today. One or two of them were here earlier — the little boys, as I called them in Committee — *[Interruption.]* It is true. They have not lived yet. They do not know what life is about; they do not know what work is about; and they certainly do not know what trade unions are about. They are no longer here, they have gone — *[Interruption.]* They have gone; there are only some of the more elderly Conservative Members on the Benches opposite.

The Bill is the responsibility of the Secretary of State. I have made a few notes about him. For example, the right hon. Gentleman arrived in the Chamber at 5.37 pm and departed two minutes later. He is not really meeting his responsibility, is he? He has left his junior Ministers to take responsibility for the Bill. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) — he is from that beautiful country of Wales, the Principality — mentioned the junior Minister. I can tell my right hon. Friend that the Under-Secretary is a nice chap — *[Interruption.]* Yes, he really is a nice chap, but politically he is vicious. There is no doubt about that.

Ms. Short: He is not nice.

Mr. Haynes: My hon. Friend wants to jump in and talk about the junior Minister.

The two junior Ministers are up front today. Of course, they were up front in Committee because the Secretary of State hardly ever attended. From the Conservative point of view they have not done a bad job, but we have done a better job. We did a better job in Committee, we are doing a better job today and we are pulling the Bill to pieces.

The new clause clearly shows what lies behind the appointment of the commissioner chappie and the sort of assistance that he will give trade unionists. It is a scabs' charter — *[Interruption.]* I wish that Conservative Members would listen. Some of the young Tories in Committee were given a bit of an education. I am surprised that the more elderly Tories are turning round and gasbagging when they should be listening.

By talking about the young laddies in Committee, I am reminded of my school days—as I am sure you are, Mr. Deputy Speaker — when little fellows used to sneak around looking at what everybody was doing. It is the same today — little Tory sneaks in trade unions. The Government will give them the opportunity to go to the commissar so that he can really take the trade unions to town. That is what it is all about.

The Government change the rules and regulations again and again. They have not yet said anything about the national vote at Ford not so many days ago. They keep saying that they want everybody to have ballots. Well, there was a ballot at Ford, a decision was made and it was carried out. I am waiting for the Government to say something——

Mr. Favell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I came into the Chamber bursting to hear about new clause 3, but so far I have heard about the Ford strike, the youth of the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) and even your youth, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May we please return to the new clause?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has a point. The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) must address himself much more closely to the provisions of new clause 3.

Mr. Haynes: That is what I am trying to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not need the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) to encourage you. That is just not on. In any case, the hon. Gentleman was not even here at the start of the debate, and he was not a member of the Committee either. He is a new boy to the Bill. He need not tell me when I am out of order; that is the job of the Chair. I respect the Chair at all times.

There has been massive infiltration of the trade union movement by the Conservative Trade Unionists. That has been the cause of the problems. They have attended branch meetings and stirred up trouble. Now, they can run to the commissar to try to bring the unions into disrepute. That is not on, and the Government jolly well know it.

[Mr. Haynes]

When the Opposition return to office, we will know what to do with this legislation—*[Interruption.]* Oh yes we will. This Government preach freedom, but they have introduced this Bill to take away freedom from the individual. That is what the Bill is all about.

Mr. Allen: I am sure that my hon. Friend would like to mention that the trade union commissar will not even have to refer any complaints to the trade union involved. Complaints—and they may, of course, be frivolous—will be made to the trade union harassment officer, but there will be absolutely no referral to the trade union in the first instance.

Mr. Haynes *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Member for Ashfield will not be persuaded to go too far down that road. I remind both him and the House that the new clause under discussion seeks to extend the provisions of clause 19 to proceedings before an industrial tribunal. I hope that the House and the hon. Gentleman will address themselves to that.

Mr. Haynes: I am going down no road other than the right one, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because you asked me to do that. You asked that right at the beginning of my speech. Indeed, you have pulled up hon. Members for going down the wrong road. I shall not allow myself to be persuaded to go down the wrong road by either Conservative Members or my hon. Friends. I intend to stick to the rules, of course—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members are trying to put me off because I want to tell the House about the CTU and its massive infiltration of the trade union movement. Its members are stirring up trouble throughout the country, and not just in my industry.

Before I came here I worked in a heavy industry, so I know what work is all about. I also know what trade unions are about. They look after their members, negotiate with the employers, and do this, that and the other. The employer is not even mentioned in clause 19. My experience of industry was that workers and management worked together and if something went wrong they sat round the table and sorted it out. They did not run down the road to the commissar saying, "That is it. I am not going back to work until you sort things out." That was the last resort if we did not get anywhere with management. There was co-operation from day one. The problems stirred up by the CTU should never have happened, but they were encouraged by the Government to join trade unions and cause trouble.

The question of cost has been raised. This is interesting. In Committee, a figure of £1·25 million was mentioned as the cost of running the commissioner's office. The Minister does not nod or shake his head in response to say yea or nay. He will probably respond to that point when he rises to the Dispatch Box. If these sneaky trade unionists keep running to and fro between the commissioner and their jobs, it will obviously increase the cost. The more work that the commissioner takes on, the higher will be the cost. As the Government keep reminding us, they were elected to reduce public expenditure. If that expenditure increases, there must be a reason. We want to know how much the Government are prepared to spend on the commissioner and his office.

6 pm

Mr. Allen: I hope that my hon. Friend will accept this piece of information. With his usual modesty he has underestimated the financial effects of the measure. The figure for 1988-89 is estimated at £1·5 million, and the figure for each of the following two years is £1,700,000. That relates to the new commissioner for the rights of trade union members to be established and to operate under those clauses. I am sure that my hon. Friend will appreciate that.

Mr. Haynes: That is interesting. It shows that, as time goes on, it will cost more and more. Given that membership of trade unions is dropping, many people will run to the commissioner to complain about various matters in respect of their trade unions. The Government are obviously prepared to set up a scabs' charter.

Mr. Clelland: Does my hon. Friend agree that, although there is no upper limit in the Bill in respect of the cost of the commissioner to the taxpayer, the Government propose to save £10 million a year on the legal aid system? Surely this again shows the Government's priorities when it comes to justice and fairness.

Mr. Haynes: That is what Conservatism is all about. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent reminded us about what happened in the early 20th century. The message is coming over to the Labour Benches loud and clear. We shall go back to those days of the early 20th century, when the Government shackled the trade unions. This is what it is all about, yet the Government talk about freedom of the individual.

Finally, some names have been suggested for appointment as commissioner. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent picked the right one when he suggested David Hart, given the marvellous job that he did for the Government in Nottinghamshire during the miners' dispute. He was running from pit to pit, and from branch to branch, convincing chappies that they should be doing this, that and the other, contrary to what the National Union of Mineworkers had decided. Is it any wonder that we had a dispute?

Mr. Foot: He was at No. 10 Downing street, too.

Mr. Haynes: Yes, that is right. He was under instructions from No. 10. I understand that he used to work there. There is a clear connection.

What experience is required for such a job? Will this commissioner have trade union experience, management experience or financial experience? Will he have anything like CAB experience? We want to know.

Mr. Clelland: Does my hon. Friend agree that the only qualifications needed are those of an agent provocateur? That is why Mr. David Hart fits the bill so well.

Mr. Haynes: I take my hon. Friend's point. The Minister must tell the nation that taxpayers' money is being used to appoint this fellow and his staff and to run his office. We want to know how much money will be spent, and how it will be spent. If the Bill is enacted and a commissioner—or, as we like to call him, a commissar—is appointed, he will be a tool of the Government. He will not be a tool of the trade union member. He will be answerable to the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State is assuming more powers under the Bill. One of those powers will enable him to control the

commissioner and to tell him exactly what he is to do. I do not care what the Minister says when he rises to the Dispatch Box. I welcome the Secretary of State back at 6.5 pm. I, my colleagues and people outside the House want to know, before his appointment, what kind of experience the commissioner will have. We may want to play a part. We want to find out exactly what kind of qualifications are needed.

Mr. Clay: There is a slight difficulty in respect of this clause. I support it, but, given the function that it should perform, it is narrowly drawn. I wish to draw the attention of my Front Bench colleagues to this point and put one or two suggestions to them.

As I understand it, only an existing trade union member who has been unfairly dismissed by reason of trade union membership or activities can seek the commissar's assistance and go to the tribunal. What about those people who do not get a job in the first place because of their trade union membership? This is a serious new clause to which the Government have not responded in any way.

I recall last Monday night's "World in Action" programme about the Economic League and the extraordinary situation in which a spy can be involved in a trade union for years, go to meetings and collect names, all of which are used to form employers' blacklists. It is not just the Economic League and Aims of Industry which do that. When an unemployed trade union activist goes to an employer seeking work, the employer can get out his blacklist and say, "We're not having you". As a trade unionist, will that person have the right to go to the commissar? If there was a genuine commissioner for the rights of trades unionists, he would serve no more essential purpose than for people to be able to complain to him that they have been blacklisted for trade union activity. The Bill does not cover that situation. Unfortunately, new clause 3 does not appear to cover it either, although I am sure that that is a technical oversight.

Mr. Allen: Surely this is the ideal opportunity for the Government to condemn such activity openly from the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Clay: My hon. Friend is right. If the Government were serious in their wish to assist trade unions, rather than continually to harass them, they would accept this new clause and table amendments to widen the scope of the measure. The Government must explain why there is no legal provision to prevent this practice. Why do the Government shed crocodile tears from time to time in Committee about those people who do not wish to belong to a trade union, yet are happy to reap the benefits of this provision and to insert legal protection and the opportunity to go to the commissioner if things do not go their way? If the Government feel so much sympathy for people in that position, why do they feel no sympathy for people who are hounded out of work and are prevented from working for years—sometimes for the rest of their lives — simply because they have been known as members of trade unions? If the Government had the slightest sincerity, they would do something about that. The clause represents an excellent opportunity to do so.

It seems also that the clause could be widened to deal with many other matters apart from unfair dismissal. For instance, why not give the so-called commissioner—the commissar — the power to enforce some other trade union rights? It is interesting that, in other parts of the Bill, there will be provisions to allow trade unions to be harassed, particularly, I suspect, lay representatives of trade unions, by having to produce seven years of accounting records, down to branch level. That will make the life of the average, decent, hard-working lay trade union officer, such as a branch secretary or branch treasurer, quite impossible. As such onerous obligations are being laid upon them, it is interesting that trade union officials can go to the commissioner to say that they want the right to have time off work—thereby enforcing that part of the employment legislation—so that they can cope with all the additional onerous harassments that the rest of the Bill places on them.

Obviously, a full-time trade union officer is provided with some facilities by the trade union that he represents, but many lay trade union representatives, such as shop stewards and conveners, have extremely poor facilities. Their employers are so hostile to the existence of trade unions that they make it as difficult as possible for them to carry out their functions. It is about time we had some legislation that obliged employers to provide proper facilities for trade unions in work places. If we had such legislation, new clause 3 could be widened a bit so that if employers fail to provide satisfactory facilities and sufficient time off, which they are obliged to provide, for them to cope with all the onerous, aggressive and malevolent practices that the Bill imposes on them, trade union members could go to the commissioner and ask for assistance. That would be a serious purpose of the Bill. There is no reason why the Government, if they were in the slightest way serious about trade union rights, should not concede all such purposes.

Mr. Allen: Is that not an even greater reason for a trade union harassment officer, if he is to be the sort of person whom the Government say he should be, to have great experience in the trade union movement, to have a track record and know the ins and outs of the trade union movement, rather than merely act as the acolyte of the Secretary of State in such narrow terms? A broader range of knowledge, which was not evident among Conservative Members in Committee, would give some credibility—not a lot of credibility—to the office.

Mr. Clay: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. If the Government were serious about a Bill or a clause to assist the rights of trade union members, the person who had the job of carrying it out would, by definition, have had considerable experience of the way in which trade unions operate, and know their ideals, objectives and practices. Of course we know all that is not so, because we have referred to the proposed person not as the commissioner, as the Government do, but as the harassment commisar or the harassment office. As we have said in Committee and in the House, the clause has nothing to do with the rights of trade union members. It is concerned with the rights of mavericks, and is to be manipulated by Conservative organisations, industry, the Economic League, people such as David Hart, who may get the job—that is the irony of it—and by the Freedom Association to harass trade unions.

Of course, the new clause gives the Government the opportunity to say, "Hold on. You are wrong. We have a little bit of balance, much as we hate and detest trade unions, and wish the Bill to make life as difficult as possible for them. We recognise that some elementary

[Mr. Clay]

philosophical balance is required, and we shall at least make some small gesture towards recognising that if we describe a job as that of a commissioner for trade union rights. We shall at least enable the commissioner occasionally to do some small thing to assist trade union rights." In effect, without clause 3, the commissioner will never do anything to assist any genuine trade union rights. All he will do is harass trade unions.

I am slightly unhappy about the wording of the clause in respect of non-trade union members. We should talk also about the rights of non-trade union members, but not in the way in which the Government do. I do not refer to people who enjoy the benefits of collective organisation and are quite happy to work in conditions that have been negotiated by trade unions and receive pay, but do not wish to be a member of the club. I refer to people—very often young people, women, ethnic minorities, and those who work for small and often unscrupulous employers—who have never had the opportunity to join a trade union in the first place. If there is a genuine commissioner for trade union rights, such people should have the opportunity to seek advice from the commissioner and, possibly, representation at an industrial tribunal, in the way in which the clause suggests for others, to pursue a case.

We have had a long debate in Committee and in the House about the comparison between the functions of the commissioner and legal aid. Many valid points have clearly demonstrated the Government's bias. But another point has not been sufficiently stressed. In reality, compared with legal aid applicants, those who complain to the commissioner against a trade union and those who wish to get the commissioner's assistance in harassing a trade union will find it easier to do so than to get legal aid. In respect of legal aid, it is not always entirely clear to people whether they will have to pay something. Not everyone entirely understands that the first brief interview is free. Many people think, "It will take a lot more than that. I shall probably end up paying." It is difficult to work out whether, depending on one's circumstances, one is entitled to legal aid. With the trade union harassment officer, people will know it will not cost them anything. The Government have made sure of that. In a sense, it will be a much more open door.

We need a representative for workers' rights who will give the kind of assistance that the harassment officer will give mavericks, and who, in the same open way as the commissioner, will assist people who are genuinely concerned about trade union rights.

6.15 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that legal assistance in tribunals was not wished upon trade union members as a result of some quirk on their part? Does my hon. Friend agree that the development of industrial tribunals has meant that, at tribunal after tribunal, employers have employed barristers and solicitors to represent their side? In effect, they have corrupted what was meant to be a largely informal arrangement whereby workers could represent themselves. Employers have so biased, shaped and prejudiced tribunals that workers are now desperately looking around to try to obtain some sort of legal representation.

Mr. Clay: My hon. Friend has made an extremely valuable point. He reminds me of the debate that is taking place at the moment in which trade union members of tribunals are beginning to say that the whole thing is so rigged now that their job is impossible. They say that it is pathetic to observe the complete imbalance between the barristers and all the rest representing employers on the one hand and trade union officials or lay representatives doing their best—or, on some occasions, a trade union member acting on his own behalf for some reason—on the other. They say that the imbalance is so appalling that they wonder whether it is really worth carrying on with the farce. They wonder whether they should pull out and expose the hypocrisy of the whole process because the bias is so great.

We have another difficulty with which the commissioner might be able to deal. Those representing employees' interests at a tribunal sometimes have difficulties with their employers—for example, in getting time off work or after they have had time off work. If the Government are serious about trade union rights, they could examine that possibility, and it could perhaps be worked into the new clause.

I was talking about non-trade union members. If we are to have a commissioner, there is huge scope for him to protect workers' rights. I shall refer to one example, about which I have written to the Minister, to illustrate the sort of work that the commissioner could usefully do, instead of harassing trade unions. Some young people contacted me saying that they had answered an advertisement for a job, in which they thought they would be properly employed. They went along and found out that it was not a proper job but a salesman's job. They were told that they would be paid £120 a week and would start to receive bonuses when they started selling things. They found that they could not sell anything. After a week or two they had not been paid a penny, and the employer said, "Well you had better go on signing on." In fact, they had been told not to sign off the dole in the first place.

As I have said this outside the House, I am happy to say it inside the House. Effectively, the employer had induced them illegally to claim benefit. The young people came to me because they did not have a commissioner to go to, as they might under new clause 3. I wrote to the Minister saying, "How about giving them an amnesty so that they can provide evidence against this crooked employer?" I asked him at least to agree that they would not be prosecuted because for a week or two they had wrongly claimed benefit. They had not received any other income while they had been claiming benefits, so it was only a technical offence. The Minister replied that he could not give an amnesty.

It is interesting to note the contrast between the attitude of the Department of Employment to fraudulent employers and its attitude when it is hounding and chasing people who it thinks have illegally claimed social security or unemployment benefit. That is something else with which the commissioner could help trade union members and others.

Ms. Short: We have touched on this subject before, and I agree with my hon. Friend that it is a growing problem, which affects not just one small group of people in his constituency. It is a growing malpractice among employers, who use the desperation of those on benefit to force them to work illegally and thus trap them. Once they

are claiming benefit and getting payment from the employer, which they know is illegal, the employer has them trapped. He can threaten to report them if they protest about any injustice at work. I am coming across more and more cases in my constituency; I am sure that the practice is growing.

Mr. Clay: I agree with my hon. Friend. There is no proper statutory avenue for such people to take. That is why it would be useful to widen the new clause to provide a commissioner to deal with workers' rights — and if ever there was a case of workers' rights being under threat, this is one. Although the Minister told me that the young people could not have an amnesty, one or two of them were courageous enough to put their names to statements.

I was appalled when the regional fraud officer of the Department of Employment told me that the Department had never managed to produce a successful prosecution against an employer. He said that he knew that the practice went on and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) said, that it is growing, but that in the northern region there had never been a successful prosecution. I am not surprised, because the young people were in a very difficult position. They did not want to go to a solicitor. They did not understand all that. What use would a solicitor have been anyway? They did not have a trade union to protect them. They had come off the dole and gone for a job in desperation. All that they could do was to turn to a local advice centre funded by a hard-pressed local authority that is heavily penalised and then seek the advice of their Member of Parliament.

That is the sort of case that a commissioner for workers' rights could usefully deal with. He could help people who are told that they cannot join a union or that, if they do, this, that or the other might happen to them. He could help people who have been dismissed for joining a union. He could help those who, when trying to organise a union, are put on impossible shifts so that they cannot talk to other employees. He could help the person who has a known trade union record and is immediately transferred somewhere else to work on his own—the person who is told, "You will have to move to another factory 20 or 30 miles from where you live. There is not a place here for you any longer." When faced with the malpractices that employers get up to, employees could go to the commissioner to seek assistance in court and at tribunals.

Mr. Allen: Is not my hon. Friend's suggestion completely consistent with what Conservative Members said in Committee? They said that they were not about bashing the trade union movement even though they have tried to create the trade union movement in their own image. Therefore, everything that my hon. Friend suggests should be wholly supported by Conservative Members.

Mr. Clay: Of course. As I said, if we were seriously talking about the rights of trade unions, the Government would accept that trade unions are best able to judge for themselves the rights that they want. They certainly do want the right to litigate against each other for alleged minor infringements of balloting rules and so on. They want not only to exercise their existing rights under the health and safety legislation but to have more rights under better health and safety legislation. They want the right to organise. They want the right to time off and facilities in the workplace. They want to be able to hold union meetings.

The question of rights is an interesting one. The Bill is enthusiastic in its assertion that everyone must hold ballots for everything and that there must be postal ballots. However, if the Government were serious about trade union rights, they would insert into the Bill a little clause to say that meetings could be held when required in any work place. It is no good the Government saying that that would be too complicated; one has only to consider what they have done to try to get round alleged selective balloting and the tangle that they got into to over that. It was clear that they did not even understand their own Bill for quite a long time. There is no reason why we should not have a simple provision giving the automatic right to have mass meetings on full pay. The Government allege that they are keen on unions being able to consult their members. Therefore, when a union wants to consult its members, it should be able to have a mass meeting in or out of normal time and paid by the employer. That would be a very good provision. The commissioner could enforce that important aspect of trade union rights under the new clause. Of course, no such rights appear in the Bill, which is about nothing but harassment.

I hope that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench and my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), who is chairman of the parliamentary Labour party employment committee, will agree with me that we should develop the ideas in the new clause. We should expand the trade union rights that could be enforced by a genuine commissioner for trade union and workers' rights rather than the disgusting and pathetic harassment commissar whom the Government are appointing.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I hope that the Minister will respond to the specific point raised by the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) about the alleged activities of the Economic League. It is a matter of basic democracy that citizens should be free from a potential threat to their lives and livelihoods from a secret "big brother" type of activity such as seems to be emerging from that organisation. If true, such activities are causing widespread concern beyond the House. Therefore, I hope that the Minister will address those points.

Mr. Allen: I thank my hon. colleague for giving way, but I ask him not to raise his hopes too high, as many of the organisations that donate money to keep the Economy League afloat also donate to the Conservative party. I, too, will be interested to see whether the Minister takes the opportunity to condemn from the Dispatch Box the activities of the Economic League. However, I ask my hon. colleague not to hold his breath and wait for that.

Mr. Welsh: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but my faith in human nature always tries to come through. This matter goes beyond party politics and to the basic democratic rights of citizens to be free from such "big brother" type activities, especially when they affect their lives and livelihoods. I hope that, as requested, the Minister will exercise his mind on that point.

6.30 pm

It is significant that opposition to the proposal for a commissioner comes from a wide range of sources. That leads to reasonable questioning of the setting up of the post of commissioner. The new clause is merely an attempt to patch up and improve what is basically a flawed Government proposal. As proposed, the commissioner

[Mr. Welsh]

will be a figure of possible division and dispute within unions. He could be used by individuals deliberately to disrupt joint action and the overall business of trade unions. Such a situation would not be in anyone's interest. If the Bill remains unamended there is the problem that, instead of producing all the benefits that the Government claim would come from such a post, the commissioner would, on the contrary, himself become the subject of controversy and division, leading to distrust. Indeed, we have heard the beginnings of that in the debate, and if that came to pass it would detract from any case made by the commissioner. Surely the post must be non-political, but there is no guarantee, in any shape or form, in the Bill of such a non-political appointment. The new clause goes at least some way towards giving the commissioner a more balanced role.

There is also a danger that the new external agency could detract from and harm any new democratic rights given to trade union members. I believe that that is exactly the opposite of what the Government say they are trying to achieve.

We are entitled to ask what real case was made for extending the role of the Certification Officer. Why did the Government reject that simpler and easier move, which builds on existing institutions, rather than creating instead a whole new system of bureaucracy?

There are massive inbuilt difficulties in the Government's proposal to which they have not really addressed themselves. The appointment must be fundamentally non-political. It is hard enough for trade unions to swallow the idea of a commissioner, but it would lead to enormous problems if the person appointed were seen to be anti-trade union. We have all heard the beginnings of such feelings towards that person, unless that person is beyond all suspicion. It will be an almost impossible task for anyone appointed to gain the good will and good faith of the trade unions and their members unless that person is seen to be above such suspicions. Given that, how does the Minister intend to proceed in choosing such a "perfect" commissioner? The proposed legislation puts any appointee in an impossible one-sided position unless the commissioner looks at the employers, as this new clause seeks to allow him to do.

New clause 3 should be supported as a medicine for improving a bad and ill-thought out proposal. I hope that it will be supported.

Mr. Cryer: I should like to make a few brief comments about the new clause that my hon. Friends have tabled. It is a valuable addition to the debate on the Bill. I do not expect the Government to give it their support because the basic thrust of their legislation is to attack the trade union movement: not to make it more accountable or more democratic, but to smash it. The Government will not succeed, but that is their point and purpose. Therefore, I suspect that any new clause such as this, which seeks to redress the balance which is weighing heavily against trade unionists, will receive short shrift from the Government. I am willing to be proven wrong and if the Minister would like to cut short my remarks by intervening to say that the Government will accept the new clause, I shall welcome that and forgo my few moments of comment.

On the question of assistance for trade unionists, the new clause simply and modestly—I am surprised that my hon. Friends have tabled such a modest new clause and shall discuss its modest nature shortly—attempts to give some sort of advice and guidance to trade union members who are facing the sack or the threat of dismissal because of their trade union activities or their non-membership of a trade union. Again, I shall elaborate on that shortly.

As my hon. Friend the Member for——

Mr. Clay: Sunderland, North.

Mr. Cryer: That's right, for Sunderland, North. I knew that it was somewhere in the north-east region, which has produced many distinguished Socialists, such as my hon. Friend.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) pointed out, the fact is that when trade unionists go to an industrial tribunal, which was intended as an informal discussion and decision on difficulties such as unfair dismissal, referred to in the new clause, they now face the difficulty that they are up against barristers employed by the employers, who can afford the huge and lavish fees that barristers command, or against solicitors, who charge whatever they do charge, but it can amount to several hundred pounds for a tribunal appearance.

Sometimes, trade unions can provide a legal service but the reality is that with a declining level of employment, trade union membership is declining, as is trade union income, so the sort of service that trade unions would like to provide to a member going to a tribunal is, of necessity, limited. Therefore, trade unionists going before a tribunal find themselves up against paid legal hacks who know the ropes, but they have to present their own case.

In fact, employers often comment, outrageously, that an unfair dismissal tribunal is an expensive business because they have to hire a solicitor. However, it was not in any way intended that that would be the case. The sort of provision contained in the new clause would enable some guidance to be given by a powerful figure.

The Government are to appoint the commissioner and he or she will not be receiving supplementary benefit levels. He or she will not be paid at, for example, the level of a caretaker in a state-maintained school. The salary of the commissioner will be in the stratosphere. If the commissioner works part-time, for two or three days per week, that person will receive about £30,000 or £40,000. If the commissioner works full-time, he or she will probably earn £50,000, £60,000 or £70,000 per year. In our society, that sort of money is meant to give status and, therefore, power.

If a trade unionist goes to the commissioner and obtains advice under the terms of the new clause, that advice alone will assist the trade unionist in arguing his case. If the commissioner says, "I think that you have a very good case", that alone would pre-empt any further action because an employer will accept the position of the commissioner.

I must make my position clear. I do not think that the commissioner is necessary at all. I think that it is an unfair interference in free-standing organisations that, over the years, by and large, have run their affairs with democracy and fairness. Of course there have been exceptions, but no one in the Conservative party can say that there have been no exceptions to the normal standard of conduct that we expect from members of the Conservative Cabinet, whose conduct has not been unflawed. However, all Conservative

Cabinets are not to be condemned because one or two Ministers, from time to time, have erred in their public and private behaviour.

We can say with confidence that the vast majority of trade unions have been conducted honourably and have carried out their duties well, and that there is absolutely no case for the commissioner. He will be a spy for the Government because the commissioner, who we are asking to carry out duties under the new clause and to give balance, will be appointed on the same principle that the Government have appointed every area health authority chair and every chair for every public body on which they can lay their dirty hands.

They will appoint convinced Tories who will carry out the decisions of the Tory Government, and who will be like puppets pulled by strings from No. 10. If the Government have appointed people who are not Tories to a wide range of positions, let the Minister respond and give us a list of people who have not been carefully politically vetted by the Government. We can assume that the commissioner will not be some wonderful, neutral person who will do his or her job without any prejudice.

The commissioner will have a set of prejudices. He will go through the usual hypocritical motions that we in Britain are rather too fond of accepting. He or she will say "Of course I shall do my best by both sides, by the employers, and, of course, by the employees." We know, by virtue of the legislation and by virtue of the fact that the Government are the most Right-wing Government ever——

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): That is why we are so successful.

Mr. Cryer: The hon. Gentleman says that that is why they are so successful. They are not successful in electoral terms. The Opposition is divided, but that will end. The Government are not successful in economic terms, because in Scotland, where the hon. Gentleman comes from, there are lengthy dole queues. They are not successful in terms of the National Health Service because every other Conservative Member——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The hon. Gentleman has been very good up to now in keeping to new clause 3. I hope that he will not allow himself to be detracted from it by sedentary remarks.

6.45 pm

Mr. Cryer: I was provoked by the intervention of the hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack). I should not have allowed myself to be drawn, because I am concerned solely with new clause 3. Before I was rudely provoked, I was saying that the commissioner will not be a paragon of neutral virtue. He or she will be prejudiced, and those prejudices will match the prejudices of the Right-wing Government.

Therefore, it is important that the Bill should have some balances and checks. After all, we are always told that the British constitution — that vague and amorphous collection of rules—is full of balances and checks so that we maintain glorious neutrality. However, it is not quite like that, and we know it. We are trying to produce constitutional checks in the Bill. My guess is that the Government, in their Right-wing extremism, will not accept new clause 3 because it is a check to bring something to bear on the side of labour.

New clause 3 seeks to provide a balance between capital and labour. Trade unions are simply bodies of people trying to organise sufficient strength to equal the power of capital. The power of capital can determine the disposition of production factors—the location of the factory, the machinery inside it, the hours of work and the level of wages. The trade union movement attempts simply to equal that power by saying that people, throughout their lives, should try to equate that power and modify those decisions in the interests of the community in the factory, the offices or the shop premises. The new clause is trying to bring something to bear on the side of David against the Goliath of the employers.

Conservative Members have maintained that trade unions are all-powerful. That simply is not true. It never has been true. It is a myth that British trade unions have been extremely powerful. Since the Conservative Government came to power, with one or two isolated exceptions where we have had minor victories, trade unions have never been able to halt the ruthless programme of closures and the massacre of the British manufacturing industry that has cost 2 million jobs since 1979, mostly in the north of England.

New clause 3 clearly is necessary to put some weight on the side of those who continually battle, day in and day out, against the onslaught from employers who are confident in their attacks against the trade union movement because the Government are organising it through legislation.

Mr. Allen: I have been looking at the references in the Bill to remuneration for the trade union harassment officer. The Bill states:

> "There shall be paid to the Commissioner such remuneration and such travelling or other allowance as the Secretary of State may determine . . . Payments required and made under this paragraph shall be made by the Secretary of State out of money provided by Parliament."

There is also a lengthy paragraph about the payment of travelling expenses and so on to applicants. It seems that the £20,000, £30,000, £40,000, £60,000 or £70,000 to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) referred may be merely speculation. There is absolutely no ceiling on the expenses and salary for this job.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend has made a point that emphasises the need for new clause 3. We are discussing people who will live in the stratosphere of incomes. Such people will not be aware of or understand the struggle on the shop floor. They will not be aware of the little indignities that people have to suffer. People have to wait outside doors to ask for time to go to meetings or to discuss health and safety at work, as such matters are left to the discretion of employers and not to the employees or workers. They will not have had to face the possibility of dismissal because of trade union activities.

Lord Wedderburn, an accepted expert on industrial relations and industrial law, has pointed out that people are not normally dismissed for trade union activities. The employer usually waits for something to latch on to in order to get rid of a person for some infringement and not because he is a shop steward. We know who normally heads a list of redundancies — the shop stewards. Employers will say that it is merely chance, but we know that it is part of the intimidation process to stop people participating in trade union activities.

[Mr. Cryer]

Recently a relative of mine was asked to work three weekends in a row. When she said, "What about trade union membership?", the managing director said that it would be frowned on. What was she to do? Was she to go against the managing director? What would the consequence of that have been? It would almost certainly have meant that her work would have come under close scrutiny and some opportunity taken to dismiss her, not because she was a trade union member, but for some other entirely spurious reason.

The new clause would provide guidance and assistance from this highly paid commissioner to people who face double jeopardy. They include sacked miners. Several miners have been picked on viciously and vindictively by the vicious and vindictive management of British Coal. Following the miners' strike, miners found not guilty of any offence were given their cards and sent down the road. They were not re-employed. As they had been to a court and had been found not guilty, that should have been the end of the matter. Equally, if they had been found guilty and punished that should have been the end of the matter. Miners have faced double jeopardy because the NCB, now British Coal, has used that excuse not to allow them to return to work.

The commissioner under the new clause could put his weight behind those people who were merely carrying out trade union activities. The miners were simply plucked from a picket line by police activists who wanted someone to arrest, and had a charge stuck on them. Even where the charge was not sustained, the miners were dismissed. At present the miners have only the support of the NUM under its president Arthur Scargill who has maintained a principled attitude towards this. With new clause 3 that sort of injustice would at least come a step nearer rectification.

Mr. Clay: Does my hon. Friend know that on several occasions some Labour Members from the northern region have visited British Coal management in that region about these matters and have drawn attention to the names of sacked miners, who were not only found not guilty in the courts but ordered to be reinstated by industrial tribunals, which British Coal has refused to do? Is he aware that on one such occasion a senior figure in British Coal implied that British Coal understood what was right and wrong better than the courts? In other words, he implied that British Coal felt it was above the courts. When one considers employers like that, does it not make out a case for the tremendously powerful commissioner figure to be directed against such employers, rather than to harass trade unions?

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That would fall exactly under new clause 3(a) which deals with any

"complaint by an employee of unfair dismissal by reason of trade union membership, activities of non-membership."

Obviously, it would be right to bring in the commissioner on the side of the employee.

When my hon. Friend made his intervention I was reminded of a note which I have with me. Last night, I was talking to a friend who was telling me about his firm. I shall not mention its name because of the possibility of repercussions. A man has been unemployed for about five years although he is skilled, and we are always told that there is a shortage of skilled people. The firm he worked for, machine tool manufacturers, was closed—part of the booming Thatcher economy—and the other people at the firm found jobs, but he did not. Why? Because he was the convener of the shop stewards. This new clause would help such people.

It angers me because I can see the Ministers sitting ready to bring out the clichés. The Minister will stand up and say, "The Government are concerned about all these things and about innocent parties who happen to be members of a trade union and who for one reason or another or because of the intransigence of their employers, which we do not like, have been unemployed for years." We know that the Government are aiming at that. The consequences flow from their legislation.

The attacks on the trade union movement which the Government have instituted consistently since 1980 have reduced the power of organised labour, which has never been as great as that of organised capital in our history. The Government have beaten the heads of ordinary working men and women who have nothing more than their labour to offer. They do not have factories, machines or offices. Most of them are lucky if they have half a mortgage for a house, and the houses are not grand detached houses, but ordinary terraced or council houses. Those are the people who will be affected.

The Government will reject the new clause because they cynically discard the aspirations and hopes of ordinary working people. That is why we shall continue to treat the Government with the contempt that they so richly deserve.

Mr. Nicholls: I shall try to do justice to the many speeches that we have heard. It says much for the ingenuity of hon. Members that they have been able to have such a wide-ranging debate and yet remain in order.

The hon. Members for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) and for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) raised particular points about legal aid, some of which I dealt with in my opening remarks. Legal aid certainly is means-tested, and should be, because it is being applied for and, if granted, will be used to obtain private rights and, indeed, possibly monetary compensation, too. If one is talking about a system that should be made available to obtain public rights, obviously means-testing would not be appropriate.

The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) treated us to a display which we all richly enjoyed. He had some particular suggestions about whom we might appoint as the trade union commissioner, and that was taken up by other hon. Gentlemen. I am not entirely sure what they want me to make of those recommendations. Perhaps I should not speculate at this stage. The essence of the right hon. Gentleman's speech was that he regarded the legislation as being motivated by sentiments which were both bad and vindictive. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment cannot be accused of being bad and vindictive, and whatever sinister suspicions the right hon. Gentleman may harbour about me, in no sense can I be said to be the author of the legislation. In all seriousness, I cannot accept the idea that we are bad and vindictive.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) quoted from paragraph 6 (9) of the Green Paper with some idea that he might embarrass us. If time permitted I would read the rest of that paragraph, because it points out why it is necessary to have a trade union commissioner. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) made a

number of points which amounted to the fact that he was convinced that the trade union commissioner would be a commissar for trade union harassment. He repeated that on a number of occasions. However, the fact that the commissioner cannot act on his own volition and has discretion whether or not to take up cases referred to him should be a safeguard.

7 pm

The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) shared a doubt expressed by the hon. Members for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) regarding the political impartiality of the trades union commissioner. It was suggested that it might be a Tory appointment. I do not believe that it would be appropriate to go round prying into the political allegiances or otherwise of anyone who accepted any form of public office. Unless statute provides, no statutory authority can be directed by a Minister of the Crown and that is the best safeguard against any political partiality.

The hon. Member for Ashfield was also concerned about Conservative Trade Unionists infiltration. I can only believe that he has such a concern because he believes that it is impossible for Conservatives to be members of a trades union, and that is a bizarre idea to hold. However, I should like to thank the hon. Gentleman for concluding his remarks by describing me as "politically vicious". Listening to his other remarks I was afraid he might cut short a political career before it had started. Although he believes that I am personally nice, I thank him for describing me as "politically vicious". However, I must formally deny that I am politically vicious, but I certainly would not deny his other claim.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, North spoke of blacklisting or the right not to employ people because they are trade unionists. Obviously there is a distinction to be made between dismissing people for trade union activity and trying to dress it up as something else. There is no doubt where we all stand. One cannot be dismissed for trade union activities. The only fetters that we put on the right of an employer to discriminate against somebody, even before he has employed him, are based on either sex or race. We regard that as correct. However, for the reasons that I stated in Committee, possibly as compulsively as I do now, we do not believe that an employer should be fettered if he decides to employ someone because he is or is not a member of a trade union.

In the end one must return to the words of the new clause and see what it hopes to address. We believe that there is a fatal underlying fallacy throughout the new clause in so far as it tries to equate the legal aid system with the assistance provided by the commissioner. For all the reasons that I have tried to lay before the House, we cannot regard that approach as valid. Therefore, we urge the House to reject the new clause.

Mr. Meacher: With the leave of the House, I will reply to the debate.

A number of my hon. Friends have referred to the Minister as being conciliatory and congenial. I believe that they were rather generous, especially having listened to his rather discursive and dismissive remarks, which in no way sought to answer the major points that have been made by my hon. Friends.

I listened with great care to the Under-Secretary, but he has put forward only three arguments in defence of the Government's position. The first was that, despite the existence of the courts and the Certification Officer, trade unionists need the commissioner to assist them in actions against trade unions while industrial tribunals are already available for actions against the employer. The Minister also said that industrial tribunals were expeditious and helpful, but the fact is that there are considerable delays. Indeed, in their White Paper on reducing the barriers to business the Government are proposing a £25 access fee.

The Minister has not answered the key point. Indeed, there is no answer. If trade union members have access to a Certification Officer and the courts, but still need the commissioner, surely trade union members who have access to industrial tribunals also need the commissioner in respect of actions against the employer. That is our central argument.

Secondly, the Under-Secretary said that the commissioner cannot look for trouble, but that is a disingenuous statement if ever there was one. The clauses are drafted as positive encouragement to litigation rather than to conciliation. I draw the attention of the House to the tell-tale phrase in paragraph 6 of the Green Paper: "the courts are not being used."

No doubt that was written by the last civil servant at the Department of Employment with a grasp of reality, the last man in a universe of Ionesco's rhinos frantically signalling the Government's real intentions to the outside world. If we had some truth and honesty from Ministers when they come to the Dispatch Box they would say that trade union members are not using the courts against their unions and that, of course, there is much abuse. There may not be any evidence of it, but the Government know about it because they read about it every day in the *Daily Mail*. The Government's view is, "The courts have got to be used and we will jolly well make sure that they are." That is the role of the commissioner.

The third argument advanced by the Minister was that the commissioner would use discretion on whether to take up issues. That may be true, but I believe that the Minister will forgive us if, taking account of the Government's hostility towards trade unions and given that the Government will exercise the same kind of partisan patronage in making the appointment, we believe that the commissioner will exercise a malevolent discretion against trade unions. Indeed, my hon. Friends have repeatedly referred to the appointment and one described the commissioner as the nationalisation of the privatisation role of that agent provocateur, David Hart. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that we suppose that the commissioner will exercise such malevolent discretion.

The true grievances of the trade union members are not against their unions. That is why they do not use the Certification Officer or the courts. Their real grievances are in respect of employers and concern the lack of consultation and information over unfair dismissals — 30,000 cases every year are heard and one tenth are upheld by the tribunals. They concern health and safety matters. There has been a major reduction in the number of health and safety inspectors and a consequential rise in the serious maiming of many workers. Trade union members have grievances about the illegally low wages — below what is agreed by the wages inspectorate—that are paid by employers. They have grievances about the right to trade union membership in the first place, as instanced at GCHQ.

None of those issues will be within the purview of the commissioner as drafted in the Bill. This is a dissident's

[Mr. Meacher]

charter and that is what the Government want. We are opposed to that, and for that reason we propose to push the new clause to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 198, Noes 243.

Division No. 168] **[7.7 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, J.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alastair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, James
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Samuel
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Douglas
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Tom
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, John
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Steinberg, Gerald
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wall, Pat
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A. J.
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Anthony
Wray, James
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Cook and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Allison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bigge-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dickens, Geoffroy
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Favell, Tony
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Rydale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heyhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*

Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas (Gr'th'm)
Holt, Richard
Herdern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David (G'dford)
Howell, Ralph (North Norfolk)
Hughes, Robert G. (Harrow W)
Hunt, John (Ravensbourne)
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Timothy
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym (Cardiff N)
Jones, Robert B (Herts W)
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger (B'ham N'thfield)
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg (Derby North)
Knight, Dame Jill (Edgbaston)
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John (Pendle)
Leigh, Edward (Gainsbor'gh)
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter (Fareham)
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew (E Berkshire)
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. (Newbury)
McNair-Wilson, P. (New Forest)
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Martin, David (Portsmouth S)
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew (Gedling)
Mitchell, David (Hants NW)
Moate, Roger
Morris, M (N'hampton S)
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David (Taunton)
Nicholson, Miss E. (Devon W)
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris (Bath)
Patten, John (Oxford W)
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry (Wirral S)
Porter, David (Wavensey)
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William (Corby)
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David (Dover)
Shaw, Sir Giles (Pudsey)
Shaw, Sir Michael (Scarb')
Shelton, William (Streatham)
Shephard, Mrs G. (Norfolk SW)
Shepherd, Colin (Hereford)
Shepherd, Richard (Aldridge)
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley (Warwick)
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim (Dorset W)
Spicer, Michael (S Worcs)
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan (Eastwood)
Stewart, Andrew (Sherwood)
Stewart, Ian (Hertfordshire N)
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian (Esher)
Taylor, John M (Solihull)
Taylor, Teddy (S'end E)
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. (Calder Valley)
Thompson, Patrick (Norwich N)
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John (Bridlington)
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill (T'side North)
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. (Bexhill)
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Young, Sir George (Acton)

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Kenneth Carlisle and
Mr. Alan Howarth.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 1

RIGHT TO A BALLOT BEFORE INDUSTRIAL ACTION

Mr. Nicholls: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 2, line 4, leave out 'as it' and insert
'imposing requirements on the union as the court'.

The Opposition expressed concern in Committee that, under clause 1, a trade union member might be ordered to perform his contract of employment. Further consideration has suggested that there is a remote possibility that the clause would be interpreted in that way. The amendment will ensure that it cannot be. I hope, therefore, that it will commend itself to the Opposition and the House.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): As the Minister said, the amendment was tabled in response to our complaints in Committee that the original form of clause 1 would allow a court to take any action it considered appropriate to prevent or reverse an act or authorisation by a union in connection with unlawful industrial action, which might have included an order against an individual or a group wholly independent of the union in question. For example, if an independent newspaper or magazine supports an industrial dispute and reproduces an authorisation by a union of that dispute which is subsequently ruled unlawful, action might be taken against the publication. The original form of the clause was so badly drafted and so draconian that even the Government could not defend it. The amendment in no way deals with our central concern about the clause—that it will sanction unjustified and damaging action against a union by a dissident member—but it at least removes the danger to third parties.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 3

RIGHT NOT TO BE UNJUSTIFIABLY DISCIPLINED

Mr. Strang: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 4, line 40, leave out clauses 3 to 5.

We are now coming to the heart of the Bill. As we have made clear throughout our deliberations, the Bill is an outrage. It is an extreme measure designed to weaken and undermine the role of trade unions in our society. This part of the Bill will deny unions the legal right to discipline members who fail to comply with action advocated by the union. That is especially outrageous, and has been the focus of much critical comment from a whole range of organisations, most of which are usually aligned with the Government on political matters.

It was interesting last week to hear leading figures in industry interviewed on the Government's legislation, against a background of industrial disputes, arguing that the Government had tipped the balance too far in the direction of employers. Of course, we have been arguing that ever since the Government introduced their first Bill against the trade unions. It is significant that last week Sir John Harvey-Jones, the recently retired chairman of ICI, said, when interviewed on the BBC, that the Government had tipped the scales too far against the trade unions. He went so far as to suggest that some of the industrial disruption that we are now experiencing was a backlash reaction to such legislation.

[Mr. Strang]

The basis of the Government's justification for the legislation is that—to use the Ministers' phrase—they are giving the trade unions back to their members. Part of the argument is that trade unions are responsible for industrial disputes, and strikes can somehow be solved by preventing trade union leaders, officials or elected officers urging workers to come out on strike. If there was ever a time when that argument can be shown to be utterly fallacious, it is now.

Is it seriously being suggested that the disruption in the National Health Service is a consequence of trade unions urging their members to come out on strike against their will? Far from it. The role of the trade unions in the Health Service is to persuade Health Service workers that no one's life should be put at risk by their action. The role of the trade union officials in the industrial action in the Health Service is that of seeking to minimise the hardship arising from the action, while recognising and supporting the strength of feeling of workers—of nurses and ancilliary workers alike.

Is it seriously suggested that those in the seamen's dispute are taking action because they have been urged to do so by militant trade union officials? The opposite is true. The national and local leaders of the union have been pleading with those workers to resume working, and the fact that some ferries are still not sailing is a measure of the strength of feeling of the union members, despite exhortations from the National Union of Seamen to resume working. In that dispute as well as the Health Service dispute, we have a clear demonstration that the idea that, it is the trade union leaders who are pulling people out on strike and causing disruption against the will of the members,, is nonsense.

7.30 pm

The Ford dispute has been the subject of comment during the debate. Is it seriously suggested that in the strike the trade union leadership and officials are urging the Ford workers to take action against their better judgment? Far from it. In fact, the strike reflects the strength of feeling in the Ford work force against the final amended offer. As I think the Secretary of State himself said in the exchanges earlier this afternoon, in that dispute the trade union negotiators recommended the amended offer to the work force.

Therefore, the idea that somehow we need the legislation because the trade unions are causing disruption is nonsense. As we said repeatedly in Committee, trade union officials spend 90 per cent. of their time avoiding and settling disputes. When there is industrial action, almost invariably it reflects the strength of feeling of the workers. After all, it is the workers, not the trade union officials, nor the owners or managers of the company, who suffer and lose their earnings in an industrial dispute. So I take it that we shall hear no more of the nonsense that somehow it has been necessary to introduce the legislation to give the trade unions back to their members because trade unions are not representative of their members.

The measure is extreme. It is a reflection of how extreme it is that so many organisations came out against it during consultation on the Green Paper. Let me remind the House of some of the comments by those organisations. The Industrial Society, referring to what has loosely and rather inaccurately been called the right to go to work despite a strike call, stated:

> "We are very concerned that if the individual union member has a legal right to circumvent a properly taken majority decision and thus may be held to have no responsibility towards his/her union, there will be no reason why anyone should take the balloting process seriously. The likely consequence is that the value of the beneficial measures already introduced will be lost."

The Institute of Personnel Management states:

> "The Green Paper appears not to accept that a trade union (when properly run) is a body, which, no less than a commercial organisation, disciplines people behind a legitimate purpose. The use of the law to deny such a body any opportunity to discipline members when they infringe rules which go to the heart of the contract between the union and its members, is coming close to denying the body any legal standing. This is a far cry from action to ensure that trade unions are democratically-run."

Finally—there has been frequent reference to this—even the Confederation of British Industry has come out against elements of clauses 3, 4 and 5. It states:

> "The principal argument against the proposal is that it could undermine the balloting process itself, so productively encouraged by the 1984 Trade Union Act insofar as it was seen to provide a form of statutory protection for those refusing to be bound by the results of such a ballot. It is a measure of the importance that employers attach to the proper pursuit of balloting procedures that the CBI believes it would be right, for the time being at least, to take this proposal no further."

The proposal is patently unjust. How far can one seek to undermine the role of the trade unions? How far can one tip the scale against them? When there is a proper ballot on industrial action and an overwhelming majority vote for it, the trade union calls its members out on strike or to take some form of industrial action, such as an overtime ban. If some members of the trade union refuse to comply with that call, it is fundamental that those individuals should be subject to the discipline of the trade union. As the organisations that I quoted have argued, it undermines the democratic process and weakens the principle of balloting to which the Government are so attached to say that, even when there is a ballot, that ballot will not give the trade union the authority to discipline its members for breaching the call for industrial action. Therefore, we submit, as do the Freedom Association and a range of organisations, that the proposal is fundamentally anti-democratic.

It is important to understand that we cannot legislate on how trade unions and their members feel during an industrial dispute. Let us take the Ford dispute as an example. Of course, we all hope that it will be settled soon because of the damaging consequences to our economy if it continues. But is anyone suggesting that in a dispute, when individuals breach an official decision which has been properly reached to call a strike, that that will not cause resentment on the part of the vast majority of workers who are complying with the strike decision? Of course, it will provoke tremendous strength of feeling, and tremendous anger and bitterness can be generated. It is understandable, especially if there is a prolonged strike and trade unionists and families are suffering in the struggle, and see their efforts being undermined by individual trade union members, who will eventually benefit from any settlement that the trade union achieves. Those individuals might help to prolong the strike unnecessarily.

Of course, trade unionists are outraged in such a situation. The benefit of the right of the trade union to discipline its members is that in those circumstances the workers can say to themselves, "At least we know that when the strike is over those individuals who are members of our trade union and have failed to comply with our collective action will be called to book." That has a positive effect. It means that people are less likely to take the law into their own hands. That is one of the reasons why industrial disputes in this country are, in general, conducted on a much more orderly and disciplined basis than in many countries — not only Europe, but, on occasions, the United States. It is because there is that discipline, and because the trade union can, in the main, control its members. It is because, when the decision is taken, the members know that if people undermine the collective decision of the trade union there is a proper, orderly procedure whereby those individuals will eventually be disciplined. The removal of that sanction will, in many cases, encourage individuals, wrongly, to take the law into their own hands. It will create more anarchy, disruption and, dare I say it, possibly more violence on the picket lines when there is a prolonged industrial dispute.

One must also consider the authority of the trade union movement. I quoted the CBI. It goes without saying that the TUC and the trade unions are against the proposals. That is why we seek in the amendment to delete them from the Bill. Hon. Members must ponder this question: why are so many of the employers' organisations against this proposal? I have already given one of the arguments. Another was probably put best by the Engineering Employers Federation, which said:

"It is thus possible that the respect and importance now accorded to the pre-strike ballot will be diminished by this proposal."

That is the point that I made earlier. The federation continues:

"There are also grounds for believing that another consequence could be generally to undermine the authority of officials of unions whose responsibility it is to secure the compliance of their members with the provisions of collective agreements. This would be particularly disadvantageous in certain industries (for example, Engineering Construction) where the authority of full-time union officials may quite commonly need to be exercised in order to prevent unconstitutional action on sites where employees of many different employers, in membership of several different unions, are working closely together."

That makes the point very effectively.

Whatever regret we may have about the current dispute at Ford, I should have thought that hon. Members would want the dispute to be conducted in a disciplined and orderly manner. We want the dispute settled as soon as possible. I should have thought that an orderly dispute ending with a settlement between trade unions and their members would be in the interests of all concerned.

The problem with the Government's proposal for employers—and our opposition to it goes much wider than this—is that the prospect of conducting disputes in an orderly manner, for a range of industries, will be undermined by this extreme and excessive element of the legislation.

There is no question but that, in the main, trade unions and their officials work to avoid disputes. When disputes arise, it is their role to settle them. Inevitably, there is conflict between capital and labour. In those circumstances, there are occasions when it is necessary for workers to act collectively and to withdraw their labour to secure a fair outcome in relation to the profits and wealth that their efforts create for the company.

In a case such as Ford, workers and management have a common interest in the firm succeeding, making a profit, investing, providing employment and making its contribution to the local economy. The role of the trade unions is to ensure that their members receive a fair deal, and to sustain and encourage the development of the industry so that it will continue to maintain employment and raise the living standards of their workers in the future.

This is an extreme and obnoxious measure in an extreme and obnoxious Bill. We debated it at length in Committee — we make no apology for that — and the Government have tabled some amendments, which we shall deal with later. The purpose of the new clause is to put on record our complete opposition to this part of the legislation and to appeal to the Government, at this stage of their deliberations, to think again about this outrageous measure, to recognise how indefensible their position is against the background of the current industrial action and to withdraw their clauses.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Norman Fowler) *rose*——

Mr. Foot: I am sorry if I interrupted the Secretary of State as he was about to withdraw his proposals. If that was his intention, I shall happily give way.

I should like to make one or two points to the Secretary of State, as he is in charge of the Department of Employment. One of the worst aspects of the legislation that the right hon. Gentleman is introducing is the further injury that it causes to the reputation of the Department of Employment in the industrial world.

The Department of Employment used to be withdrawn, to some degree, from some of the other aspects of Government action. In the old days, the Ministry of Labour sought to keep the powers of arbitration and conciliation separate from other Government action. In some respects, it was regarded as a body removed from Government pressure and influence. It did not always take the Government view in these matters. For a considerable period, the Ministry of Labour and the old Department of Employment had power to arbitrate in and deal with industrial disputes.

This part of the Bill is the most offensive of the measures that the Government have taken. The previous measures that they took have gradually reduced any claim that the Department of Employment can approach these matters in an impartial or objective spirit.

7.45 pm

Some parts of the old Department of Employment were rightly taken away and given to ACAS and other institutions; different forms of institutions were established to take over the functions of the Ministry of Labour. As I was responsible for some of these transfers, I think that it was a perfectly proper course to take. It was highly desirable that the Department of Employment retained the ability to intervene in disputes. However, if the Department was to be successful in that it had to be intervention that would be considered as the Government intervening not in their own interests but to achieve industrial peace.

[Mr. Foot]

That reputation has been cast aside by the Government. This measure is the final act. It has shown the violent prejudice in the Department against retaining its old reputation.

It is ironic that this miserable measure has been brought before the House on the day of the Ford strike. It underlines the absurdity of the way in which the Government have gone about these matters. I shall consider later how the Ford strike would be affected if this legislation were in operation. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) has already raised that important matter, which will affect strikes in the future. The consequences of the Government's proposals are very serious.

The Government are faced with an industrial dispute of major proportions. The loss to Ford is reckoned to be about £17 million a day. If the dispute continues, it will be a serious matter not only for Ford and its workers but for our industrial position. It will have consequences for Britain's trade, and all those matters will develop in the next two or three weeks if the dispute continues. The last strike at Ford went on for nine weeks and was an immensely costly affair.

At the beginning of the proceedings, the Secretary of State said that the strike was nothing to do with him. He said that the Department of Employment has no interest in the matter, and that it had nothing to propose to avoid the catastrophe of the strike going ahead.

If the Bill were in operation, it would be even more difficult for the Department to say that it would not intervene. It is a scandal for the Government to talk in such terms to the House. But we have only to remember the way in which Ministers spoke to the House during the coal strike. They claimed that the Department of Employment would not intervene in any of the negotiations, in what was happening on the picket lines or on the allegations of violence. The Prime Minister made the same claim that the Government's new method of dealing with industrial disputes was not to intervene at all, but the truth tumbled out during the general election campaign when she boasted on television about how long and skilfully the Government had fought the miners.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I hesitate to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman, but his remarks are very wide of the amendment.

Mr. Foot: If you will allow me just a moment or two more, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will clinch the matter for all concerned. My point is entirely relevant to the way in which industrial disputes will be still further exacerbated if this measure goes through. I believe that the Bill will lead to the breakdown of industrial discipline, as I shall illustrate directly.

I was comparing what the Minister is proposing here with what he said earlier about the industrial dispute that is currently in all our minds. The Minister claims that the Department has nothing to do with such disputes and would not think of intervening. That is a policy of abdication, but I do not believe that his statement is true. The Minister has undoubtedly discussed the matter in his committees and with the Prime Minister and others in exactly the same way as happened during the miners' strike; all the Government's claims about non-intervention were utterly disproved just a few months later. I believe that their current claims will be disproved later today. It was especially ill advised of the Minister to claim that he had no role to play in the Ford dispute when he intended later the same day to try to carry through the proposals before us.

Let us consider what would be the position at Ford's if the proposal were already in operation. Suppose the union had gone through all the ballots and legal procedures prescribed by the Government and come out on strike. If a few members decided to break the strike and return to work, under the present law the union would have power to seek to persuade those members to back their colleagues and sustain the strike. Under the Government's proposal, although the strike was backed by a ballot, any form of discipline by the union would be undermined. Presumably that is the Government's aim. It would be a travesty of everything that we have ever learnt about how to conduct industrial relations if, when a union has taken every legal precaution to ensure that the action has full backing and has followed all the Government's prescribed balloting procedures, the Government seek to introduce a further measure to incite a few members to render the whole action nugatory. That is a recipe for hopeless anarchy. It is the more disgraceful that such a proposition should come from the Department of Employment, which should have at its fingertips and in its records all the evidence to show how monstrous would be the consequences of such a measure.

The evidence of the Industrial Society has already been quoted from the Opposition Front Bench. No one could claim that that body is arguing the case in some obstreperous way. The TUC disagrees with many of its views. Nevertheless, the Industrial Society has a long record of seeking to achieve a sensible outcome in industrial relations. The society's view of the Government's action is as relevant now as it was when the Green Paper was published. At that time, the Industrial Society said:

> "The most significant proposal, however, in the entire Green Paper, concerns the right for an individual to work after a majority balloted decision to strike."

That brings us back to the current Ford strike. The society continues:

> "Whatever the Government's own motivation, this will undoubtedly be interpreted by trade unions as prejudicing their basic role, which is to negotiate acceptable terms and conditions on behalf of all their members. This does involve, from time to time, sanctions on the employer. We are very concerned that if the individual union member has a legal right to circumvent a properly taken majority decision and thus may be held to have no responsibility towards his/her union, there will be no reason why anyone should take the balloting process seriously. The likely consequence is that the value of the beneficial measures already introduced will be lost."

Some of us disagree about the so-called beneficial aspects of previous legislation, but the Industrial Society supported the Government in some of those measures. The logic of its argument in relation to this measure, however, is overwhelming. If the Government force this proposal through, they will injure the whole balloting process and undermine its authority.

What would happen in a case such as the Ford dispute if the Government's proposals were implemented? The union having balloted strongly for a strike, a tiny minority would be able to say that they have the Government on their side in undermining the whole process. The result will be anarchy from the outset. The Government clearly wish

to undermine all forms of effective trade unionism, but the result will be to create chaos in industrial relations throughout the country. That is not just the view of the Opposition. It is shared by almost all the bodies that have studied the Government's proposals, including the Industrial Society, the Confederation of British Industry and originally even the Conservative Trade Unionists, if such a laughable group still exists. The message from all of them was, "It is madness—for heaven's sake don't do it."

It is especially regrettable and deplorable—they are mild words in the circumstances—that the Department of Employment should throw away its authority in this way. We should be re-establishing the authority of conciliation and arbitration and the idea that there are impartial people to whom one can appeal. Most industrial disputes are a clash not between right and wrong but between two rights or the result of the kind of arguments that have occurred at Ford's, between the bulk of the membership and union leaders whom the Government, through previous legislation, have deprived of the right to negotiate effectively. The Government now seek to carry the process still further.

Any Minister at the Department of Employment who seeks to push a measure of this nature against all the recommendations of every sector of industry does not deserve the power to intervene in any future dispute. The Minister said that he had no interest in intervening in the Ford dispute, but if the action continues and the country loses thousands of millions of pounds there will have to be some intervention.

It is shameful and shocking that, almost for the first time in history, a Minister at the Department of Employment will have thrown away any authority whatever to intervene in such matters, and to try to restore industrial peace. I hope that even at this thirteenth hour the Minister will think again and withdraw these wretched proposals.

8 pm

Mr. Fowler: My hon. Friend the Minister for Employment will wind up the debate, but I wish to respond directly to what the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) said, particularly about the tradition of the Ministry of Labour and the Department of Employment. I do not believe that any law can eliminate disputes, but it is worth pointing out that the last three years have seen fewer strikes than at any stage since the war, and fewer days have been lost through strikes in the past two or three years than at any stage in the past 20 years. Before the right hon. Gentleman talks about traditions, it is worth remembering the record of the past few years.

However distinguished a predecessor of mine the right hon. Gentleman may have been, I am not inclined to take lectures about this from him, particularly given his prominent part in a Government who presided over the worst industrial anarchy we have seen, in 1978. No one is claiming that the industrial relations position has been transformed by trade union law alone, but little would have been achieved without that reform, and the Government have tackled that issue. Over the past few years we have seen the success of that approach and we have seen the basic support for it given by the British people, with the exception of a few Labour Members.

Mr. Cryer: Have not the Government statistics for loss of working days as a result of industrial disputes been slightly changed? For example, in the Silentnight strike in Yorkshire, when the strikers were sacked after a few weeks, they no longer appeared in the statistics for strike action, even though their strike lasted a further 12 months. They would not have appeared in the statistics even if their jobs had been returned.

Mr. Fowler: The hon. Gentleman is clutching at straws. Any objective observer with whom the hon. Gentleman would like to get in touch—for example, the Industrial Society — will tell him that strikes have markedly decreased, not just compared with the past few years but in the period since the war, and days lost have gone down as well. The public will not be much impressed by what the hon. Gentleman has said because they remember the position from which we have recovered, and what the position has been over the past year.

Clause 3 establishes a right for union members not to be unjustifiably disciplined by the union, and specifies the conduct for which discipline is unjustifiable. Clause 4 establishes procedures in which union members may present complaints to tribunals that they have been unjustifiably disciplined and empowers the tribunal to make a declaration where it finds a complaint well founded. Clause 5 sets out procedures under which a union member whose complaint of unjustifiable discipline to an industrial tribunal has been declared well founded may apply for a reward or compensation.

In resisting the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang), who quite fairly said that this was debated at great length in Committee, I make one fundamental point. The proposal was set out fully in the Green Paper published last February. It then became a specific election pledge and was contained in our election manifesto. There was no question of keeping this proposal hidden. We set it out to the public. In paragraph 2.10 of the Green Paper we said clearly:

> "The right of the individual to choose to go to work despite a call to take industrial action is an essential freedom."

In 2.13, we said:

> "Unions have not been slow to enforce their powers over dissenting minorities."

We went on to give examples of that. We have been clear and explicit on our intentions. We set them out clearly in our election manifesto to the British public and Labour Members know the result of that election.

Mr. Allen: Is the Minister telling us that he has been clear and open about this matter? I cannot remember the exact words of the manifesto, but as I recall it referred only to strikes. It did not refer to industrial action. The scope of clause 3 is virtually unlimited. The Secretary of State may be able to massage unemployment figures, but he should not massage his party's manifesto.

Mr. Fowler: I agree that clause 3 does not apply only to industrial action. However, in essence it applies to industrial action, and the manifesto explicitly said:

> "We will introduce legislation to . . . protect individual members from disciplinary action if they refuse to join a strike they disagree with".

As I understood the first two speeches made about the amendment, precisely that point is being opposed. I make no complaint about that, but we should not confuse ourselves by saying that that is not the essence of the debate.

[Mr. Fowler]

Although unions are in general protected against the legal consequences of inducing employees to break their contracts to the employer, the individual trade union member has no such protection. The union member then has a number of obligations. He has an obligation to his trade union—no one disputes that—but he also has an obligation to his employer under his contract of employment and wider obligations to the community and, more particularly, to his family. These separate duties and obligations can pull an individual in different directions. Our view is that he should not be influenced in coming to a decision by fear of disciplinary action taken against him by the trade union.

We are not talking just about the beginning of a strike. An individual trade union member may have gone along with a majority decision and gone out on strike. Suppose that the strike goes on for two or three weeks, or even longer, and the employer makes a new offer. The union executive, for reasons of its own, may decide to continue the dispute. The individual member, and perhaps some others, may decide that the offer is fair and reasonable. The Opposition are suggesting that in those circumstances those union members who vote with their feet and go back to work should be subject to the discipline of the trade union. In Committee, we rejected that proposition.

One reason for that rejection has been the willingness of unions to take disciplinary action. We are not talking about a theoretical danger. The Green Paper listed a number of examples of large-scale disciplinary action by unions — for example, the National Union of Railwaymen disciplined some 12,000 members, and the National Communications Union is reported to have expelled 1,000 members and to be considering disciplinary action against others. There was also disciplinary action after the miners' strike. There are long and well-documented cases of disciplinary action being taken.

To take up the complaint of the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), it is true that this clause is designed to protect those who seek to expose wrong doing by their unions. Once again, I can easily cite cases. In May 1984, four members of SOGAT wrote to their union's general secretary-elect alleging serious financial and administrative irregularities at their local branch. They were told to make their complaints through the usual channels. Their correspondence was forwarded to their branch secretary, despite the fact that he was the subject of their allegations. An investigation was held at branch level, which resulted in two of those members being immediately demoted and, subsequently, all four were dismissed.

Despite an appeal and considerable local support, including a petition with more than 2,000 signatures, the national executive committee confirmed the dismissals. At least one of the members involved had been a trade unionist for 30 years. The clause does, indeed, go beyond strike action and is intended to meet the case that I have just cited.

Throughout the Committee stage Opposition Members consistently said that a member who found himself in such circumstances should leave the union—[Hon. Members: "No."] Well, certainly that was one of the arguments deployed in Committee. It is a surprising argument that union members who find themselves just once in disagreement with their unions should voluntarily withdraw. Even if unions could withstand such a voluntary outflow, it would not justify forcibly expelling members who disagreed with them. That would leave the union movement manned either by yes men or by those too scared to stand up for their views.

We would all agree that the small minority of members who consistently find themselves opposed to the majority view have no long-term future in their unions. However, it is strange to argue that a union should make an issue of every disagreement, even when an individual member has a long history of loyal and active service to the union. Nevertheless, that has been the thrust of the cases that I have cited.

Mr. Allen: The right hon. Gentleman said that in Committee the Opposition said that union members had the option to leave their unions, and that they should do that. To my knowledge, no one said that—other than Conservative Members who tried to claim that we had said it, which we consistently denied. Will the Minister now correct himself?

8.15 pm

Mr. Fowler: I shall not correct myself, but rather I shall ask my hon. Friend the Minister to quote the relevant lines from *Hansard* when he replies to the debate. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will then realise that his hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who led the Opposition in Committee, adduced precisely that argument.

It cannot be right for participation in industrial action to be an obligation enforceable by a union. Some unions resolve not to strike, and many do not strike. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East mentioned international comparisons, but in many—probably most—countries, unions operate quite effectively without forcing their members to strike.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): This is an important point. Do the Government think that unions should be coherent and disciplined bodies? Let us consider the current dispute of the National Union of Seamen. Mr. McCluskie has given certain undertakings to the court. The judge said something like, "You must ensure that those undertakings are carried out, because if you do not, when you come back to court on Tuesday, watch out". The judge was telling Mr. McCluskie to exercise discipline in his union. He told him to get his men back to work, or the whole might of the judiciary would fall upon him and the union's funds would be sequestrated. The judge was effectively saying, "There must be discipline in your union or else."

What do the Government want? Do they want the unions to be coherent and disciplined, or are they saying, "It doesn't matter—whatever the vote, do what you like"? The union official may say one thing, but the members can do something else. Do the Government want coherence and discipline or do they want laissez-faire?

Mr. Fowler: The hon. Gentleman knows the answer to that question. I will not discuss the detail of the NUS case because it is still before the court—*[Interruption.]* Now hang on, just hang on. The case is before the court, because, for example, one point at issue is that there was no secret ballot. When the hon. Gentleman talks about discipline, he should also deal with the problem of unions

not seeking to meet the conditions laid down in law. For him to talk about discipline in that light is somewhat fanciful.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that unions are coherent and important organisations. Indeed, throughout our long debates we have maintained that to compare trade unions with social or golf clubs is nonsensical. Trade unions are powerful institutions which have a powerful impact and effect on the working lives of their members. That is why the clause is justified. In the end, it comes down to a fundamental issue of belief. As our manifesto made clear, we place the highest priority on the freedom of the individual to decide for himself.

Opposition Members have said more than once that a ballot before industrial action resolves the conflict of loyalities and obligations that individuals may face. The Government reject the proposition that when the majority put their pay claim above the survival of a firm, the interests of patients or the welfare of families, the individual member is obliged to do the same. Trade union members are free adults and we intend that they be treated as such.

The Bill fulfils our promises and extends the freedom of the individual. That is why we reject the proposition of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East.

Mr. Winnick: My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) opened his remarks by saying that he thought that the Secretary of State was going to withdraw this part of the Bill. My right hon. Friend has a far more optimistic view of human nature than I have. The Secretary of State may not believe in this measure, but he knows that he is a member of a Cabinet dominated by someone who is a malicious opponent of trade unionism. If we wanted any evidence of that, we have only to consider the case of GCHQ to see how the Government took away the democratic rights of people working there to belong to a trade union. That illustrates only too well what the Government would like to see elsewhere, but, fortunately, they have not had the courage to put forward such proposals.

This part of the Bill is very offensive. It is intended to do away with the right of a trade union to take any kind of disciplinary action when an industrial dispute has occurred and where a ballot has decided that such a dispute should take place. To justify this, the Secretary of State gave us an example in which a dispute had been going on for a few weeks, or a couple of months, and the executive had decided to keep that dispute going. The workers, the trade union members, decided to go back and vote with their feet. However, the Secretary of State's example did not deal with the case which my hon. Friends have developed and with which I want to deal, where there is no dispute to start with, a ballot takes place, there is a clear majority in favour of industrial action and a dispute then begins. Is the Secretary of State telling the House that, in that situation, the union has no responsibility and no role to play in taking action against those who decide to work, regardless of the ballot?

That is why Opposition Members consider this measure to be so offensive. It is difficult to imagine any professional organisation, whether of lawyers or solicitors, not having some kind of disciplinary code. Every professional organisation has some kind of code to protect itself and its membership. Why should trade unions be denied this basic right?

We can only conclude that the Government have a malicious intent against trade unions. They say that they do not like strikes, but industrial disputes occur. One of the differences between a dictatorship and a free society is that in the latter working people can take strike action. As we know, people do not take strike action lightly. They do so after they have concluded that there is no other way of settling matters. As a democrat and someone who believes in the right of working people to take such action, I believe that it is far better that working people can do this in a free society rather than have to live under a dictatorship, whether Communist or not.

I am a national officer of my trade union. At a recent meeting of my executive we had to decide what action should be taken against a few members who decided to go into work when, after a ballot, there had been a majority vote for industrial action. My union does not need any lectures from the Government about ballots. We have taken the view that members should be balloted before industrial action takes place. This is how the union decided to proceed democratically at its annual policy-making conference long before I became involved. The executive council did not initiate the action against those who happened to work during that industrial dispute. It arose because those taking industrial action, and as a result won their case, felt very bitterly towards the few individuals who worked. They wrote to the official, who wrote to the executive council, requesting that action be taken.

The Secretary of State said today that the executive of my union should have no role to play in such cases. I find that very difficult to understand or to justify. I also take the view that, if this measure remains in the Bill, it will undoubtedly cause immense bitterness in the work force.

I can visualise a situation in which an industrial dispute has taken place and ended. When the large majority of people who have not worked during the dispute return, they will feel very bitter towards those who have worked. They will feel even more bitter if, as a result of strike action, they have won the point, whether it concerns conditions or pay.

Whether we are discussing the Ford dispute, or any other dispute in the future, no legislation can take away the feeling of bitterness and hostility that undoubtedly arises when a strike has ended and the people concerned decide that some action should be taken against those who blacklegged during the strike. Therefore, it is perfectly understandable that there should be such a feeling of opposition and hostility to these proposals.

Despite the Secretary of State's comments about the rights of working people, when the Governments took office nine years ago they decided that they would do what they could, by legislation, to undermine the rights of trade unions. As in the case of GCHQ, they took away the right of people to belong to a trade union — something unheard of in a democracy. Although the Government would like to take such action in the public services, for example, they have decided not to do so, at least for the moment. They have undoubtedly undermined and eroded the rights of the trade unions. Whatever success the Government may have as a result of their majority in the House, when a different Administration come into office, all these offensive powers and obnoxious actions that have been taken against trade unions will be removed.

When I was away from the House during the 1970s, I well remember being told that the changes brought in at that time by the Government led by the right hon. Member

[Mr. Winnick]

for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) would be permanent features on the statute book. We were told that no future Government would ever change that. Yet what happened? When my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent became Secretary of State for Employment, it all changed. I assure the Secretary of State that, however much Conservative Members may state that Conservative legislation will remain a permanent feature on the statute book, it will change.

Whenever action has been taken against trade unions, not only in the 1970s, but many years before the beginning of this century, the trade unions have won the point. They will do so again. The right of working people to belong to trade unions and of those unions to regulate their affairs without undue state interference will remain. People will not be denied the right to take action against those who have defied the majority in a ballot. If the Bill is enacted, that right will be taken away. I look forward to the day when there will be a different Government and different legislation will be proposed.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): These clauses have been drafted by interferers who know little about trade unions and care little about democracy. They have been drafted by people who wish to interfere in the running of trade unions, when it makes sense to anyone who knows anything about unions that the rules governing members of trade unions should be left to the union members.

Why should trade unions have such laws imposed upon them by the Tory Government? Do the Goverment have any proposals to bring in laws to control the professions? In which professions is the right to expel controlled by laws such as are proposed in the Bill? Is that right controlled in the medical profession, the legal profession or in the City? The Government's answer to controlling fraud in the City has not been the type of control and restriction that will be imposed by the Bill. Did they bring in a Bill to introduce rules and regulations to control the stock exchange? No, they did not. They produced the Criminal Justice Bill to prosecute those who carry out illegal practices, not to prevent them.

8.30 pm

The Government say that unions are too powerful. What about the stock exchange? It has enormous powers, but it is not controlled in such a way. We do not need to ask why it is not to be controlled. What about political parties' powers? The Tory party is not prevented by law from expelling people. Its members are not controlled by such laws. Yet the Tory party has enormous powers. Its members are allowed to decide what to do with regard to internal discipline. How can anyone run an organisation without its members having the democratic right to decide rules governing membership?

The clauses will not give the Government what they want. If members do not have to face up to the problems and the sacrifices that they will have to make if they vote for a strike, are they not more likely to vote to strike or even to abstain? Whichever way they vote, they will not have to take responsibility for their actions. They can vote to strike and then go to work. How does that make any sense to anyone? What use is that to an employer? It can be an embarrassment to the employer if a few members return to work after a ballot for a strike.

Recent strikes have destroyed the myth that trade union officers cause strikes. It is the members who decide to strike when they do not like what is on offer. If a union cannot control discipline, its members will take the law into their own hands.

Does the Minister not recognise the bitterness that is felt by union members who democratically strike and, after weeks of sacrifice, go back to work and see other union members who have not gone on strike but who have picked up money and enjoyed improved conditions? Where is the democracy and fairness in that?

If members are told that the results of ballots do not count, those who do not want to return to work will use that argument, and a return to work will be jeopardised. Union members should be disciplined by the rules and procedures of their unions. Such rules and regulations should be democratically decided within a union. Union members should not be disciplined by unjust and unnecessary laws. The Government should accept that fact and withdraw the clauses.

Mr. Allen: The amendment has a far wider significance than its effect merely on the Employment Bill. Without overstating the case one iota, we are seeing a fundamental attack upon democracy. A central tenet of our democracy has always been that, whatever one's own view, if a majority freely accept a certain course of action, we should all follow such a course. In all parties throughout all societies, that has been a fundamental rule of democracy. *[Interruption.]* As Conservative Members say from a sedentary position, it may not apply to the Conservative party or particularly to the Cabinet, but, none the less, the matter overrides even the petty party politics of the Conservative party.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): The hon. Gentleman's argument seems strange. He is in support of a majority view, irrespective of whether one agrees with it. Hon. Members from Ulster have been pleading with the House to do that for a long time, yet the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have always voted against it. That is sheer hypocrisy.

Mr. Allen: I am grateful for that intervention. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will make his own contribution a little later.

The clause represents the lowest water-mark of democracy in the eight years of the Government. Short of the abolition of elections, I fail to see how much further they could possibly sink.

The Secretary of State referred to two key ways in which the amendment can be justified. His first point was that it appeared in the Conservative party's manifesto. I corrected him at the time, and I correct him again. The proposal which was referred to in the Conservative party manifesto applied only to situations in which strikes take place. It did not refer to the wide-ranging extension to industrial action as a whole which, on occasions, can amount to trivial matters rather than major industrial disputes and strikes to which the Conservative party manifesto alluded. I hope that the Secretary of State will forgive me for correcting him about the contents of his party's manifesto, which I would have thought that he would know better than I do.

The second major plank of the Secretary of State's approach related to consultations. I am glad that the Secretary of State raised the matter. He will have a hard

job to find more than a handful of organisations, secret societies or individuals who have come out above the parapet to support the clauses. On the contrary, if we weigh the evidence, we shall find masses of organisations — some peculiar, some hardly about to bring in the Socialist millenium — such as the Freedom Association and other organisations that have consistently supported our view about various clauses in the Bill, and clause 3 in particular.

This has quite rightly been dubbed the scabs' charter because of its basic anti-democratic nature and the way in which it has been put forward in Committee and the House. I am sure you will correct me if I stray from the topic, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the names of those Conservative Members who voted for the clause, without even listening to the debate and without even being present for much of the debate, will live on the record for a long time. They have voted away a fundamental tenet of our social democracy — with a small "S" and a small "D", I hasten to add — and our trade union democracy. The people will bear a heavy burden.

Another aspect that surprised me, particularly as a new hon. Member, was the Government's reluctance even to entertain the arguments. As someone who had watched the proceedings of the House from outside, I assumed that, in Committee, the Government would not, of course, accept major fundamental changes to their Bill but would listen to arguments and would change aspects of the Bill in regard to which serious problems were pointed out by the Opposition. Not in the least. Above all, the clause demonstrates the way in which the steamroller pushed the Bill through Committee. It is a poor day for us. The attack on the fundamental principle of democracy was well summed up by the TUC in its guide to the Employment Bill. It states:

"When people are part of a voluntary association like unions there must be an obligation on them to accept and act on majority decisions."

Clause 3 institutes the contracting-out of democracy. That is novel and not to be welcomed.

Above all, we shall see that the clause, as well as being philosophically anti-democratic, produces many significant local effects. We shall see a breakdown in local industrial relations of the sort that gave rise to Donovan and others back in the 1960s. An employer can pay a strike-breaker and that strike-breaker cannot be disciplined, whatever action he may take against his colleagues at work. That is an absolute incitement to certain of the new brave wave of entrepreneurs created by the Government to break the law as well as breaking a few skulls along the way.

Another thing that emerged in Committee was that the Government are not in touch. They lack connection with the way in which the shop floor really works. A number of my hon. Friends attempted to bring Conservative Members back into touch with industrial relations as they are really practised. I shall quote again from industrial officers of the major trade unions. In Committee, I quoted from Mr. Keith Moore, an officer of GMB. He is by no means a revolutionary. He wants to get his work done. He goes to work every day and spends most of his time settling disputes. He does not really live up to the mythical picture that the Government paint of a man who spends 90 per cent. of his time creating disputes and discord. He said:

"Basically, I believe that this Bill will be a charter for anarchy as far as industrial relations are concerned and many employers must indeed be wringing their hands in despair at what is being proposed. In the main, there has been discipline within the trade union ranks in industry. This Bill will destroy such discipline. It's ridiculous and defies democracy that, where there's been a ballot for industrial action and the majority of those participating have voted in favour then to give the people in the minority the legal right to protection is ludicrous and does nothing for industrial relations."

That is the voice of someone who deals with industrial relations every single day of his working life. However, the Government would not listen to that or to other arguments advanced by Opposition Members.

The Bill goes even further than that. We have heard about the sanctity of the contract with an employer. What about the contract with the trade union, which has been freely entered into? The Bill overrides that contract. As well as re-writing the rule books of trade unions, the Bill overrides the contract of association that trade unions have with their members. It is overridden not just by another contract but by something of a lesser status — an agreement. As we discovered when we pressed the Government on this in Committee, an agreement need not even be what we term a binding agreement. It may be something that two people reach over a drink in the pub. That shows how serious the change is.

The Government have allegedly fought hard to introduce secret ballots where they did not exist before. However, unfortunately it seems that the clause throws away the idea of secret ballots on the ground of political expediency. The Government are not only moving the goal posts; they are starting to play a different game.

8.45 pm

The Secretary of State referred to all the cases of people who have been disciplined. In Committee, we tried hard to get the cases listed. We left it for a week and came back after the weekend and asked, "Where are the cases?" At least the Minister has come up with a case tonight and I would celebrate that with my hon. Friends. We have got the case, lads. We have done it. It has taken us three months, but we should be very grateful that the Secretary of State has come up with one case. All the thousands of cases, of which we have been able to find only one, are intended to replace and undermine the current disciplinary procedures of trade unions. It is important to place on record what those disciplinary procedures are.

In modern trade unionism, discipline and expulsion are governed by the rule book. They do not drop out of thin air or arise from an Act suddenly appearing on the statute book. They are worked at, honed and polished within the trade union's rules. Year by year in annual conferences, and month by month at meetings of union executives, those rules are polished to meet the members' needs. If Conservative Members feel that that is not enough, there is always recourse to natural justice and law. The rules always state the penalties to be applied, although under the Bill the right to appeal has been changed so that members will have only six months to submit their appeal in certain cases. Trade union members have recourse through their own organisations. As many of my hon. Friends and I said in Committee, we do not need lectures on democracy from a Government whose predecessors denied the vote to working people for 100 years. We are only now celebrating the 70th anniversary of women over 30 having the vote. The Government are not in a strong position to start lecturing the labour movement on who should have the vote, when and how.

There are clear motives behind the Bill, which has little to do with improving industrial relations. One obvious

[Mr. Allen]

motive is to try to confuse and muddy the legal processes so that all members of trade unions feel insecure. They will always feel that a legal threat may be brought down upon their heads. The Government have fundamentally misunderstood the situation if they believe that such a threat will fatally undermine the trade union movement. Conservative Members do not understand how trade unions work. Conservative Members' view is based on individual rights—many of which they freely enjoy—as opposed to collective rights, which are the fundamental pillars of supporting trade unionism.

The Bill is not about the average trade unionist. It is not about the person who needs to organise to protect himself at work, to improve his conditions and wages and to make a better life for himself and his family. Clauses 3, 4 and 5 are about one thing alone. They are intended to assist that small minority of trade unionists—0·1 per cent. or 0·01 per cent. — who wish to take action — often vexatious action — against their trade union. It is not about the 99·9 per cent. of trade unionists who work within their trade union and develop it. It is merely for those who would thwart the democratic wish of their colleagues and organise a return to work which would otherwise be unlikely. The Bill substitutes the rule of the very small minority for the genuinely agreed democratic decision reached after a secret ballot.

In Committee, we had a long argument about the contract between employer and employee and the contract between a trade union member and his trade union. That argument needs to be aired again. When there is a conflict between the contracts, it can be resolved under the trade union's own rules, through the process of a ballot. The reconciliation that takes place at a ballot means that there is legitimacy in sinking the differences that existed prior to the ballot. Everyone then becomes united behind that ballot. I hope that my hon. Friends will take that argument up tonight.

Another case mentioned in Committee related to the National Union of Railwaymen. I know that some of my hon. Friends want to refer to it later. All that I would say is that it raised a great problem involving, according to the Green Paper, 120,000 railwaymen. As I understand it, a magnification of 10 times occurred in that Green Paper. It was, of course, a minor error that put just another 100,000 railwaymen into the equation. However, we should not let the facts get in the way of a good story and it certainly did not inhibit Conservative Members in Committee.

Another aspect that needs to be touched on is the question of intimidation. We are told of many people who have been intimidated to return to work and to do this, that and the other by the trade unions. However, the real intimidation and the coercion in our society is practised not by the unions on their members, but by capital on individual trade unionists and their families, and on individual trade unions. People are put into a position such that they cannot exercise the rights that they have at present because of fear that they and their families will suffer. As an active trade unionist such a person may be sacked and have next to no chance of getting his job back and being reinstated. Time and time again in Committee, the Government were pressed to include provisions in the Bill that would bring into force some sort of justice for reinstatement at industrial tribunals. Of course, that was quickly passed over.

The other myth that was blown around in Committee was the sacrosanct nature of the ballot—the jewel in the trade union reform crown that has been put forward by this Conservative Government. Although we need no lectures from Conservative Members, the Conservative party would do well to look to itself before starting to tell other people how to conduct their affairs in view of the lack of democracy in that party.

The great problem about ballots for the Government is that ballots were the be-all and end-all which would allegedly give the trade unions back to their members. However, with the ballots the trade unions and trade unionists have defeated the Government. I give just one example of the political fund ballots. Forty trade unions held compulsory national ballots and 40 separate national ballots each recorded a victory for the trade union concerned and its members in retaining the political funds. Indeed, another seven or eight trade unions have now established political funds.

It may well be that the Government's reason for undermining that concept of democracy is because it simply has not delivered for the Government. In their ruthless way, if something has not delivered they chuck it out and try something else. If the Government cannot get a majority they say, "Let us break it down even further and wheedle away at the trade unions through individuals." They do so through a few dissident members and through a few people funded by the likes of David Hart and the Freedom Association. That is another way in which the Government attack the trade union movement.

The more law, routine and regulation that exists, the more we get what my hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) referred to as "the Gulliver syndrome". Every little rope may not be as much in itself but it is "salami tactics" under another name. However, it may well tie down the sleeping giant. In my view, the rope that they have tied on this occasion has been tied round a vital organ of Gulliver and the tears will come to the eyes of the trade union movement, but that does not mean that the sleeping giant cannot rise.

Mr. Cryer: Will my hon. Friend comment briefly on the fact that the Government always seem to be opposed to more legislation when it comes to, say, small businesses, but are prepared to heap it on the trade unions? That is a curious set of double standards.

Mr. Allen: I would need at least another 20 years in this place before I could find the oratorical brilliance even to answer my hon. Friend's clear question, but perhaps the Secretary of State will pick up that point with his usual aplomb.

Another aspect that needs to be brought out is the support that there has been for this "abolition of democracy" clause within the trade union movement. Some peculiar people with whom, perhaps, I would not have associated the word "democracy" have attempted to pressure the Government to see sense on this issue and to get them to ditch their dogma in favour of something more workable. I said earlier that I would quote another trade union officer and I should add that I do not include Fred Childs who works for the GMB in Hull in that description

of "peculiar". He is a man who could hardly be described as a militant Socialist. He earns his daily bread at the coal face of industrial relations. He wrote to me, stating:

"Individual strike breakers given the right of protection if they disobey a democratic decision of the members after a secret ballot makes a complete mockery of the need to hold such a ballot."

He underlined the word "need", and continued:

"It will lead to even worse industrial relations on the shop floor and I can see an increase in unofficial industrial action taking place."

Those are similar terms to the words I quoted earlier from one of his colleagues. From their independent and different geographical standpoints, both can see the effect of the legislation. Those men are mainstream, sensible practitioners of industrial relations.

However, some weird people support the case against the clause, notably David Shiels, the vice-chairman of the Conservative Trade Unionists. I do not know how many votes he received; he might have won by a considerable margin. It was probably three votes to one or something like that. However, the best of luck to him because he had a nice job as vice-chairman of the CTU. He has said that if the Government made trade unions alone among voluntary bodies incapable of disciplining their members, they would look "decidedly silly". It may be too late to prevent the Government looking silly on this issue. However, I hope that even they will listen to their cohorts in the Conservative Trade Unionists, if they will not listen to anyone else.

Another surprising ally in this came in Mr. Murdoch's latest edition of *The Sunday Times*, which made its position clear in an editorial. I shall wash my mouth out with soap and water after quoting from it. It stated:

"We are also unimpressed with the government's case for legislation to prohibit trade unions from taking disciplinary action against members who refuse to abide by the majority decision in a secret ballot. Minority groups of union members must never be denied the right to cross the picket lines in defiance of a majority strike decision; that is their choice, and they should be free to do so. But they must be prepared to take the consequences so far as their union membership is concerned, either by being fined or expelled. We cannot have democracy 'up to a point' in the workplace. Mr. Norman Fowler's new employment bill will insist on secret ballots, which is right. It must also respect the right of unions to act in defence of those ballots. To argue otherwise is perverse and self-defeating."

That is the successor to *Labour Weekly*, *The Sunday Times*.

9 pm

I will finish my list of quotations with another great socialist radical of the generation, Peregrine Worsthorne. He said that the Government will be wrong-footed

"if it presses on with the clause in its new Employment Bill which stops unions expelling members who blackleg even if after a ballot has found in favour of a strike. In the old days trade unions had too much power over their members, and were free to act like tyrants. But if the Government's new bill goes through, they will have been emasculated. Of course, it was right to liberate trade union members from the obligation to strike when no ballot had been called. But to liberate them from that obligation even when a ballot has been called is plainly wrong and will be seen to be wrong by all but bigots."

That was Peregrine Worsthorne. I would hardly choose him as one of the most ardent supporters of Opposition Members or necessarily of the concept of democracy.

My final point relates to the way in which the clause would affect not merely those who were previous targets such as senior trade unionists, general secretaries and national officers. It could unwittingly affect ordinary members of trade unions. I refer in particular to clause 3 in which no discipline is allowed for those who are involved in mischievous actions.

A member can actually put forward that another member was "proposing to contravene" the rules of the union — not "contravening" the rules, but simply proposing to do so. That charge could be made against an officer of the union, or against an ordinary member of that trade union. In other words, the clause will apply to the volunteer, the person on whom the trade union movement was built. The trades union movement is not Ron Todd, John Edmonds or Rodney Bickerstaffe; it is the individual members, the people who have of their own volition put time aside without pay to make the union work, to defend their colleagues at work and to develop a sense of solidarity and to confront the management which often has the power to reduce the earning ability of those individuals and make life hard for them. Those volunteers will suffer, not the trade union officers or the full-time trade union officials. I would not wish such sanctions to apply to trade union officers and full-time officials. None the less, if they have to be applied, it is better than they should be applied to them rather than purely to the volunteers.

The provisions will be able to apply to individual trade union members and volunteers whose connection with the trade unions may be tenuous. It may be that Charlie joins the trade union and after a couple of weeks, because he seems to be keen, he is pushed forward and made a representative because nobody else wants the job. He is a young lad who wants to get on in the trade union, so they put him up in the firing line. He knows nothing about the way it may work or about the consequences of possible action taken against him. Such people may be shop stewards, branch secretaries or branch officers, they may only make up the numbers on a local committee, but they will be hit by the full force of clause 3(3)(c) as if they were general secretaries wth 40 years' experience in the movement. That is not the way we should go about things.

The crime can often be no more than "proposing to contravene the rules"—not actually contravening them. I would be very surprised if all hon. Members here tonight have not proposed contravening a number of issues in the Tea Room or the Corridor. People could be chatting over a cup of tea in the works canteen, and say that they would like to do something to someone. As I said in Committee, that would certainly apply to those Conservative Members who say that they would like to get their hands around the neck of the Prime Minister. That is where it should rest.

Mr. Clelland: Round the Prime Minister's neck?

Mr. Allen: Yes, most appropriately.

Finally——

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Do hon. Gentlemen want to intervene?

Mr. Allen: I ask my hon. Friend not to encourage hon. Members to intervene. For three months in Committee they had great difficulty in standing up and I should hate a maiden speech to be made on the Floor of the House. If Conservative Members wish to intervene, I should be more than happy to give way. In Committee the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) was present for only one speech, but it lasted longer than the sum total of Back Bench speeches from Conservative Members.

[Mr. Allen]

The Law Society has made its view on this clause clear. It stated:

"we are concerned that serious problems of evidence may arise on either or both sides in any dispute. We particularly have this in mind in clause 3(3)(c)."

It is appropriate for the Law Society to point that out to Conservative Members.

Of all the clauses this one has the most fundamental effect on our democracy. It robs democracy of the idea that a decision by the majority after a proper series of discussions and a secret ballot should be adhered to. This is a charter for those who wish to break the trade union movement, for those who lose in ballots and employers who will not abide by democratically agreed decisions. I hope that the House will vote against it tonight and that throughout the country it will be exposed for its fundamental attack on our democracy.

Mr. Heffer: These three clauses are nothing but the essence of a scabs' charter. Those of us who have spent our lives in the trade union movement know that workers do not go on strike at the drop of a hat, but think long and hard about it. They have lengthy debates and discussions, and even when they go on strike they are unhappy because they lose money, find tensions developing in their families and experience all sorts of pressures.

The Government's idea that workers are always willing to walk out at any moment so legislation is needed to prevent that is wrong. That was the basis of their argument for legislation. They said, "We must stop the growth of unofficial disputes. Before a strike there must be a secret ballot in which all workers vote. Then we shall find that the mass of workers will not want to go on strike."

Mr. Skinner: Has my hon. Friend ever considered during our debates on industrial relations and employment matters the double standard on secret ballots? At the end of this debate we shall vote in what I call the Longbridge fashion. One lot will go into one side and the other into the other — the Aye side and the No side. Instead of having shop stewards on the doorways, we have Government Whips and Opposition Whips. There is no secret ballot for Members of Parliament in this House or the other place. We have strong-arm men and a few women twisting our arms. Hon. Members ask, "Where shall we vote?" and the Whips say, "Vote in that Lobby." Imagine if some Tory Member decided to baulk the Whips tonight and the House applied clauses 3 to 5 to them, all hell would be let loose.

Mr. Heffer: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I do not think that anybody could put it better or more succinctly.

The reason why the Government do not want a Longbridge vote for the ordinary worker on the shop floor is that they have the nonsensical idea that if only workers had a secret ballot, the majority of them would never vote for strike action. Of course, they have been proved wrong, not once, but on a number of occasions. At the present time they have been proved wrong by the vote at Ford. The workers had a secret ballot and decided, by an overwhelming majority, that they were prepared to go on strike. There have also been secret ballots by other sections of workers that have proved the Government wrong. As a result, the Government have been forced to say, "It is not working. It is going to our disadvantage because, by majority, the workers have said that they are going to make a stand. Therefore, we will change the rules again." When the Government get into difficulty about any issue they constantly move the goalposts and change the rules. Now the Government believe that they must defend the rights of those who do not want to go on strike or who are prepared to break a picket line.

The Government have said that if a union takes action under its rules to discipline members who have failed to take strike action, perhaps by imposing a mild fine, those members should be compensated. Listening to some Conservative Members one would imagine that such strike-breaking members are hung, drawn and quartered. Unions do nothing of the kind and, in my opinion, they are sometimes too gentle with people who break the rules. Conservative Members have double standards.

The working people's fight for better conditions, better wages, reduction in hours, decent holidays and so on has been hard and bitter. All the workers' achievements have been got by that struggle. I worked in the shipyards and on construction sites and I never met one employer who came along and said, "Don't worry. Don't do anything and don't have a mass meeting. Don't think in terms of strike action because next week, lads, as we have made so much profit, we are going to give you another shilling an hour, reduce your working hours, give you longer holidays and more days off with more pay." Workers have had to say to their employers, "If you do not do something to improve our conditions we will use the only right we have and refuse to work for you until you do." That is a fundamental right of working people and, step by step, the Government are taking that right away.

The Government would like to outlaw strikes altogether. They cannot do that at the moment — no doubt one day they will. In the meantime, the Government are seeking to make it as difficult as possible for the trade unions. The Government are faced with the situation where workers have, by an overwhelming majority, taken a decision for strike action. That is not in line with what the Government want, so they are now seeking to bring in legislation that will protect those who are prepared to go to work and to cross the picket lines. It is not just a question of police on the gates, because the Government are now seeking to take further action, even though there has been a secret ballot, to protect those people who scab. If the union takes action against them, there will be compensation for those workers. That is the scabs' charter. The Government are trying to defend people who would undermine the basis of the trade union movement.

9.15 pm

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend has been a little too fair to the Government. This legislation will allow scabs to operate. It is about the fourth or fifth step that the Government have taken, but the serious step that they want to take has been outlined in the Carlton club document, which states, in relation to the National Health Service, that the Government want to get rid of all trade unions. They want to have a gigantic Royal College of Nursing across the entire trade union movement. They could have 22 Trevor Clays running each trade union. They want no strikes, and the Bill is just another step along that road.

Mr. Heffer: My hon. Friend is right. From the day they came to office, in employment legislation — that is a misnomer for a start — the Government have taken steps

to make the position of workers far worse even than that caused by the Industrial Relations Act 1971, which was introduced by the Administration of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). It was positively mild compared with what this Government have done.

There are not many Conservative Members present in the Chamber, but I pose this question to them: are they willing to accept the ending of democratic practices in the trade union movement? It is only one step away from ending all democratic practices in the country. The Government start by attacking the trade unions, but they will move into other sections of the community and eventually they will say, "We had better not have elections, secret or otherwise, because they are dangerous and they might put in a Government we do not want." I ask Conservative Members who have been or are members of trade unions——

Mr. Leighton: How many are there?

Mr. Heffer: There are one or two. Do they agree with this further attack on the democratic rights of trade unionists and ordinary people?

This is a mockery of what the Government argued. How can they say that it is essential to have a secret ballot and, when the secret ballot goes against them, defend those who want to break the decision of the majority? They are being two-faced. The workers' struggle has been a sort of warfare for better conditions. Sometimes the country has to fight wars, and members of the armed forces who scab in time of war or who run away are disciplined. They must be. One cannot turn and flee in the face of the enemy. But Conservative Members are saying that trade unionists who are engaged in warfare for better conditions, or to defend their conditions, may defect from the ranks—and that is all right with them. The Government say that that is fine; they support such union members and urge them to defect.

I ask hon. Members to support the amendment, which would delete clauses 3, 4 and 5. That is essential, and if the House does not go along with us, it will be a further sign of the continuing movement towards authoritarian Government in this country.

Mr. Clelland: My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) referred — it seems a long time ago now—to the Donovan report, the Royal Commission on trade unions and employers' associations which met between 1965 and 1968. I have a copy here. It may look a little dog-eared, but that is not because I have just taken it from the dusty shelves of the Library. I bought it when I was a shop steward in 1968. It is probably the most in-depth study of trade unions and employers' associations ever done. It took a

"considerable volume of written evidence . . . from Government Departments, the Trades Union Congress, the Confederation of British Industry, numerous trade unions and employers' associations, companies, nationalised industries, organisations connected with industrial relations, individuals having specialist knowledge of the subject, and members of the public. In all some 430 organisations, persons or groups of persons sent us written submissions."

The commission sat on 58 days for the purpose of taking oral evidence. It conducted

"interviews on the basis of a series of questionnaires with some 1,400 shop stewards, 200 full-time trade union officers, 500 workers belonging to trade unions, 400 non-union workers, 600 foremen, 300 works managers and 120 personnel officers."

The commission also conducted research into many other subjects. There were a number of visits to industrial establishments, and the views of management and shop stewards were taken.

"Members also attended as observers a number of meetings of national joint negotiating bodies, including a Wages Council,"

and paid visits to Sweden, which I understand the Secretary of State recently visited, and the Federal Republic of Germany.

So a considerable amount of work was done by the Royal Commission, but it all seems to have fallen on deaf ears, to judge from this Bill, which goes against everything recommended in the report. In particular, clauses 3, 4 and 5 go against what the commission said. The Government pursue the myth that trade union members are some sort of sheep, which is an insult to many men and women who are members of trade unions. The Government think that those members are sheep being herded along by militant trade union officers for their own ends, despite what is happening with the National Union of Seamen, at Ford and in the National Health Service. In the face of all that, the Government still believe they cannot be wrong.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) asked the Secretary of State a question, which he failed to answer, about how clause 3 would affect a dispute such as the one at Ford. The Secretary of State has gone off for dinner now, and is doubtless enjoying brandy and cigars, so perhaps the Minister will reply to the question in his absence. How does the Minister imagine the clause would affect industrial relations in these work places especially in the Ford dispute? Does he not realise the bitterness that would be fuelled if, following a substantial majority in a balllot, some individuals decided to ignore the decision and go to work, no doubt escorted by the police under the powers given them by other legislation such as this? If Ministers cannot see that bitterness and recrimination on an immense scale would follow, they are divorced from reality and are ignoring the lessons of the past.

At present, the ability of unions to impose some sort of disciplinary action on those who ignore majority decisions is at least a way of stemming such a bitter reaction and taking the steam out of the situation. Following a dispute of that nature, the shop steward would smooth over the trouble. I have experienced that on many occasions. I have told members "Let us calm feelings. The union has invoked disciplinary procedures, and at the end of the day the matter will be resolved." The member would be called upon to explain his action and the others would be assured that some form of discipline could and would be initiated. Such a procedure can take the heat out of things and sometimes violent incidents can be avoided.

If that safety valve is removed, which is what is proposed in clauses 3 to 5, the Government will blow the lid off everything that has been done to promote good industrial relations over many years. As we have heard, no organisation of any note in industrial relations has a good word for the clauses. Anyone with any knowledge, and certainly any experience, of industrial relations knows the disastrous consequences of such a proposal and what will follow.

What is the proposal about? The Government have alleged that it is about reducing the number of working days lost through strikes — or so it seems from the Secretary of State's remarks. Apparently, the right hon.

[Mr. Clelland]

Gentleman regards the Government's record on working days lost through strikes as good. The point has been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) that, like the unemployment figures, the figures for days lost through strikes have also been fiddled and no one can tell what the position is.

However, if days lost is the important aspect of industrial relations that the Government wish to address, they are responsible for far more days being lost through unemployment than under any other Government in history. Some 1 billion working days per year are lost as a result of unemployment. The Government have presided over many more days being lost through sickness and accidents at work than have ever been lost through strikes, yet what do they do about that? They have reduced the capacity of the safety inspectorate to deal with unsafe practices at work. Worst of all, they have deliberately and calculatedly tightened their icy grip around the National Health Service so that it has reached the crisis point that we are now witnessing. The Government are not interested in the number of days lost through strikes; they are interested in anarchy because they stupidly believe that the proposal will cripple the trade unions.

The Secretary of State said that the proposal is about essential freedoms, such as the essential freedom for people to go to work, regardless of a democratic decision to strike, in which he or she has freely participated. As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) said, that essential freedom extends to all industrial action, whether it is an overtime ban or a work to rule. In a democratic society, complete freedom for every individual is a myth — it is impossible. We run our affairs through collective decision-making. Indeed, as we shall see again soon, the House runs on that very principle. The Government's supporters will troop through the Lobby to vote this squalid measure on to the statute book. That will be an act of the utmost hypocrisy, in that a decision taken in the House to encourage individuals to ignore a democratic majority decision will itself be taken by a majority vote in the House.

How can any reasonable person who supports this country's democratic traditions, and who supports the House of Commons and its democratic traditions, have any respect for a Government who use that very system to undermine democratic accountability in the work place? A Government who think that they can introduce such a measure and retain respect are doomed to die from an overdose of their own arrogance.

9.30 pm

Mr. Leighton: I did not intend to participate in the debate, as I was not a member of the Committee but I was provoked by the Secretary of State. Out of courtesy one comes to listen to the Secretary of State and, although I am mild-mannered, I was provoked into making a brief intervention.

In introducing this fourth piece of legislation on industrial relations the Government have gone a Bill too far. In clause 3 they have gone a clause too far. I do not know of anyone who favours the clause. Can Conservative Members tell me of any reputable body of opinion or of any reputable organisation that is in favour of clause 3? I am anxious to give way to any hon. Member who can tell me of anyone who is in favour of the clause.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): The Economic League, I think.

Mr. Leighton: My hon. Friend is guessing. He is normally expert on these matters.

Does any hon. Member know of anyone who is in favour of the clause? Are there any Conservative trade unionists who are in favour of it? Does the smiling Whip, the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown), or the other Whip, the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Mr. Lennox-Boyd), know of anyone who is in favour of the clause?

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): It would be a serious denial of the position of the listening party if Conservative Members were to pre-empt the many currents of opinion that are flowing from that well-known listening party.

Mr. Leighton: The hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), for whom I have great admiration, makes a brave effort. I am wondering how convincing he is, but I applaud him for trying to smooth over the fact that nobody is in favour of the clause, except, apparently, Ministers on the Front Bench.

The clause is misguided, because it undermines ballots. We in the Labour party are in favour of ballots. The trade union movement is in favour of ballots; it lives by ballots. Unlike parliamentarians, who have ballots once every five years, trade unionists have ballots every day on myriad issues.

Before I entered the House I was an active member of a trade union, in which I occupied a modest elected position. I was elected, as were all my colleagues in what we called the chapels, once every quarter. I and other officials had to be re-elected by a secret workplace ballot — not a postal ballot — every quarter. That was democracy run mad, because those officials had to be re-elected before they had taken office and done anything. The unions are run by constant, interminable secret ballots.

I am in favour of ballots. Every reputable body of opinion—including, primarily, employers—is against the clause, because it undermines ballots.

It is said that if there is to be an industrial dispute there must be a ballot. If the vote goes against taking action, it must be abided by. If not, by penalty of law, the weight of the state will descend, funds could be sequestrated and one could even go to prison. According to the clause, if the vote goes in favour of industrial action it does not have to be abided by and everyone can do as they like. That surely undermines the principle of the ballot. Why have a ballot at all if no one has to take account of it? *[Interruption.]* The Government Whip, the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South-East, is a very jolly character. It is pleasant to see someone deriving pleasure from these squalid and gruesome proceedings.

I shall willingly give way if anyone can tell me of a body which does not work on the principle that I have described. As I understand it, in a democracy the minority have to abide by the majority vote. The majority prevail. That is certainly true in this place. I am sure that you, Mr. Speaker, would insist on that being so. The same applies to every cricket club, football club, university, company or other organisation. Only the trade unions, by the diktat of this authoritarian and dictatorial Government, are expected to do things differently.

The Government are becoming schizophrenic. That is worrying. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) referred to the Government's attitude to the Ford dispute. In 1979 they said that they were not in favour of an incomes policy and that the Government should not have a view about wage levels—everything should be decided by the free market and independent partners in that market. They said that the Government should keep out of such matters. Now, however, there are daily exhortations from the Secretary of State about wages being too high. The Government must make up their minds where they stand.

The Government are also becoming schizophrenic about whether trade unions should be coherent bodies. Do the Government want trade unions, operating in the labour market, dealing with industrial relations and negotiating with our great companies, to be coherent and disciplined organisations? Perhaps the Minister will answer that question when he replies to the debate. As I said in my intervention to the Secretary of State, when the general secretary of the National Union of Seamen appeared in the High Court recently he was asked to give an undertaking to call off the industrial action. The judge seemed to think that the undertaking given was not sincere and that the union would simply continue the dispute, so he was very severe on Mr. McCluskie, who was instructed to return to the court the following Tuesday and told that unless he used his best endeavours and exercised his discipline in the union to get the chaps back to work he had better "watch out". That union was expected to act in a disciplined and coherent way. The general secretary was told to enforce his discipline on the members or the union's funds would be taken away. Do the Government want unions to be disciplined and coherent?

Another example concerns the print unions at Wapping. When the unions were organising nightly demonstrations, the court gave instructions about those demonstrations. When it was felt that some union members were not abiding by those instructions, the court threatened to bankrupt the union. The national executive of the union, without having a ballot, exercised its authority under the rules—and the rules are the free contract between the union and its members, under which discipline is exercised—and obeyed the orders of the court and called off the strike. That is the way the trade union operated its discipline.

Do the Government want trade unions to have discipline and coherence, or not? They do not know. They are schizophrenic. They want it sometimes, but not at other times. If the discipline is to carry out a dispute, they do not want it. If it is to call off a strike, they insist on it, using the threat of huge penalties and swingeing fines. We should have the truth, and the Government should stop being schizophrenic, because that is not the way to make law. That is not the way to legislate for law that will stick and remain. Clause 3 will not remain. It will not endure, because it is not just and proper.

When I taxed the Secretary of State about this, he said that when a union calls a dispute a member has obligations to his union, but he also has obligations to other people, such as the employer, and to his contract. That is true, but those workers at Wapping who voted to take industrial action were sacked because they broke their contract. We have to ask whether we have the right to strike. If workers ballot to strike and take strike action but are then sacked and their contract of employment is revoked, we do not have the right to strike. We do not have a right to strike set out in a constitution as they do in the continental countries. Britain is the only country in the Western world, as far as I know, that does not have the right to strike written into its law.

The way to end this conflict of obligations is for the Government to introduce legislation saying that if there is a strike the contract is suspended. That is what happens in the United States of America and every Western European country. The Secretary of State may say that that will encourage strikes, and the Government do not like strikes, but none of us like strikes. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) has great experience of strikes and knows that the people who suffer are the trade union members who go on strike. They lose their wages and suffer mental stress, and there is stress on their families. They do not take such action lightly, or very often. The majority of working people have been on strike at the most only once or twice.

The right to strike is a basic inalienable freedom in any free democratic society. Show me a country without the right to strike and I will point to a dictatorship. Under this Government, we are moving towards that. The Government have no consensus for this legislation and cannot produce a single witness in support of it. This is a clause too far and a Bill too far. It will not stick, and it is the result of a vendetta, vindictiveness and arrogance. It is wrong.

Ms. Clare Short: We raised this matter in Committee. We suggested to the Government that the Solidarity trade union movement in Poland would not be free to operate in the manner that it wished under British trade union law. The Government said twice that in an unfree society such as that in Poland trade unions are needed, but that in a society like ours, which the Government say is free, we do not need them.

9.45 pm

Mr. Leighton: My hon. Friend has made an extremely good point about the Government's double standards. We should be in favour of free, independent trade unions in Poland — as, indeed, the Government are — but we should also be in favour of them in this country. Although the Government are in favour of free, independent trade unions in Poland, in this country they are taking away the rights of trade unions. We want free independent trade unions in every country, but above all in this country, where the trade union movement was born. The Government may think it an alien institution that was invented in Poland, but the Poles are only just beginning to learn about trade unions, and they are learning from us. We invented the trade unions. They are British institutions, native to this country. They will not be destroyed by this Government, and especially not by the Employment Front Bench team.

The Minister for Employment has some slight responsibility for training programmes. It is about time that Employment Ministers took part in a training programme on industrial relations and trade unions. It is all rather like a pendulum swinging from one extreme to the other. The Government are at the very limit of one extreme with this absurd, ludicrous legislation that no one supports. It is misguided and mistaken and, in the fullness of time, we will get rid of it.

Mr. Skinner: One or two hon. Members have asked what the Bill is all about, and some of my hon. Friends have made some very good arguments against it. I am waiting to hear one of the Tory Back Benchers have a go. I am sure that they must have something to say. I do not know whether they managed to say anything in Committee — [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] That simply proves that, when the Government say they want to guillotine a Bill, there is no truth in their argument that the Opposition have taken up all the time in Committee. This Bill is not guillotined, but Conservative Members still did not say anything in Committee. It blows a hole in the Government's claim that the Opposition deliberately filibuster.

The Bill is about shifting the balance of power away from working-class people and their families towards the bosses. Since 1979, there have been several Acts dealing with employment issues, every single one of which had within it the idea that the Thatcher Government could say to the nation, "This is an another Act on the statute book that hammers the trade union leaders"—the emphasis is always on the leaders. For the past decade, it has been the classic Conservative belief that if they attacked a few trade union leaders that would gain a few percentage points in suburbia-land—the people with the filofaxes, and the pampas grass in their gardens. The Government tested their argument through MORI and Gallup, which asked, "What do you want?" Sadly, many people in the south of England in particular, but also in other parts to a lesser degree, replied, "Hammer the trade union leaders."

Most of those people—the yuppies now searching for their Porsches outside the pawnshops—never thought that trade unions were about trade unionists, about men and women belonging to trade unions, yet some of those yuppies perhaps come from working class families.

Those people bought this silly notion. The Prime Minister's crown princes will grovel at her feet and will probably do so again tomorrow when there is a vote on the televising of proceedings in this place. They will scamper into the Lobby after her. I bet the shop stewards will be on the door saying, "Get 'em in." They will be running, saying, "Where has she gone?" Let us suppose that one of them says, "I'm not going into that Lobby. I believe in televising Parliament. I'm going to invoke clauses 3 to 5 of the Employment Bill. I'm going to opt out." What chance has he or she of getting promotion? He or she will not even get a bag-carrier's job, let alone a post as an unpaid, grovelling parliamentary private secretary. That is the way they operate.

At the beginning of this Session, in the afterglow of victory, I have no doubt that, when it came to proposing legislation, the Prime Minister said, "We must have an Education Bill." The Secretary of State for Education probably said, "Oh, yes, we shall have to have one of those. I wasn't very happy about it during the election campaign, but I'll settle for it now that I've got the job. It may enable me to perform at the Dispatch Box and get a few votes when you've gone, Prime Minister." The Prime Minister probably said, "We shall have to have a poll tax Bill. You had better get that ready because it will give me £2,000 in my pocket. I want a poll tax Bill now. Get it on the statute book."

Then somebody would say, "We must have an Employment Bill." Somebody new to the Cabinet may ask, "Why? Do we need one? We have the trade unions tied up," to which the reply would be, "It's good propaganda to have a trade union bill, if not two, in every Session because it shows that we are attacking the workers and, particularly, trade union bosses. We want there to be a configuration in the minds of people who drift between the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) and the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel), who leads the party that dares not speak its name, as that might just swing the vote."

Then someone in the Cabinet says, "What shall we put in the Bill? I've a good idea. What about making them have ballots?" Someone else will reply, "We've done that. Didn't you know?", to which the reply will be, "I went through the Lobby without thinking." Someone else will say, "We must have another one. It must have something to do with ballots because we are handing back the unions to the members."

The Ford workers have found that out in the last fortnight. Thirty-two thousand of them have had a taste of it and said, "Well, the Prime Minister said we've got to hand the unions back to the members. We've got'em and I'm not bothered about what Mick Murphy says." The Bill would tie Mick Murphy to the floor and release the members. This Bill is another attempt at being macho. This will show the yuppies that the Government are still in pursuit of the trade unions.

Clauses 3 to 5 make nonsense of democracy. On the "World at One" programme on the radio last week, I heard a discussion that I thought I would never hear in Thatcher-land. Three or four pundits were taking part, whom one would normally expect to agree with everything that the Tory Government want. One said, "This is an Employment Bill too many." I thought, "Well, has he switched? Has he been to one of our listening campaigns?" One never knows. There are all sorts going, so they tell me —the chamber of commerce and the Police Federation. They are writing the Labour manifesto. Others are now joining in. They are from establishment-type institutions. They have all the answers. They take them to "World at One". They throw in a Member of Parliament now and then just to liven it up, or to damp it down, as the case may be. Without exception, using long words, all have come to the same result and have said, "They have gone too far."

Of course, Governments can overreach themselves. This Government are doing it in many respects. They have done so with the Education Reform Bill, the poll tax Bill, and with this Bill. They are saying to the people, "Oh yes, we believe in democracy," but if two or three people do not accept the majority view, they will invoke the "David Owen" clause, the one whereby one does not accept the result of a ballot and one does as one likes.

Tory Members have jeered at the Liberals and the SDP over the course of the past few months. Of course they can jeer. They have not accepted the results of the ballot. Yet the same people will march through the Lobby tonight, following the Secretary of State for Employment and the rest of the Cabinet, to vote for clauses 3 to 5, which will license people to say, "The ballot? Get stuffed."

The Bill is part of the propaganda and machinery to dismantle Socialism. We cannot draw any other conclusion. Some time ago, the Prime Minister said that she wanted to see the end of Socialism. She actually believes that. It is nonsensical to say it. She is supposed to be bright, but she actually believes that she can dismantle a philosophy by passing Bills in the House of Commons. It is another step, she hopes—in my view, it will not

work—towards Victoriana, to impose a type of upstairs-downstairs mentality on anybody who works in the House of Commons. I refer to those who clock on and clock off. They know only too well about the upstairs-downstairs mentality in here. We saw recent evidence of cases in which that attitude was imposed upon workers in the building. I suppose that the Governent are trying it out, ready to impose it on many others.

I said earlier that the matter is all about shifting the balance of power towards bosses. We shall see more of that in the 15 March Budget. If the Bill is passed, it will result in many people outside realising at long last just how vicious and vindictive the Tory Government can be. Just imagine somebody going along to next Thursday morning's Cabinet meeting and saying, "I do not think that I like what you have just said. I am not going along with it." The Government will say, "We have just had a majority vote." They do not have votes, they have what is called a collection of voices. The Prime Minister will say, "What did you say?" He will say, "Well, I was just thinking that I do not quite like it." He would be sacked. The Government would do what they are telling trade unionists to do as a result of a ballot. It is the same principle. They want the jam, the cake, the bread and all the rest of it rolled into one.

Universities were mentioned earlier. It crossed my mind that they recently held a big ballot at Oxford. They all went up in those gowns and kinky clothes to vote. There was an ex-Prime Minister and Lord Jenkins—that bloke who tried to take my seat one day; I told him, "We've had a ballot for that seat and I have won." They had a vote at Oxford and Lord Jenkins won—

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Employment Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

Employment Bill

As amended, again considered.

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

Mr. Skinner: You see, Mr. Speaker, we have just had a vote. The majority won. What would you say, Mr. Speaker, if I said, "I'm not having it." I would be out. The House will see what I mean. My shoulders are big enough to bear it. I would be off; I would not argue, although as we both know, Mr. Speaker, we might occasionally argue about technicalities and the fine print.

The House can just imagine the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) saying when Lord Jenkins won, "I'm not having it. I'm going to invoke clauses 3 to 5 of the new Employment Bill. I'm not going to allow him to have the job." That makes nonsense of what the Government are doing.

I call these the "Peter Wright" clauses, because the same argument applies. In that case, we have a bevy of spies. They all agree to keep their mouths shut but when they get their pensions, Peter Wright comes along and says, "I'm not bothered about that. I'm doing my own thing. I'm going to make some money on the side." The principle established in clauses 3 to 5 will give licence to all those lawyers who are in a closed shop. They all have to join, although the lawyers' union is a different union altogether. The House can just imagine what will happen. Some bright-eyed lawyer will come along and say, "I'm not going along with that lot." The clauses open a big door.

On Thursday, the Prime Minister celebrates 13 years as leader of the Tory party. She became leader on 11 February 1975. She got the job because there was a vote and she won. The previous Prime Minister was caught napping and one or two Conservatives thought, "We will give her a vote or two." Most people said, "They only tried to frighten Heath." I say that in parenthesis, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister won. That is what democracy means. The Tory party and other institutions are allowed all these democratic trappings, but it is a different ball game for trade unions. They are told, "You can have your vote but woe betide the winners if they do not act to suit the Tory party." That is the truth of it. The Government say to the bosses, "It is all right. We have a different method of balloting. Don't worry."

Just imagine someone turning up and being paid to invoke the clauses. It would not be for the first time. One has only to listen to some of the things that we have heard over the years from the Economic League and other organisations. People have been implanted into areas where there has been industrial ferment and strikes. Many of us thought that that happened during the miners' strike. Under the new system one would certainly not need many such people to wreck the whole of industrial relations in Britain. As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) said, those scabs—they could be saboteurs if they were paid—would be completely protected by the law under this undemocratic system.

I went to Manchester a few weeks ago to see some trade unionists and to speak at their anniversary rally. They were employed by Senior Colman and had been on strike for 12 months. Some of my hon. Friends know about the case. Those men got done—not for taking part in a ballot, but because they could not fill in their timesheets properly, according to the gaffers. They got sacked because they did not fill in their timesheets. Imagine if that applied in here. I told them "They don't have timesheets in the House of Commons. In the House of Lords, they just nod to the bod, get their names in the book, call for a drink at the bar and go, getting £100 per day tax-free."

When I saw those 31 men and women who were still on strike after 12 months I could see all the Employment Bills in front of my eyes, and here is another to stoke up some Senior Colman-type industrial disputes, to start another Silentnight, to attack many of the low-paid workers, many of whom, after a lifetime of never having been on strike, finally have to take up the cudgels because the freedom to strike, to withdraw their labour, is the only freedom that the trade unions have. However, having had a democratic vote they are being told, "Not only will your funds be sequestrated if there is secondary action, but people can now usurp your authority by taking you to the courts." Who elected the judges? Of course, they did not have a vote. They did not have to run into that problem.

I can see a lot of difficulties ahead, yet I am an optimist. To be a Socialist, one always has to be optimistic. In this deceitful, vindictive legislation I can see the seeds of a revival among many of our people. It will not only be the blue and white-collar workers, the nurses and others who have taken industrial action recently, who will spot just what is happening now in this so-called "mother of Parliaments." The Tory Government are now trampling on freedoms in such a way as to say, "We treat you

[Mr. Skinner]

working people with so much contempt that you can have a ballot but we shall give the rights to the people who have been defeated." That is contempt, but the Government will see to it. It may take a while; it may need a few more policy reviews and a bit more listening, but it will happen.

We are now reaching the point where, such is the nature of industrial relations in Britain today, exemplified by the Bill, that I almost thought that I could hear the siren calls from the Tory Benches when the nurses and ancillary workers went on strike last week. I was getting ready to hear the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) and his mates talking about the nurses as the enemy within. That will come. However, because it will come, people will not stand for it.

As those people who have commented on the Bill and are not Socialists, not even trade unionists, have said, it is one Bill too many. One of my hon. Friends has referred to the Industrial Relations Act 1971, which flew in the face of the Donovan Commission report, which had been published some time before. People said then that it was not fair. The result was that the then Tory Prime Minister had to come to the House to say, and I paraphrase, "I have put the Industrial Relations Act on the back boiler".

We shall vote against the Bill in the knowledge that a lot of people believe that the cause that we are fighting is correct. The very idea that in a democractic country one can have a democratic ballot between trade unionists but because they are trade unionists no notice will be taken of it, is why we shall win in the end.

Mr. Cryer: I hesitate to follow such a powerful exposition of the tortuous nature of the Bill. *[Interruption.]* The more that Conservative Members suggested that I should not, the longer I will take to expound the case in detail, because they need some time to be educated.

Clauses 3 to 5 are designed to wreck the democratic provisions that the Government are imposing on ordinary workers. I thought that it might be useful to remind the House of the wage levels about which we are talking. The Low Pay Unit has done a survey in west Yorkshire and Humberside specifically about the wages of the people who want to negotiate decent terms and conditions, and the low wages that are paid to young workers.

A 20-year-old working full-time on a construction site earns £1·30 an hour. An under 21-year-old is paid £28 a week for working full-time in an estate agents' office. A 20-year-old is paid £60 to work more than 40 hours a week doing motor repairs. An under 21-year-old is paid £52 to work 37½ hours a week in a hydraulics warehouse. An under 21-year-old is paid £1·50 an hour to work in double glazing assembly. An under 21-year-old girl is paid £38 to work 44 hours a week in a stables. A 17-year-old hairdresser, a second-year trainee, is paid 85p an hour. Those wages were paid in 1987.

Conservative Members are trying to wreck the development of trade union membership and the negotiating rights for people earning 85p per hour. That is scandalous when Conservative Members are getting £22,000 a year as Members of Parliament, but most of them are also lining their pockets through parliamentary advisorships and directorships. Some of them are knee-deep in such work, yet they will vote in the Lobby tonight for a Bill to stop trade unions organising themselves and, after a ballot when a majority has decided to take strike action, applying some rules that have stood the test of time and have been applied fairly over the years. They are saying that if somebody does not support strike action and goes through a picket line, or does not take part in a strike, trade unions can say, "We have taken a majority decision and we will make you subject to our rules." However, they will then be subject to the compensation provisions in clauses 3 to 7. Moreover, that compensation will be taken from the trade unions' funds. It is another attack on trade union finances.

Therefore is it not unreasonable that we should examine the matter in some detail because when the Secretary of State was defending clauses 3 to 5 against the Opposition amendment which is very reasonable he said that as a result of the legislation of Conservative Governments, industrial relations in Britain had actually improved. I intervened and said that perhaps the statistics were being fiddled again. The statistics are being fiddled in a way that I shall explain to the House.

The legislation will not improve industrial relations. It will make them worse. That was a characteristic of past legislation. The Government claimed that fewer days have been lost through strike action. The truth is that days are not counted when workers who go out on strike are subsequently sacked, even if at the end of the period those workers are reinstated. The days when they are out on strike, but which the employer counts as days when they are sacked, are not included in that total.

10.15 pm

I shall give the House an example of the way in which the statistics which are used to justify these three clauses have been fiddled. In west Yorkshire there was a two-year strike at Silentnight bedding manufacturers, the chairman of which has an abiding hatred and detestation of trade unions which equals that of the Government and would have made Adolf Hitler proud. He negotiated with the Furniture, Timber and Allied Trades Union and they reached an agreement. In justifying these three clauses the Secretary of State said that trade unions have not been concerned about creating redundancies through high wages, but this example refutes that. The Silentnight workers said, "We won't accept a wage increase providing you don't make anyone redundant and we shall have the arrangement for a minimum of six months. We shall waive a national agreement." The workers undertook their side of the bargain, but after two months the management sacked 40, in breach of the agreement. The workers took a ballot and in both factories there was a clear majority for strike action.

These people were not high wage earners; they were relatively low wage earners. The Clarke family had been sucking the firm dry by taking a huge proportion of the profits. One third of what they took would have paid the claim for a full 12 months. That is a clear example of a parasitic employer sucking money from the firm for himself and his family and depriving workers of a decent wage.

The workers went on strike and were sacked after three months, but they stayed out for nearly two years. Of those 24 months only three were counted as strike action. Nevertheless, it remained one of the longest, most bitter disputes that west Yorkshire has seen. By manipulating the statistics the Secretary of State is claiming that industrial relations have improved. That is absolute nonsense.

Under clause 3 any worker at Silentnight who voted for strike action, walked through the gates to help the employer defeat the trade unions and was then subject to disciplinary action, could claim compensation from the union that took the majority decision. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) so graphically and powerfully explained, it is against every basic tenet of democracy which hon. Members, the Cabinet and Conservative Members are supposed to uphold. There is not one other example—I shall be interested to hear the Minister produce another example, if he can—of where, when a majority takes a decision, a minority is not only exempt from that decision, but can claim compensation.

If the Minister says that trade unions have not applied the rules fairly—indeed, the Secretary of State gave one illustration—I am sure that hon. Members will agree that one example as a reason for legislation is a poor basis. If one used such a basis to legislate on the Cabinet, legislation would be introduced to stop Cabinet members committing adultery. The Government have not done so, but that is one powerful example—it rocked the nation—and is more important than the example the Secretary of State gave about one trade union.

If such a rule is good enough for trade unions which represent 9 million people, why is it not good enough for a handful of people in the Cabinet? Adultery is one example of something that must be stopped, so presumably legislation must be passed. The majority of the Cabinet must surely believe that, for the majority of the time, most of them behave with a certain moral standing in their private lives, but it is their public lives that worry me. Their public lives are disgraceful and are prime examples of degradation.

For years the trade unions have, with one or two hiccups, been managed well and run democratically. The notion that the one example that the Secretary of State has quoted is a justification for the vicious measure is wrong. It is a justification for every saboteur and every agent provocateur that the Tories can dig up. It is the encapsulation of the man who, in the 1960s, brought Chrysler to a halt. He was a member of a trade union, but all of a sudden he said that he had to resign from the closed shop. He had to resign because he said he was hearing the voice of God. God was telling him to leave the trade union. Some of us believe that he was either a schizophrenic, or, more likely, the voice of God was coming to him from the CBI, the Engineering Employers Federation or the Tory party.

Mr. Skinner: Or Anderton.

Mr. Cryer: Yes indeed, they may have been communicating together. Perhaps they were members of the same church — the Methodists, the Church of England or whatever it was at that time. Certainly they were moved in the same way. If someone says they are hearing voices it is difficult to disprove that. Most people put it down to sheer pretence, mischief or a mental breakdown. However, under this legislation every knave or saboteur has the opportunity of legal backing. That is the purpose of the Bill.

The Government's political philosophy and standards are much the same—they will not like this—as those displayed in Germany under Hitler before the war. That is true in every aspect, from privatisation and their concern for small shopkeepers — that is an alleged concern because it is not put into much practice because they are paid more by the multinationals and they call the tune —to their vicious attacks on the trade union movement. The cumulative effect of legislation from 1980 has been to ensnare and encircle ordinary men and women in a wreath of legislation to curb their activities.

The reality is that—I have said this before but it is worth repeating again and again—more days are lost each year through industrial injury than through strikes. That is based on the Government's statistics and, if that is so, why are the Government doing nothing about health and safety at work? They are not doing very much, apart from trying to water down standards.

There have been some graphic illustrations of Government cuts in public standards having tragic consequences. King's Cross is a by-word for cuts in staff. They have all been replaced now, but it is a bit late for the 50 people who were trapped when the fire swept through King's Cross. No one can deny the facts. The answers to parliamentary questions that I have asked show that there were cuts in health and safety standards on the London underground, and they were brought into the open by a chance fire.

In all those areas, the Government could use their time to improve standards of health and safety at work. If they did that, they might achieve the Valhalla for which they constantly seek, with the Opposition agreeing to improved standards of health and safety at work and tighter controls on asbestos. Despite their claims, they have been a bit lax about asbestos. There are still cowboy operators around. No qualifications are needed to get a licence to remove asbestos in our schools, houses, hospitals and factories.

Mr. Skinner: They do not have a ballot for that.

Mr. Cryer: That is right. The cowboys simply write to the Health and Safety Executive, obtain a licence and they are in work.

The Minister has the opportunity to accept the amendment, which proposes to delete clauses 3, 4 and 5, and make the Bill a little better. They should remove this extraordinary corruption of democracy. One ray of hope is that the Bill's ideology is so corrupt as to show the Government beginning to curl at the edges. They are becoming overweening and arrogant, and their supporters are beginning to find it difficult to justify their employment legislation. The Bill is the beginning of their undoing. Their arrogance has made them think less and produce more of such ugly Bills.

I do not wish to detain the House for much longer, especially after the powerful contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover, so I shall make this my last point. It is ironic that, when trade unionists apply the rules that have been approved democratically by the ballot procedure and a complainant then seeks compensation under clause 3(4)(b), the compensation must be paid from trade union funds. That is a further punishment on trade unions, which are already heavily pressed by the Government's economic policies. The Government's economic and social policies have destroyed 2 million jobs and are designed to subdue the work force and make people more complacent. Many of the people who lost their jobs were trade union members, but they no longer pay trade union subscriptions. As a result, the unions were hard-pressed for cash. The Bill is another attack on their

[Mr. Cryer]

funds and is an encouragement to someone who may be a bit short of cash after a dispute to take his union to court in the hope of getting a little money back.

This is a scab's charter. It is designed to encourage disaffection in the trade union movement and to encourage the saboteur. Trade unions' funds, as well as the cohesive organisation of the movement, are being attacked. This legislation finally demonstrates that old truisms still hold sway. The trade unions represent ordinary working men and women struggling to make a decent living and obtain decent standards in their environment and their working conditions and the Government represent the owners of capital trying to stop workers combining in trade unions.

The Government have not succeeded in the past, and they are not succeeding now. The Government's policies are so appalling that they have brought out on to the streets people who have never taken industrial action before. They have produced a solid mass of trade union legislation since 1980, and they have brought the angels out—men and women who agonised for months and who could see their rotten conditions, and, more important, the conditions for their patients deteriorating because of the Government's shoddy policies of deliberately running down the National Health Service so that they could argue that only private money could rescue it.

There is always hope. There is hope in the Ford workers heeding what the Prime Minister said in 1978, when she saw a political opportunity and took it. The Ford workers, the nurses and workers in all walks of life will not be suppressed. There have been too many years of organisation, aspirations and democracy for this sort of shoddy legislation to be imposed on workers.

10.30 pm

The Minister for Employment (Mr. John Cope): My right hon. Friend set out the basic arguments for these clauses once again about two or three hours ago. I shall now try to respond to some of the points that have been made in the debate since then.

It is clear that strong views are held about our proposals, and that neither those views nor the arguments advanced in support of them have changed in the course of our discussions since Second Reading, or before. Quite a few Opposition Members, including the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), seemed to think that this would be the end of trade unionism as it is known today. I can assure the hon. Member for Newham, North-East that we are not out to destroy the trade unions, but are out to give a small piece of extra freedom to individual members of unions.

My right hon. Friend was pressed to give examples of unions disciplining their members. Some examples were given in the Green Paper some time ago. In recent months, even while we have been discussing the Bill, there have been the examples of the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers expelling 500 members, and the National Communications Union is reported as having expelled a great many more than that.

Almost no Opposition Member has picked up my right hon. Friend's point about the effect of ballots when there are subsequent changes in offers as a result of discussions, as frequently happens, and about whether a ballot should be binding in those circumstances. Whatever view one takes of the proposals, it is an odd doctrine to suggest that taking action—whether by striking or some other means—should bind a trade unionist, even after there has been a further offer, or perhaps several offers before or after the action started, and sometimes both.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) seemed to agree a little with that point, although he might have gone along with it only for the purposes of argument, but I do not think that he would be happy with the clause even if it applied only where there was no change in an offer between a ballot and the members' decision to return to work, or to withdraw from the action. There is an important point there, which should be taken into account by Opposition Members and those who comment on those matters.

As some other hon. Members have said, I accept that, particularly when there is a strike but also when there is other industrial action, feelings often run high. Feelings have run high this evening. Some individuals might want to take it out on those who have not supported the action or who have withdrawn their support at some stage during the action. It has been argued tonight, as it has been before, that one of the effects of the unions exerting disciplinary pressure is somehow to draw the sting of those high feelings. I believe that union disciplinary proceedings also give credence to those who try to exert other pressure on those who have withdrawn from a strike or did not support it in the first place. That can work in one way, and sometimes it can work in another, often in the same dispute.

Mr. Allen: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Cope: No. It has been a long debate, and the hon. Gentleman made a long speech.

The central point is the clash of obligations for someone who is faced with a strike call—the clash between his obligations to his union, which we recognise, and his obligations to his contract of employment, his family, the customers of the company, and, indeed the strength of the company itself, or whoever his employer is. The Bill does not choose for the trade union member which of those obligations he should honour. It gives him the opportunity to choose for himself. In the past the Labour party has given at best half-hearted support to ballots, but now Labour Members talk as if they were the staunchest defenders of ballots that there had ever been.

My right hon. Friend was asked when Opposition Members had said that those who disagreed with unions should leave them. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) said that nobody in Committee had ever argued that point. In Committee the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said:

"Of course they have other obligations, and if they find membership of a trade union so damaging to those other obligations, they can leave the union."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 19 November 1987; c. 110.]

On another occasion the hon. Gentleman returned to the subject and said:

"If a person objects profoundly to what the union is doing, his answer is to withdraw from membership of it."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 24 November 1987; c. 113-14.]

So that argument was used, and not only by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): The Minister has accused Labour Members of being reluctant to accept

ballots. Given that in ballots the majority rule the day, why do the Government now propose legislation that will seek to destroy majority decisions in a secret ballot? Will the Minister comment on the Prime Minister's quotation from St. Francis of Assisi in 1979, which conveys the sentiment that where there is discord he shall bring harmony? I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is acquainted with that. Perhaps he will relate that to the industrial action by the nurses for the first time ever — *[Interruption.]* — and perhaps the Secretary of State will keep quiet or go outside the Chamber where he has been for most of the evening.

Mr. Cope: With regard to discord, we have already discussed the figures for strikes, days lost and the way in which the numbers have fallen. Whatever nitpicking takes place about those figures, the trend is perfectly clear.

With regard to the general argument for the clause, I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was present when my right hon. Friend set out the argument for the clause, but he did so very clearly.

Labour Members want those who disagree with unions to leave them or for them to be driven out. They want the membership of unions to be constantly distilled. They go on about the rights of employees to belong to a union. The clause protects a person's right to remain a member even when he or she disagrees with the union on a matter. Labour Members reject that right.

These clauses are not the end of trade unionism as we know it. They are an importat piece of extra freedom for individual members of a union.

Mr. Strang: I am glad that the House has taken time to debate this amendment fully. These clauses are among the most indefensible that have ever appeared in a Bill before the House. It is a measure of how extreme and indefensible they are that so many organisations, which normally agree with the Government, including employers' organisations, have attacked them for being extreme and for undermining the democratic process.

As Labour Members have repeatedly said, the Government have been motivated, in the Bill and in the three previous Acts affecting trade unions, by the fundamental objective of undermining the bargaining power, strength and role of trade unions in our society.

The Minister acknowledged that feelings run high in these matters. That is true, but there is no doubt in our mind, or in those or many employers, including the Engineering Employers Federation, that, far from reducing anarchy and indiscipline during industrial disputes, these clauses will make matters worse.

It is hypocritical for the Government to talk about the need to protect workers who are on strike but who feel that if they do not return to work they will lose their employment, because in the Employment Act 1982 the Government created a position whereby workers dismissed while taking part in industrial action were collectively re-engaged three months later. That legislation enables an employer to practise discrimination against strikers and dismiss them.

We have heard no justification for this draconian set of clauses. This measure is not only damaging to good trade unionism but will have an adverse effect on industrial relations in this country. I have no doubt that it will be repealed—the sooner the better.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 200, Noes 246.

Division No. 100] **[10.45 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Begga, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, J.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alastair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, James
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Samuel
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Douglas
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Tom
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John

Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, John
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Steinberg, Gerald
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A. J.
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Anthony
Wray, James
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Frank Cook.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Favell, Tony
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Heyhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'ford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Timothy
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Miss E. *(Devon W)*
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shephard, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shephard, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Strasling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Alan Howarth.

Question accordingly negatived.

Employment Bill

Mr. Nicholls: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 4, line 45, leave out 'any of'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this we may discuss Government amendments Nos. 4 to 6 and 21.

Mr. Nicholls: The amendments address two concerns raised by the Opposition in Committee. First, they ensure that disciplining, in the context of maintaining professional standards, will not be unjustified and, secondly, they remove potential from disciplining in respect of assertions made in bad faith. I hope that they will be welcomed by the House.

Mr. Strang: I shall not detain the Committee, but it would be helpful if the Minister could clarify amendments Nos. 5 and 6. I understand that they are intended as concessions to points raised by Opposition Members in Committee.

The purpose of amendment No. 5 appears to be that, where an individual member is disciplined for an action independent of a dispute—in other words, an action for which he would be disciplined even if there were no dispute—that would not be covered by clause 3. For example, in Committee we discussed the possibility of a trade union disciplining an individual member who took action contrary to health and safety considerations. Another example related to whether the clause would prevent the Royal College of Nursing from disciplining a member who took action incompatible with its code of practice.

Amendment No. 6 goes some way towards meeting the Government's undertaking on what the Opposition called the libel charter—where an individual member could libel an official, but it would not be possible for the trade union to discipline him. However, it does not go far enough. Someone may make a libellous statement, which, indeed, is determined by a court to be libellous, but it will not necessarily be covered by amendment No. 6, which states that for a statement to be excluded from the requirements of clause 3 an individual must have acted "either in the belief that it was false or otherwise in bad faith".

If the matter ever got to court and the person were disciplined, the trade union would have to show that the member made the statement in the belief that it was false or had otherwise acted in bad faith. That is difficult to prove.

If my understanding of the clause is correct, the Minister will probably find that the amendment is discussed again in another place. It is not a satisfactory way of meeting the Government's undertaking in Committee.

11 pm

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman asked me to compare amendments Nos. 5 and 6. I shall compare amendments Nos. 3 and 5 on the one hand and amendment No. 4 on the other hand. Amendment No. 4 would only have protected disciplining to maintain professional standards outside a strike context. One could have put an argument for doing that. The hon. Gentleman quite properly said that that would have gone far enough.

The conjunction of amendments Nos. 3, 4 and 5 together is such that, if it is a matter of maintaining professional standards, disciplining can take place. The hon. Gentleman is entirely right to refer to the Committee debate. If what a union does is incidental to a strike or industrial action—if it is almost coincidental to it—and if it could show that it would have disciplined for that sort of matter anyway, it will be able to do so.

The example that we discussed in Committee was helpful. We discussed what would happen in a nursing home if nurses acted in an unprofessional manner by over-administering sedation. Obviously, in such a situation, a union will be able to show quite straightforwardly that it will always discipline for that matter, and that therefore, to that extent, it is almost coincidental to a strike. In such a situation, the clause will be everything that the hon. Gentleman would hope that it might be.

Amendment No. 6 addresses a specific concern. The hon. Gentleman will have opened his remarks on the basis that he thoroughly dislikes the whole clause and the Bill. The point that concerned him and other Opposition Members was that it will become a libellers' charter and that people could say anything that they want in the most bad faith and in the most malicious way. We believe that, as drafted, amendment No. 6 takes account of that.

When I was considering the amendment, the only thing that I could find about it which I suspect will not be entirely to the hon. Gentleman's liking was simply that it would be the case that, if an allegation were made in bad faith but was nevertheless true, that situation also would lie outside it. That is almost an exercise in logic. The hon. Gentleman would scratch his chin at it, but he would agree that it, at the end of the day, the assertion turned out to be true, even if it were made in bad faith, it would have to be exempt.

Subject to that rather narrow point, we certainly believe that it would answer everything that the Opposition want. I take the hon. Gentleman's point. If he is not entirely satisfied with it, I imagine that it will be discussed again in another place. I hope that, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman will feel that, if not exactly what he wants, it is pretty close to it.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 4 in page 5, line 8, leave out from '(b)' to 'by' in line 9 and insert—

'it consists in a failure to contravene, for any purpose connected with any such strike or other industrial action, any requirement imposed on that individual'.

No. 5, in page 5, line 37, at end insert—

'but an act, omission or statement by any individual does not fall within this subsection by reason of its being comprised in conduct falling within any of paragraphs (a) to (g) above if it is shown that that act, omission, or statement is one in respect of which individuals would be disciplined by the union irrespective of whether their acts, omissions or statements were in connection with conduct falling within any of paragraphs (a) to (f) above.'.

No. 6, in page 5, line 37, at end insert—

'( ) An individual who has been disciplined by a trade union shall not be treated for the purposes of this section and sections 4 and 5 below as having been unjustifiably disciplined if it is shown—

(a) that the reason or one of the reasons for disciplining him was that he made any such assertion as is mentioned in subsection (3)(c) above or encouraged or assisted any other person to make or to attempt to vindicate any such assertion;

(b) that that assertion was false and that, in making it or, as the case may be, in encouraging or assisting any other person to make or to attempt to vindicate it, that individual acted either in the belief that it was false or otherwise in bad fait; and

[Mr. Nicholls]

(c) that there was no other reason for disciplining him or that the only other reasons were reasons in respect of which he does not fall to be treated for those purposes as having been unjustifiably disciplined.'.—*[Mr. Nicholls.]*

Clause 7

RIGHT TO REQUIRE EMPLOYER TO STOP DEDUCTIONS OF UNION SUBSCRIPTIONS

Mr. Nicholls: I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 11, line 19, leave out from 'that' to '; or' in line 20 and insert

'there has been or will be, as from a particular date, such a termination of his membership of any trade union as is within the knowledge of the union'.

The amendment addresses itself to the concern expressed by Opposition Members in Committee that clause 7(1)(a) as drafted would place no obligation on a trade union member to tell his union of his intention to leave. The amendment provides that a trade union member has to certify to his employer that the termination of his membership is known to the trade union. I commend the amendment to the House.

Mr. Strang: We accept that the amendment constitutes an advance and we have nothing further to say on it.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 12

EXTENSION TO NON-VOTING POSITIONS OF DUTY TO HOLD ELECTIONS

Mr. Strang: I beg to move amendment No. 8, in page 14, leave out from beginning of line 41 to end of line 32 on page 15 and insert—

'(1) After subsection (6) of section 1 of the 1984 Act (duty to hold election of voting members of a trade union's principal executive committee) there shall be inserted the following subsections—

"(6A) Notwithstanding anything in the rules or practice of any trade union, the person who holds the position of president of the union, or in the case of a union with no such position, any equivalent position, shall (if the rules do not otherwise provide for him to be a voting member of the union's principal executive committee) be deemed for the purposes of this section to be a voting member of the committee.

(6B) Notwithstanding anything in the rules or practice of any trade union, the person who holds the position of general secretary of the union, or in the case of a union with no such position, the position in the union which is the equivalent, or nearest equivalent, to that of general secretary, shall (if the rules do not otherwise provide for him to be a voting member of the union's principal executive committee) be deemed for the purposes of this section to be a voting member of the committee except where the post of general secretary (or nearest equivalent) is subject to appointment by the union and the rules and practice do not allow him to vote on the principal executive committee."'

The amendment deals with an important part of the Bill. The House will be aware that in the Employment Act 1984 the Government required trade unions to elect members of their principal executive committee who had a vote on that committee. At the outset, let me say that Opposition Members oppose such interference in the affairs of trade unions. Trade unions' rules have evolved organically over many years and usually relate to their history and interests. Such rules provide the best way for the trade unions to conduct their affairs. We also believe that it is fundamental to our democracy that trade unions should be independent of Government interference and that it is an affront to the basis of independent trade unionism that the Government should seek to legislate on internal matters such as this.

However, the 1984 Act is on the statute book and at least it is has clarity: either a person has a vote on the executive committees or he does not. If he has a vote on the executive, he must be elected by the members, and if he does not, that requirement does not apply. Hon. Members will recall that the NUM amended its rules to comply with that requirement when it removed the voting rights of its president and general secretary. Subsequently, the NUM held an election and elected its president.

The important point is that clause 12 as drafted is utterly impracticable, and although the Minister sought to play down the draconian nature of the clause in relation to the officials who would have to be elected, his answers were not satisfactory. I draw attention to the provision that refers to any official who may attend the principal executive committee or who attends

"for the purpose of providing the committee with factual information or with technical or professional advice with respect to matters incidental to the carrying out by the committee of its functions."

We welcomed the assurance that the Minister gave in Committee that if individual officials attended the executive by invitation they would not be required to be elected by the members. However, we cannot rely on the Minister's statement. The whole area is still ambiguous. Many trade unions simply do not know whether officials, such as national officers covering particular sections of the union, will or will not have to be elected as a consequence of the clause. That is wholly unsatisfactory and we believe that the Government should clear that up and amend the Bill.

My second point relates to the giving of professional and technical advice on matters incidental to the carrying out of a union's functions. What emerged in Committee —it was quite remarkable—was that if an official who was normally there to give highly technical advice, possibly even on legal matters, strayed into giving advice that went beyond that, that official, whether he was called the legal officer or the administrative officer, would put himself in a position where he would have to be elected to hold that office in the union. That is what was said in Committee by the Minister when we drew an analogy between a legal officer in, for example, a trade union and a legal officer in a local authority. Therefore, to us that area of clause 12 is still ambiguous and it is unacceptable that it should go on the statute book in that form.

The other element of clause 12, which is an amendment to the 1984 Act, is the requirement that presidents and general secretaries will have to stand for regular election even if they do not have a vote on the executive committee. That is an outrageous interference in the internal matters of trade unions. As I said on Second Reading, several trade unions—I take as an example the National and Local Government Officers Association because it is a large trade union and organises the staff in local authorities—have decided that the general secretary will be appointed. NALGO's general secretary does not have a vote on the principal executive committee. In that union there is a clear relationship between the elected members of the

executive, who are lay members, ordinary trade unionists, who work in the various sectors of local government—the gas industry or whatever—run the union, determine its policy and are in control, and the general secretary and the other officials who are appointed, have no vote and are answerable to them.

I do not submit that that is the only model that should apply to the trade unions, or that is the best model. However, it is outrageous that the Government should seek to pass a law that will make it illegal for a trade union such as NALGO to continue that reasonable structure which, as we have said, is mirrored in, for example, local authorities themselves. To give another example in which the position is quite clear, the same applies to the National Union of Public Employees, in which the general secretary is appointed and is answerable to the executive, which comprises lay members of the union who are regularly elected, as executives of trade unions generally are.

Although we are opposed to the whole imposition in principle, in amendment No. 8 we have done something reasonable and ingenious against the background of the Government's approach. We have said, "All right, we will accept the principle that where the official has a vote on the executive committee—that is the principle in the 1984 Act—he must be elected." That is the first point that we have conceded to the Government.

Secondly, we have said, "As far as presidents are concerned, we will concede that point to the Government." In any case, presidents are often lay members of the union. In relation to presidents we are saying, "We concede the point in the Bill that the president would have to be elected regardless of whether he has a vote on the executive." Surely to goodness the Government could at least allow trade unions that choose to appoint their general secretary, who does not have a vote on the executive, to continue to do so. It is an outrage that the Government will debar trade unions from appointing a general secretary who could be treated as a chief executive. After all, general secretaries have different roles in different unions.

This is a modest and reasonable amendment, in that it accepts what has already gone before in the 1984 Act, and goes further in that it will require the general secretary, to avoid having to be re-elected, not to have a vote on the executive committee. It also leaves the position as it stands in the Bill as it relates to the president.

That is why I hope that the Government will look carefully at the amendment. If they are not prepared to accept it tonight, they should at least be prepared to look again at the clause when the Bill is in the other place, because, quite simply, it is an insult to the intelligence of the House for the Government to suggest that such interference in the internal affairs of trade unions will influence the general conduct of industrial relations or somehow make trade unions more democratic.

That is nonsense. There is nothing undemocratic about a trade union electing lay members to run the union and enabling those elected members to appoint a chief executive or general secretary who is answerable to them.

11.15 pm

Mr. Winnick: Clause 12 is another piece of sheer nonsense and impertinence and an interference in the running of trade unions.

I speak from some experience as I have been involved for more than 30 years in a white collar trade union. I am a national officer of that organisation. Since that organisation came into being in 1890, the general secretary has always been appointed by the lay executive. The general secretary is regarded as the most senior administrative official. At no time has the person who has held the office of general secretary had a vote. That would have been inconceivable. The lay executive holds the authority in the union, and the general secretary, as a servant of the executive, is answerable to that body.

Because we are a democratic union, as are all trade unions, we decide our rules, regulations and policy at our annual conference. Every five years, at what we call the rules revision conference, which is part of our annual conference, we discuss changing and amending the rules. It is ironic that from time to time there have been suggestions that the general secretary should be elected. That inspiration has come from the ultra-Left, from those who would regard me as a timid reformist. The few revolutionaries in our number have gone to the rostrum and said that everyone should be elected, including the general secretary.

In the past few years, I have been the spokesman for the executive, and I have had to argue the case against that—without too much difficulty. I have never had any doubts that the conference would retain the position that it has held for many years. That is the position in my union.

Thus there is an alliance between those who could be described as revolutionaries and Conservative Thatcherites who believe that the position of general secretary should be subject to election. I argue as a democrat that each trade union should be able to decide for itself.

Some unions have always elected their general secretaries. In some trade unions the general secretary has a vote. However, in other unions such as in NALGO, in my union—APEX—in ASTMS and others, that has never been the case. Indeed, in my union, if the general secretary had the vote, there would have been a very strong case, which I would have supported, for that general secretary being elected. However, since he has never had the vote, and since it was inconceivable that he should have a vote on the executive, the large majority of the union never considered it appropriate that that position should be subject to election.

Apart from the general secretary, other people attend executive meetings. Despite the qualifications in clause 12, there may be court cases in which it is argued that somebody who is not a general secretary but who attends all or some meetings of the executive should be subject to election under clause 12. All kinds of complications and anomalies could arise.

Trade unions such as mine, which has always been run along democratic lines, are being lectured by a political party that is the least democratic that one could imagine. Sometimes I wonder which is the least democratic: the Communist party in the Soviet Union or the Conservative party in this country. The chairman of the Conservative party is not elected.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) referred to the fact that the Prime Minister was elected as leader of the Tory party in 1975. That is correct; I cannot dispute it. However, until 1965 the leader of the Tory party was not elected. It was only the late Mr. Iain Macleod and Mr. Humphry Berkeley—who is not "late"—who argued convincingly that the Conservative

[Mr. Winnick]

party ought to change its ways. It was not until just over 20 years ago that the Conservative party decided to elect its leader, yet it is lecturing us about what the trade unions should do.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Is it not possible to take that point further? The prime qualification for getting the job of chairman of the Conservative party in Scotland is not to be able to get elected anywhere else. The chief executive got the job only because he was defeated when he stood for re-election to this House. The chairman of the Conservative party in Scotland is a member of the other place, because he could not even get a candidature.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It would be unwise to go down that road.

Mr. Winnick: No, it would not be wise. Since I always take the advice of the Chair I should not dream of going down that road. However, I think that the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) has made a valid point.

It is not being suggested that town clerks should be elected, yet the chief executive of a local authority is in precisely the same position as the general secretary of a trade union, because he is not a voting member of the executive. That is another illustration of a totally non-democratic political party with a vast Commons majority dictating to trade unions that need no lectures in democracy from the Conservative party.

Mr. Allen: It is difficult to understand why a debate such as this is taking place. It was not until 1984 that intervention in the election of trade union executives was put on the statute book. However, we have almost become adjusted to the idea that we should argue about interference in the election of trade union executives rather than about the fact that we should be completely opposed to such interference.

The Trade Union Act 1984 stated that members of trade union executives should be elected every five years. We are now discussing a further rule change. There are 57 trade unions with over 10 million members affiliated to the TUC, and 48 of those unions will have to change their rules because of this latest Government imposition. One trade unionist out of 10 million will be able to take a trade union to court, assisted by the trade union harassment officer. He will be able to bring the whole process to a grinding halt, with financial assistance from the state. He will be able to hold his trade union over a barrel.

Trade union structures are to be completely overriden. Therefore, it is worth saying again that a great variety of trade unions, trade union procedures and trade union democracy has evolved over many years. To seek to impose one blueprint or plan on them is idiocy in the extreme. Unions have developed those procedures because they meet their needs democratically.

Some unions may wish to have a regional base to their elections because it is the most appropriate way to represent their members. That is not permitted under the 1984 Act. Other unions may want a powerful general secretary who has the authority of a direct election. Others, again, may feel that the role of a general secretary is more like that of a civil servant and that he should do what he is told by the union executive. Each union has developed its mechanism to suit its needs and industry. In this Bill the Government are imposing a blueprint which will sit idly on many trade unions.

Some trade unions feel that an appointed general secretary acts as a buffer to the immediate considerations that are necessary in an election. They perhaps take a longer, more objective view. We may or may not agree with that but it is the right of trade union members to make that decision for themselves. The legislation is removing that power from them.

One such example is NUPE. Its view is:

"Experience in unions where the General Secretary is required to stand for re-election at regular intervals suggests that there is a constant temptation to satisfy the wishes of active members, often at the expense of long term policy objectives, in order to assist their re-election."

We may not agree with that, but it is entirely consistent with NUPE which discusses its procedures every year at its conferences and executive meetings. It should decide for itself that that is the best way for it to pursue its objectives as a trade union.

The other argument is that this should be called the Scargill clause because of the Prime Minister being kept awake at night wondering how much more she can wring out of the Scargill factor and crucify the NUM, and deciding to pursue this objective because of one individual——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: And ballot-rigging in the NUM.

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Allen: I did not catch that comment.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I shall repeat it. I said, "And ballot-rigging in the NUM."

Mr. Allen: The hon. Lady, like many Conservative Members, is quick to use that phrase but slow to produce the evidence. If she has evidence of ballot-rigging in the Conservative party or a trade union, she should bring it to the notice of the appropriate authorities.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is customary, when hon. Members have evidence, to lay it on the table. That has been the precedent for many years. If the hon. Lady has any evidence to back her scurrilous, inaccurate and erroneous allegation she should lay it on the Table.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members are free to express themselves as they wish, in accordance with our Standing Orders.

Mr. Allen: Direct elections may well provide greater strength and direct authority to particular general secretaries in unions. Some unions have deliberately chosen to have a weak general secretary because they feel that the executive, itself directly elected, should have the power and authority. For that reason they may wish their general secretary to be more of a civil servant. Under this legislation many unions will be forced to employ and elect a more powerful general secretary against their wishes.

Another union, the CMA — the Communication Managers Association — currently has three paid officers, a general secretary, who acts as chief executive, a deputy general secretary and an assistant secretary. Those people are now faced with a choice. Either they opt out of their national executive almost completely or they stand for election and assume a far greater significance

within the structure of their trade union than has hitherto been the case. It should be for the union to decide that. We are seeing here something that we would not tolerate in any other sphere of social or political activity.

11.30 pm

In local government it would be absolute nonsense if the chief executive of a local authority put himself up for election each year or every other year and began to challenge the directly elected councillors and their political authority.

Similarly, perhaps the people who have written the speeches of the Secretary of State and the junior Ministers throughout the Committee — perhaps they are more powerful than the Secretary of State—should be put up for direct election.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I would ask the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) not to read newspapers in the House.

Mr. Haynes: Hang him upside down.

Mr. Allen: I do not know whether the fact that the hon. Gentleman was reading the Conservative party newspaper is a great compliment or a great insult.

The Secretary of State may well feel that it would be inappropriate for his permanent secretary or for the deputies to the permanent secretary to be directly elected. That is the system that is to be imposed on 48 trade unions whether they like it or not. That sits ill on the Bill.

The National Union of Insurance Workers has also been placed in difficulty. Given the time, I am drawing on just a few examples, but there are examples right the way down the list of TUC affiliates. I received a letter from Mr. Mortlock, the secretarial and research assistant of the National Union of Insurance Workers, who says:

"In February 1987 a new National Officer was appointed. The position had been widly advertised and attracted some 39 applicants, many of a very high standard. Had the appointment been subject to election it is inconceivable that a sensible choice could have been made from such a large selection."

We may have views on whether that is right or wrong, but the trade union took that decision. Yet that trade union is now to have a system imposed upon it that does not suit it and may not meet its needs.

The Law Society was a very useful source of information throughout the Committee stage and it raised another point that we took up strongly. A number of officers currently attend a national executive committee and speak and offer a view. Their unions will now have to decide whether those people, because they appear at the national executive, have to go out for a full ballot. That has caused grave concern throughout all trade unions and that is the object of the clause.

The clause seeks to sow confusion and turn active trade unionists into returning officers. Therefore, instead of looking after the conditions of their members and their health and safety, those trade unionists are forever filling out ballot forms and producing ever more convoluted efforts to meet the Government's requirements.

The Law Society expressed great concern that union legal officers might have to be put out for a national ballot. On clause 12(1)(b), the society says:

"we fear that it might be possible for a union's legal adviser to be considered to be giving advice to the Principal Executive Committee which is more than 'incidental' to the carrying out of its function and accordingly he would be caught by the provision requiring election."

I underline the fact that the trade union harassment officer — the trade union commissar — who has been appointed by the Government will do the dirty work of enforcing many of the provisions, will be there sitting on the back of every union executive committee, waiting for a slip-up and the opportunity to fund a vexatious litigant to ensure that the union toes the line.

Mr. Clelland: And who elects him?

Mr. Allen: No one puts that post out to national ballot. Exactly the opposite. That person must justify his existence by looking for cases. If there are only four or five cases a year, and the post will cost £1·5 million a year, there might be a Rayner review after a year and the post will be wound up. He will have to be cost-effective, so he will look for dissidents in the trade union movement.

The General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union has highlighted another difficulty. It is extremely worried about the effect on its executive because of the many people who attend its executive meetings and who may be trapped by the clause. How many of the following officers will have to submit themselves to national ballot: one national executive officer, one principal national officer, 10 national officers related to various industrial groups, three financial assistants, one research director, one head of communications, one personnel manager, one director of education, one legal officer, one health and safety officer, one pensions officer, and occasionally regional secretaries who are called in to discuss specific matters — Northern Ireland was one example?

More than 30 officers give occasional, frequent or regular advice to the national executive of the GMBATU. There is no assurance that any of them would escape the clause. In his letter to me, the Minister said:

"I can say I should be very surprised if they were to be caught by the new subsection . . . As you are aware if a particular case was disputed then ultimately, of course, it would be for the courts to decide the issue."

We all know who will come to the aid of litigious members in the courts — the trade union commissar whose appointment the House approved this evening.

That is another gross interference with the national executives of our trade unions. They have a marvellous tradition of democratic accountability that they have developed themselves, and they should be left alone to pursue that course. Conservative Members of Parliament should be the last people to lecture the trade unions on democracy.

Mr. Foot: It is outrageous that the House of Commons should devote its time to discussing this proposition. The more one hears about the Bill, the more insolent it seems that the Government should have dared to introduce it. It has been examined in Committee, and one would have thought that the Government might have shown a little grace and intelligence and given way to some of the representations that were made by my hon. Friends. But it is outrageous for them to continue, right up to Report stage, demanding that the House should lay down the detailed provisions for elections in trade unions. The Government should spend their time on a whole series of other matters. A Government who, as my hon. Friends have said, have few claims to democracy in many of their appointments, should not come forward with such a proposition.

[Mr. Foot]

Most unions have grown up and shaped and developed their forms of elections and the distribution of power between elected and non-elected officials in their organisations through their traditions. One might have thought that the Conservative party would have respected the traditions of organisations that go back for more than 100 years, and have been developing and shaping their organisations to suit their members throughout that time. But now this anti-trade union Government come along and demand that the unions adopt the uniform pattern that they want to enforce, with no exceptions. All unions must conform, and the Government do not give a fig for their traditions, preferring to force them to do things in the Government's way.

This is a disgusting piece of legislation. The previous measures, as my hon. Friends — especially my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who made a wonderful speech — said, were an insult to our democracy. This Bill is an insult to the intelligence of the House of Commons. I am sorry for the Minister, who has been left alone on the burning deck to defend this ridiculous proposal.

I hope that the Government will take the opportunity offered by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang), and accept his amendment gracefully. If they determine to go ahead without it, I look to the other place—I do not often look for intelligence there—for rescue from what is probably the most mean, petty, miserable, squalid little proposition yet put forward by this wretched Government. I hope that the House of Lords will throw it out, even if there are not enough independent Conservative Members in this House to do so tonight.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The clause raises several points that were brought home to me when I consulted some of the employers' organisations when the White Paper that preceded the Bill came out. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and other hon. Members said that employers were not sure whether the Government were right. They had supported the previous legislation, and felt that there was a case for the Government to step in and give the unions back to their members, but they were worried that, by going into such detail, the legislation, far from improving the relationship between management and employees, would aggravate it.

The provision on presidents was referred to earlier as the Scargill clause. I agree that some union practices, of which his was the most blatant example, are indefensible. I do not dispute the sincerity of people working in the trade union movement, but to listen to the impassioned speeches of some Labour Members, one would be forgiven for thinking that there had never been anything wrong with the British trade union movement, and that it had always acted in the best interests of the workers it sought to represent and of the wider community.

It is a legitimate concern of Government to establish a balance, but the employers' organisations were concerned that if this type of legislative detail was produced by the Government, they could hardly argue if different Governments in the future produced different forms of legislation on, for example—as I might wish—building participation and workers' rights into the system. Such organisations do not want such a detailed code imposed on them. They want to be given the freedom to work out for themselves how best to involve their employees in the decision-making process. If that is the view of the employers, and the Government seek to represent the employers, it is humbug to try to argue the merits of democracy on one side but the need not to intervene in detail on behalf of the other side.

Having listened to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) I should like to examine the details of the Labour amendment. As I understood it, the hon. Gentleman said that the position of president — the Scargill example — was conceded. His amendment proposes that a president should be treated as a voting member, and should be elected, but that that should not be the case for general secretaries who may be appointed by the executive. I agree very much with that point and the arguments that have been pressed by other hon. Members, but I am slightly concerned that the amendment might go a little too far the other way.

The argument is clear. The executive is elected and chooses to appoint a general secretary as the chief executive of the union. It is therefore not appropriate that the person appointed by the elected executive should have to be elected. That seems to be reasonable. The problem is that, because no time scale is set, it appears that a general secretary would be appointed without term, for a 10-year term, or for life under the Labour party's proposals.

As we have seen in the past, in those circumstances a general secretary can achieve an extremely powerful position in that union. If there is no provision for review, re-election or reappointment, that general secretary might effectively be in a more powerful position than the members of the executive, who are elected, depending to some extent on the terms of his original appointment.

11.45 pm

Mr. Winnick: While I see the point that the hon. Gentleman is trying to develop, surely the same could apply to a permanent civil servant who holds a senior position. The permanent secretary to a Ministry could influence his Minister. In that case it is the fault of the Minister, who is not strong-willed enough to resist the pressures. It is the same with a trade union. If the lay executive is doing the job to which it was elected, it will ensure that the general secretary is answerable to that executive. It will not allow itself to be dictated to by any individual who has been appointed by it.

Mr. Bruce: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, which I am trying to probe. It is a matter of concern to me that, unintentionally, we might raise the role of the general secretary to a higher level.

I take the point that a democratically elected executive, which is subject to review every five years, should be strong enough to take appropriate action, but given that all the members of the executive are up for re-election every five years, there is a case for suggesting that the general secretary should similarly be reappointed every five years. I should prefer that, and it seems reasonable.

I accept the force of the argument of the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) that it is incredible that we are debating the detailed mechanisms of trade unions when in all sorts of other areas the Government are constantly lecturing hon. Members on both sides of the House about the need not to have such legalistic meddling by central Government. It seems that a double standard is being applied.

The Government are entering an area where they are interfering in details, the consequences of which are so detailed that they cannot be predicted. We have had the example of the Ford ballot. That may be fair, and the Government may sit back and say, "Well, we asked for democracy and we got democracy." But it is ironic that under systems that have been previously worked out, Ford workers might not now be on strike. The consequences of the Government's own legislation have accelerated a full-scale national strike.

One of the dangers of meddling in such detail is that the consequences cannot be predicted. While I can look at the matter objectively and say, "If we are to legislate for arrangements in trade unions, let us do it consistently," I accept the argument that we should not do it.

I predict that the Bill will do more harm than good to industrial relations. Having started out on a course that was popular, and in which in many respects they were right, the Government are going too far down the wrong road. They will do damage where previously they might have done some good.

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) made it abundantly clear that he did not like this clause. He felt that it was an outrageous interference. He said that he had tried to introduce amendments, which, while dealing with matters of which he did not approve, nevertheless tried to live within the clause. That was certainly the way in which we took his amendment, and I must disappoint him by saying that we cannot accept it. However, I concede that it was a constructive attempt to deal with something that he does not like.

With regard to the 1984 legislation, the principle that guided the Government was that those holding the most senior positions in the trade union movement should be responsive to their unions. We felt it appropriate that they should stand for election, and one can take a view of whether the process of election is a good way of making people accountable to those whom they choose to serve. That argument has raged during the debate, and I am sure that it did in 1984.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East reminded us that the argument has moved on because other developments have made it possible for people to play a key role and have a major say in the affairs of a union, while at the same time not having a vote. The hon. Gentleman said, as did some of his hon. Friends, that there are examples of union leaders laying down their vote. I do not think that anyone would suggest for one moment that their influence within the union has diminished.

If one accepts — the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East certainly does not — that the 1984 legislation was right, in the light of developments it seems to us that the legislation should be uplifted.

One aspect of the clause that has caused concern — particularly to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), but I am not sure whether he was concerned that the legislation is vague or far-reaching — was the idea that under what will be section 6A(b) the requirement will extend to people who,

"under the rules or practice of the union, attend and speak at some or all of the meetings of that committee otherwise than for the purpose of providing the committee with factual information or with technical or professional advice with respect to matters incidental to the carrying out by the committee of its functions."

On a number of occasions in Committee I was accused of framing or lending my support to legislation that lawyers will have a jolly time interpreting for people. Some legislation is easier than others but that provision is perfectly plain. One may not agree with the principle that it enshrines, but the words that it uses are as plain as one could expect to find on a statute. If one is playing a part in the deliberations of a trade union — not giving the information that a lawyer might, that it can go away, chew over and decide policy in respect of, but taking part in the policy-making process of a trade union — we say that it is right, as it was in 1984, that a person in that, position should be subject to election.

Mr. Allen: If the system is so good that it must be applied to trade unions, to what other organisations does the Minister suggest it should be applied?

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman may have noticed that I was addressing his hon. Friend's comments one after the other, but if he wants to jump the queue I shall allow him to do so.

The hon. Gentleman is trying to make the point that he has made a number of times in Committee. He may feel, on reflection, that it is not a terribly good one, but it is that, if it is good enough for the trade union movement, why is it not good enough for the Conservative party? All that I would say, without a trace of irony, is that if the hon. Gentleman cannot tell the difference between a trade union and a political party, I feel for him. There is a difference, which is apparent to his hon. Friends — *[Interruption.]* The ripples of laughter that greeted that statement suggest that his hon. Friends realise that fact. The hon. Gentleman should be able to understand the difference between the two.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North was concerned that the legislation might not be clear enough in respect of people turning up at meetings. I believe that the provision is as clear as it can be and enshrines the principle that a person taking part in policy-making decisions should be prepared to stand for election.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) made the point in a number of ways that it would be implausible for the chief executive — a mere appointee — to be required to run for election. He suggested that on that basis a permanent secretary might also be expected to run for election. If the hon. Gentleman's logic were correct, which it is not, it would suggest that all trade union appointees spend their time scratching away with their quills in the back room, never seeing the light of day.

No doubt there are some who fit that description, but some appointed general secretaries have the highest profile in their unions and play a crucial part in directing policy. I see that the hon. Gentleman agrees with that, even though some of his hon. Friends do not, so he will appreciate at once that the mere fact of being an appointee does not mean that the person concerned can be compared with a mere chief executive or a mere permanent secretary. Again, the hon. Gentleman has pushed the analogy too far.

Mr. Allen: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Nicholls: I have given way to the hon. Gentleman so often in the past few weeks that I may as well allow him one last crack of the whip.

Mr. Allen: If the Minister is not prepared to concede that permanent secretaries should be elected, surely the

[Mr. Allen]

person who sits in at Cabinet meetings, and gives far more than factual and technical advice — the Cabinet Secretary, formerly Sir Robert Armstrong—would be a prime candidate.

Mr. Nicholls: If one thing unites the hon. Gentleman and myself, it is the fact that neither of us has any experience of Cabinet government. However, if he discusses the subject with those of his right hon. and hon. Friends who are old enough to remember proceedings in the Labour Cabinet, he will appreciate that the Cabinet Secretary's role does not fit the analogy that he seeks to make.

It is always a pleasure to reply to a debate in which the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) has participated, as he speaks from a vast range of experience. His speech on this occasion seemed to centre around the proposition that the Government's proposals were outrageous and disgusting, and similar hyperbole. To Conservative Members, it is curious to hear the right hon. Gentleman describe in those terms the extension of the democratic process of election. One may argue about whether it is a good idea in the circumstances, but to describe a provision enabling people to vote for those who are to lead their union as an outrageous proposition sounded very much like a voice from the past. Without wishing to be unnecessarily cruel to the right hon. Gentleman, it did not even sound like a voice from the recent past.

Mr. Cryer: If the Minister is so dedicated to the spread of elections, why not start by having the chairman of the Conservative party elected?

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman obviously was not all there a few moments ago when I replied to that point as expressed by his hon. Friend the Member for Notthingham, North. If the hon. Gentleman cannot see the difference between a trade union and a political party, it would take someone with vastly greater powers of persuasion than mine to make any dent in his view.

My final point should unite the whole House. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) sounded at first as though he was about to agree with the Government, then as though he was about to agree with the Labour party and in the end as though he did not even agree with himself. That is the kind of leadership that one expects from the element that he represents and was no doubt only to be expected, bearing in mind that the hon. Gentleman is here partly in the place of the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith).

In conclusion, this is one of those issues on which one has to make up one's mind on a point of principle and decide where one stands. On that basis, I am afraid that the House will have to divide to decide where it stands.

12 midnight

Mr. Strang: The Minister's reply is unacceptable, and in some respects a step back from what was said in Committee. The trade unions are democratic, independent organisations, and that is the way that it should be in our society. It is a monstrous intrusion in their internal affairs to seek to lay down a particular pattern of their officers.

New section 6A(b) is not clear and there is no doubt —this, again, came out clearly in Committee — that many trade unions genuinely do not know which officers are covered by it and which are not. It is not simply a question whether they intend to participate in the committee. The wording is much more complicated than that. For those reasons, I ask my hon. Friends to vote for the amendment. Clause 12 is an outrageous and unjustified imposition on any trade union, and it should never have come before us.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 187, Noes 246.

Division No. 170] [12 midnight

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Foster, Derek
Allen, Graham	Foulkes, George
Anderson, Donald	Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Galbraith, Samuel
Armstrong, Ms Hilary	Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	George, Bruce
Ashton, Joe	Godman, Dr Norman A.
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Golding, Mrs Llin
Barron, Kevin	Gordon, Ms Mildred
Battle, John	Graham, Thomas
Beckett, Margaret	Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Beggs, Roy	Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Bell, Stuart	Grocott, Bruce
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Hardy, Peter
Bermingham, Gerald	Harman, Ms Harriet
Bidwell, Sydney	Haynes, Frank
Blunkett, David	Heffer, Eric S.
Boateng, Paul	Henderson, Douglas
Boyes, Roland	Hinchliffe, David
Bradley, Keith	Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Holland, Stuart
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*	Home Robertson, John
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*	Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*	Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Buchan, Norman	Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Buckley, George	Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Caborn, Richard	Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Callaghan, Jim	Illsley, Eric
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Ingram, Adam
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*	Janner, Greville
Campbell-Savours, D. N.	John, Brynmor
Canavan, Dennis	Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*	Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*	Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*	Lambie, David
Clay, Bob	Lamond, James
Clelland, David	Leighton, Ron
Clwyd, Mrs Ann	Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Cohen, Harry	Lewis, Terry
Coleman, Donald	Litherland, Robert
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*	Livingstone, Ken
Corbett, Robin	Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Cousins, Jim	Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Cox, Tom	McAllion, John
Crowther, Stan	McAvoy, Tom
Cryer, Bob	McCartney, Ian
Cummings, J.	Macdonald, Calum
Cunliffe, Lawrence	McFall, John
Dalyell, Tam	McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Darling, Alastair	McKelvey, William
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*	McLeish, Henry
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*	McNamara, Kevin
Dewar, Donald	McTaggart, Bob
Dixon, Don	Madden, Max
Dobson, Frank	Mahon, Mrs Alice
Doran, Frank	Marek, Dr John
Duffy, A. E. P.	Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Dunnachie, James	Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Eadie, Alexander	Martlew, Eric
Fatchett, Derek	Maxton, John
Faulds, Andrew	Meacher, Michael
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*	Meale, Alan
Flannery, Martin	Michael, Alun
Flynn, Paul	Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Foot, Rt Hon Michael	Millan, Rt Hon Bruce

Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, John
Richardson, Ms Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'da E)*
Snape, Peter
Steinberg, Gerald
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Anthony
Wray, James
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Cook and
Mr. Allen Adams.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Favell, Tony
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heyhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Timothy
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Miss E. *(Devon W)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen Dorrell and
Mr. David Maclean.

the person attempting to purchase a weapon or weapons is not

Question accordingly negatived.

Further consideration of the Bill adjourned.—*[Mr. Ryder.]*

Bill to be further considered this day.

Police, Fire and Civil Defence Authorities

12.12 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): I beg to move,

That the draft Local Government Act 1985 (Police and Fire and Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 28th January, be approved.

The draft order sets the maximum precepts that can be levied for the financial year 1988-89 by the joint police and joint fire and civil defence authorities with whom it has not been possible to come to an agreement over their precepts. Hon. Members with long memories will recall that a similar order was made for 1986-87. It was then debated at some considerable length.

I hope that the House will not think that it is necessary to debate this order at quite such length. We were spared that task for the current financial year by the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1987, which determined the expenditure levels for the authorities and their precepts by reference to a formula. In total, the expenditure levels for the police authorities for 1988-89, at £421 million, represent a 6·2 per cent. increase over the levels that were set by the formula for 1987-88. The corresponding figure for the fire and civil defence authorities is £371 million—a 5·1 per cent. increase over the figure for 1987-88.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): During the next few minutes, will my hon. Friend explain to the House and to the ratepayers of West Yorkshire why those ratepayers have to pay so much more than the rest of the country for their fire authority? In West Yorkshire the budget met by grant is 26·98 per cent., whereas on Merseyside it is 58·27 per cent. I have great difficulty explaining that to my constituents and it would help if my hon. Friend could explain it to me.

Mr. Patten: Perhaps I may pick up that point now to save my hon. Friend from having to listen to the whole of my speech. The position in West Yorkshire arises because under the present system authorities' grant settlement depends on their grant-related expenditure assessment, their rateable value resources and their expenditure. That is why the West Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority's grant entitlement next year is different from that for 1987-88. The difference is equal to about £1·4 million—the equivalent of a 0·6p rate.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: Indeed. West Yorkshire is here in force.

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Minister take it from me that West Yorkshire receives the lowest grant per head of population and has to levy the highest precept of any county? There is a substantial problem with West Yorkshire and I hope that the Minister will give the matter special consideration.

Mr. Patten: Of course I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, and this is the last occasion on which we shall debate an order such as this. The hon. Gentleman's point, to which we listened carefully, points to his need to support the Local Government Bill, which will enable us to sort out many of the problems surrounding the relationship between grant-related

expenditure and expenditure levels, and I look for the hon. Gentleman's support in future years. As hon. Members may be aware——

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: Yes, indeed. There is no need to point.

Mr. Fatchett: I only pointed because the Minister seemed lost in his brief and I thought that it might be useful to remind him that the House was still sitting.

Will the hon. Gentleman respond to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) that the difficulty relates to this year rather than to subsequent years? It does not relate to the Local Government Bill. What does the Minister propose to do for West Yorkshire this year, because it is this year that is crucial to the ratepayers of West Yorkshire and to the service that is provided?

Mr. Patten: I shall forgive the hon. Gentleman for his personal remarks; I do not hold any personal animosity against him. I can tell him exactly what we are doing this year. The maximum precept this year, which is 15·72p, will allow for an increase of some 7·7 per cent. over West Yorkshire's expected expenditure for 1987-88. We think that that is a reasonable level of provision. As hon. Members may expect, there are variations in the percentage——

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: West Yorkshire is exciting a lot of interest.

Mr. Corbett: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett). He prayed in aid the 15·72p precept. Is not that a cut of nearly 20 per cent. in the figure for the current year?

Mr. Patten: No, Sir. In no way is it a cut. Between 1986-87 and 1988-89 there has been an overall increase of 22·1 per cent. in the levels of expenditure allowable. That is a substantial increase in public expenditure by anyone's standards and the authority should be able to manage within that provision.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield) *rose*——

Mr. Patten: Well, I should like to make a little progress——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. One at a time. The Minister has the Floor at the moment.

Mr. Patten: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) first.

Mr. McCartney: I thank the Minister for giving way. He has been rather economical with the truth. Since 1986 the Association of Metropolitan Authorities has been trying to resolve the problems of the financing of West Yorkshire. The reality is that this year, for example, Merseyside, which is commensurate with West Yorkshire, has a percentage of GREA over maximum expenditure limits of 94·1 per cent. while West Yorkshire's is 72·7 per cent. and Merseyside's maximum precept is 8·22p while West Yorkshire's is 13·41p. Can the Minister explain why it has taken since June 1986 until last Monday for the Minister to meet the AMA to consider that matter and why, when he was meeting that body, he had already made the decision in relation to West Yorkshire?

Mr. Patten: When the delegation met my noble Friend Lord Ferrers in another place, they were able to have a full discussion about the recommendations made by the AMA. The hon. Gentleman cannot fly in the face of the fact that there is a 22·1 per cent. increase in the level of expenditure but in 1986-87—*[Interruption.]*

Mrs. Peacock: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Patten: Yes, but I am trying to finish my sentence. —and the proposed amount for 1988-89 as listed in the order itself—*[Interruption.]*—I give way to my hon. Friend.

Mrs. Peacock: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way yet again. My concern is not about the increase in expenditure but about what the Government are going to do about the grant. It is the basic grant that is the problem and not the increase in expenditure.

Mr. Patten: That is not a matter for me but for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. *[Interruption.]* That is a matter of fact.

As hon. Members are aware, there are considerable variations in the percentage increases for each authority.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the robust and wholly technically correct way in which he is seeking to defend the position. However, is he not aware that in relation to the fire precept and the fire expenditure in West Yorkshire there has been a long-standing disagreement between my hon. Friend's Department and the local fire authority? If it was purely a matter for our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, would my hon. Friend be prepared to advise our right hon. Friend on what he would wish to see for the fire expenditure—*[Interruption.]*—because this is a crucial issue?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) was the Minister of State, Home Office who made a most moving and passionate speech in favour of similar provisions in 1986, which I have read and reread carefully. I am sure that my hon. Friend appreciates that this is an issue for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. However, my right hon. Friend has authorised me to say that he is always prepared to consider methodological suggestions about changes to the grant-related expenditure for West Yorkshire in this respect at any time.

Indeed, there is a forum—the grants working group of the consultative council on local government finance —where proposals for changes can be tabled either by a local authority or by the Department of the Environment. The intention is that the development work on the fire grant-related expenditure assessment should be taken forward in the coming months. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey regards that as an adequate answer to his direct question—*[Interruption.]* Does he not?

Sir Giles Shaw: My hon. Friend made a perfectly adequate suggestion. It is therefore up to those in West Yorkshire who wish to argue that case, to use it on the

[Sir Giles Shaw]

understanding of my hon. Friend's suggestion that there is room for discussion of the principle of grant-related expenditure within that forum.

Mr. Patten: I agree with all that my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey has said.

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): I have heard enough about West Yorkshire. I should like to deal with South Yorkshire. We have only a small pot of gold, but it is £500,000 light. It seems to have been lost between the Department of the Environment and the Home Office. Will my hon. Friend explain where that money has gone, or if it was ever there?

Mr. Patten: Indeed, it would have been extremely careless of us to have mislaid £500,000. Even by my standards that is more than small change——

Mr. McCartney: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: May I answer my hon. Friend's question before giving way?

The expenditure implied by the 1988-89 precept for South Yorkshire is 6 per cent. more than this year's expenditure. That represents a hefty 19 per cent. increase over the past two years. Those increases are significantly more than the level of inflation. That certainly will allow for service development in South Yorkshire to continue.

I shall give way for the second and last time to the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney). I am sure that he will understand that I am anxious to make some progress.

Mr. McCartney: Is the Minister aware that Lord Ferrers had a meeting about South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and Merseyside last week, and the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment pulled out at the last moment for the second time? Apologies had to be made for the fact that he was not there to put the case for the Department of the Environment.

Has not the Home Office been smoked out by the Department of the Environment? The promises to sort out this matter in regard to Yorkshire have not been kept. The Department of the Environment is turning the screw. The position is unacceptable and that is why the Minister did not attend the meeting with Lord Ferrers last week.

Mr. Patten: That is not true. The Home Office and the Department of the Environment speak with one voice on these issues. The amounts of money that are available are reflected in the order, to which I shall make another attempt to return.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have two points of order and the first is——

Madam Deputy Speaker: I shall take them one at a time.

Mr. Hardy: From the start of the debate it has been obvious that there is considerable confusion and concern on both sides of the House. One and a half hours is grossly inadequate to protect the interests of the House and the various regions of Britain represented in the debate. Secondly, despite the claims that Ministers at the Home Office and the Department of the Environment speak with one voice, the element of confusion in South Yorkshire, and presumably, elsewhere suggests that the appropriate Minister from the Department of the Environment should be present to provide information that many hon. Members have sought already, and which other hon. Members certainly will be seeking.

Madam Deputy Speaker: In answer to the first point of order, the time allocated for this measure has nothing to do with the Chair. In reply to the second point of order, I very much regret the fact that there is confusion among hon. Members from Yorkshire, as I, too, come from Yorkshire. Perhaps we can now get on.

Mr. Patten: I entirely agree. I intend to follow your injunction, Madam Deputy Speaker, and get on with it.

As hon. Members may expect, there are variations in the percentage increases for each authority. We should expect that, as they reflect their particular circumstances. However, we are satisfied that, making proper allowance for efficiency, the expenditure levels for each of the police authorities will enable them to maintain and improve present levels of service. That also applies to the fire and civil defence authorities.

Having determined the expenditure levels, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has set maximum precepts. These are derived from the expenditure levels that have been decided upon, together with the authorities' entitlement to block grant under the rate support grant settlement for 1988-89 and the rateable values for each area. My right hon. Friend notified all the authorities in December of the maximum precepts that he was about to set. The authorities were given until the middle of January to let my right hon. Friend know whether they accepted the proposed maxima.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Many Conservative Members will be appalled to hear that there has been an increase in expenditure of 22 per cent. over the last two years. Is it not time that we refreshed our memories about section 42 of the Local Government Act 1985? It allowed the Secretary of State to return the functions to the metropolitan boroughs and to abolish the fire, police and transport authorities that are turning themselves into mini-empires. They are not far short of the mini-empires that the metropolitan county councils became. Will my hon. Friend remind our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment of that fact?

Mr. Patten: I thank my hon. Friend for what he has said. I shall draw his trenchant remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

I should emphasise that we are not specifying what should be the precept—only the maximum amount that an authority can levy. They are able—indeed, some authorities have done so—to precept at a considerably lower level than the maximum because they have made efficiency gains that permit them to so to do. Thereafter, the authority is free to determine how to spend the money at its disposal. The precept simply limits the amount that can be raised from the ratepayer. Of the 13 authorities, six—Merseyside and South Yorkshire police and Greater Manchester, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands and London fire and civil defence—accepted the proposed maxima. We have welcomed that fact.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The Minister can see that there are very strong feelings on both sides of the

House. The West Yorkshire fire authority has made it clear that the precept will not allow it to maintain the standards of service that the Home Office lays down and that some areas of West Yorkshire cannot meet those criteria.

Mr. Patten: I made it clear in my response to the two interventions by my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) that considerably increased amounts of money are available. Exactly the same accusations about the end of the world coming shortly to the fire service were made in the 1986 debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey, who was then Minister of State, Home Office, made it clear that in his view the provision would be more than adequate. The levels of service in West Yorkshire have improved during the last two years. My hon. Friend's prediction, made with characteristic foresight, can be banked upon completely. There is no evidence for what the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) says.

The remaining seven authorities with which we are concerned did not accept the proposed maxima and presented arguments about the levels of their precepts. Those arguments have been expressed during this debate. Four of the authorities requested meetings. That meeting took place with Lord Ferrers, at which they expressed their anxieties about the level of the precept. Some of the authorities at that meeting had sent deputations earlier in support of their redetermination applications.

My right hon. Friend was not persuaded that there was sufficient grounds for increasing the maximum precepts for five of them. However, he was satisfied that two authorities, Northumbria police and Merseyside fire, required an increase in the precept. Unfortunately, the two authorities felt unable to accept the increased maximum and together with the five authorities they are included in the schedule to the order, which I commend to the House.

12.35 am

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): With so many of the Minister's hon. Friends at his throat, he will not be surprised if my right hon. and hon. Friends want to take part in the exercise.

The order and, indeed, the Minister's speech demonstrate the Government's bogus claims that the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils would make police, fire and civil defence authorities more autonomous. Quite the reverse has happened and the noose of central Government and Whitehall has tightened around their necks. Now it is the Home Secretary, aided and abetted by the Secretary of State for the Environment through the grant-related expenditure assessments, who in reality determines the levels of police cover and how public safety is safeguarded through the fire and civil defence authorities.

The Government determine the number of pairs of boots that police officers wear on the streets and the number of fire engines and fire officers, not against proven need, but against cash limits. That is the point and there is no good the Minister saying that that is not true because he is deciding half of it and his right hon. Friend at the Department of the Environment is deciding the other half.

Right around the police, fire and civil defence authorities there are complaints because, although there are increases of between 2·7 per cent. and 10·4 per cent. in spending levels, they mask substantial differences in what authorities can levy. The Greater Manchester police authority, for example, has a cut of 13·9 per cent., Northumbria police authority a cut of 2 per cent. and the West Yorkshire police authority a cut of 19·3 per cent.

Can the Minister assure the House that those differences, especially where there are cuts, are because the crime rate has fallen so dramatically that less now needs to be spent on preventing and detecting crime? He need not answer that, because he knows, as well as I do, that under this Government inexorably year on year the crime rate not only in the capital but throughout the country has increased. Yet this is the period in which the Government choose to say to police authorities, "We know best. You cannot spend what you locally decide needs to be spent to give proper defence to people on the streets and in their homes."

Councillor Keith Wilson, chairman of West Yorkshire police authority says:

"the present precept reduction in 1988-89 can only be achieved by utilising a substantial proportion of the West Yorkshire Police Authority's balances, thereby jeopardising the development of the service for which the Home Secretary himself is pressing."

The Minister cannot have it both ways. He makes requests of police authorities to improve their service and they want to do that in the interests of the people whom they serve, but the Minister, aided by the Department of the Environment, denies them the cash resources with which to do it.

Councillor George Gill, chairman of the Northumbria police authority, says that the cash it is allowed to spend

"falls short of the amount that the police authority consider necessary for the chief constable to provide an adequate and efficient level of policing."

Will the Minister stand at the Dispatch Box and say that he knows better than the chief constable? I hope that he will not dare. They are dangerous words and again demonstrate the hollowness of the Government's repeated claims to provide all the resources needed to combat rising crime.

The West Midlands police authority has had a 10 per cent. increase in what it can spend and its precept has risen by 14·5 per cent. How has that good news gone down with the chief constable and that police authority? The police authority states that the spend

"does not cover existing approved policies and will require a cut-back of some £1·37 million in gross expenditure terms in 1988-89 which will involve deferring such schemes, undertaken at the behest of the Home Office, as the introduction of administrative support units, the crime information system and the civilianisation programme."

There is not much joy in that, especially as what the authority is allowed to spend takes no account of its outstanding request for an extra 350 police officers and 25 traffic wardens. That information must be set against the background of an alarming rise of 109 per cent. in reported crime in Birmingham and the west midlands between 1975 and 1986, with a 276 per cent. rise in robberies, a 100 per cent. rise in woundings and a 147 per cent. rise in burglaries. However, the Minister stands at the Dispatch Box and says that he and his right hon. Friend know better than the West Midlands police authority.

Why does the Minister deny to that and other police authorities the cash to pay for increases in manpower that their experience, knowledge and sense tell them are needed if our streets and homes are to be made safe again? How

[Mr. Robin Corbett]

is it that Government and Whitehall know best? They do not, but they override those who do and they are seemingly careless about the consequences.

Ministers have been all too eager to chastise Labour-elected councils that have sometimes appeared unfriendly towards the police. Now it is the Goverment who are anti-police by denying the manpower and resources that the police authorities need if they are to stand even a slight chance of reducing the crime wave.

In London in the past three years the London Boroughs Association, the Association of London Authorities and the Outer London Districts Metropolitan Police Consultative Association have jointly, in spite of political differences, criticised the Government for underfunding and for the way in which the precept is calculated and its size.

The mysteries of the police precept are compounded by those for the fire and civil defence authorities. I understand that one of the bases on which the precepts are calculated is population — of course, other factors are also taken into account. Can the Minister tell the House why it is claimed that West Yorkshire can get by on a precept of £3·88 per head of population while South Yorkshire has £5·51, Tyne and Wear £7·57 and Merseyside £11·38? What is the explanation for such wide disparities of treatment? One might have thought that the West Midlands, which is given £4·81 per head of the population might, as the largest fire and civil defence authority outside of London, needed more than South Yorkshire. But it is not need that comes into the reckoning. The cash limits override the need and proper levels of public safety.

After the horrors of the King's Cross fire, Zeebrugge and other events, Ministers cannot get to the Dispatch Box quickly enough to praise the bravery and skill of the fire service. However, in reality, that service is all too often run on a shoe string.

The Labour party believes that decisions about local police, fire and civil defence services are best taken locally, preferably by councillors accountable to those who elected them. The Government claim the same of the poll tax, but given the chance to put their claim into practice for the fire, police and civil defence services, they do exactly the opposite.

Mr. John Patten: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that a future Labour Government would give central Government to local authorities without any control, so that they could spend what they wanted?

Mr. Corbett: I understand why the Minister jibs at what I am saying, because for the past eight or nine years he and his right hon. Friends, including the Prime Minister, have said, "If we need more resources to combat crime, they will be made available." The Prime Minister loses no time going on radio and television to say that, but when it comes to orders like this one, the Government scrimshank.

Mr. Patten: Answer my question.

Mr. Corbett: It is not for me to answer the Minister's question. We are debating an order laid by the Government. The incoming Labour Government will ensure that police, fire and civil defence authorities get the money that they need to provide proper public safety in their areas. That is more than the Minister can say.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): Will the next Labour Government also ensure that all Labour-controlled authorities support neighbourhood watch?

Mr. Corbett: If the hon. Gentleman can give me an example of a Labour-controlled authority that does not now support neighbourhood watch schemes, I should be interested to hear from him. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about Manchester?"] That is not true of Manchester; I said "now". In the west midlands, Labour authorities, like all other authorities in the area, wholly support such schemes. The hon. Gentleman had better be careful about this.

Neighbourhood watch schemes have consequences in terms of police manpower. Unless the chief constable in the west midlands gets the 350 extra officers whom he needs this year, the neighbourhood watch schemes in that area will be no more than signs on lamp posts because there will not be enough policemen to make them effective.

In many areas of England and Wales, fire authorities must make cuts in manpower and cover, equipment is taking longer to replace and the purchase of modern, life-saving equipment is being delayed. If that is worrying enough in the context of the usual, although serious, run of fires in homes and industry, how much more important is it in the context of the Government's so-called civil defence policies? They are not even prepared properly to fund that sham.

People demand and expect adequate public safety cover from our police, fire and civil defence authorities. The Government have made too many police forces unable to provide the service that they wish to provide, and that they know needs to be provided. People have a right to a direct say in the services that are needed for the areas in which they live. The Government deny both to local people, and that is why the Opposition will vote against the order.

12.49 am

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): A moment ago I drew to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister the provisions of section 42 of the Local Government Act 1985, which allows the Secretary of State for the Environment to reorganise the fire and police authorities after consultation. It is now two years since the abolition of the metropolitan counties, and I suggest that the time has now come for the Secretary of State to consult and decide whether it is necessary to continue those authorities in their present forms.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) will recall that, during the proceedings of the Committee that debated the abolition of the metropolitan counties, many hon. Members were concerned about the continuity of the police and fire authorities. Many members of the Committee suggested that the time had come to sweep away those authorities and return their functions to the metropolitan borough councils that had constituted the metropolitan counties.

My constituency has little in common with Bolton, Bury, Oldham or Rochdale: far better to return the police and the fire brigades to the communities they serve. The only connection that my constituency has with police headquarters at Salford is the telephone exchange. Every telephone call goes through Salford, returns to Stockport and gets lost on the way. It would be far better if everything went directly to the police who serve the community; the same is true of the fire brigade.

We have heard about a 20 per cent. increase over the past two years. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister can

tell us what the increases over the past three years—since the abolition of the metropolitan counties—have been.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East) *rose*—

Mr. Favell: Over the past three or four days, the Government have had the good sense to see that ILEA should be abolished. ILEA is not dissimilar to the fire and police authorities. Let us sweep them away now and return them to the communities that they serve.

12.52 am

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I want briefly to discuss the South Yorkshire fire service, which the Minister knows well. I also want to correct one or two things that he said.

The Minister said that the Home Office and the Department of the Environment speak with one voice, but it appears that the voice is that of the Secretary of State for the Environment. The Minister talks like him when discussing facts and figures, but whatever facts or figures he reels out will not make up for the lack of fire cover in South and West Yorkshire.

The Minister's talk about using balances is ironic. Not so long ago, after the severe damage caused by the gales, the Secretary of State for the Environment took authorities to task for not having balances with which to cope with emergencies. Yet that is how the fire services use their balances—for contingencies. If two machines come off the road, the balances are there to be used to put them right.

It is now three years since we tried to convince the Government of the growing crisis in the South Yorkshire fire service. Statistics are of no use; the facts are there to be seen. South Yorkshire is already below the manpower requirements asked for by the Home Office. According to the standards recently laid down by the Home Office, the area needs 1,114 men, but the service does not have them. So the Minister, through the precept, is saying that it will have still fewer men, because the authority will not be able to replace losses incurred through natural wastage over the coming months. This precept will mean its having only 1,000 men, and that will mean that stations will close. They cannot be kept open without men to operate them.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): My hon. Friend's constituency is in South Yorkshire and is similar to mine. Does he share my concern that every six or 12 months there has been a squeeze on rural part-time staff at fire stations, such as in Kiveton Park in my constituency? The stations are constantly under threat. Anyone who has any sense of geography will realise that if they are taken away, fire tenders will have to travel miles through country lanes to reach the villages that now have stations. People are deeply concerned about the threat to the South Yorkshire fire service.

Mr. McKay: Ministers do not understand that sometimes four tenders are needed on the first call-out. Each area has a set number of machines that must turn out. When the machines go out, they have, not six, not five and sometimes not four, but three men. That is dangerous, because the machines are not adequately manned.

Because of the lack of finance, 27 people who have been recruited, and who are waiting to take over as a result of natural wastage, cannot be trained as there is no money to put them through the training school. If there was, the training personnel would not be there to train them, because they have to make up for the manpower loss in stations that are already undermanned.

The appliance turnout time is extended. I do not know whether the Minister realises what that means. At Hood Green, a house was completely gutted in four minutes. That is the maximum turnout time for such a house. For polyurethane, which I understand we are getting rid of, the turnout time is six minutes. If those turnout times are increased, one is increasing, not the danger to property, but the danger to life. That is what the fire service is all about.

The firemen are excellent. They could not be matched anywhere in the world, but there will come a time when they will say, "What is it all about? What have we done to deserve this? Our training and manpower are going through the roof." What about the fire service inspections? In South Yorkshire, fire service certificates are not being given out because those inspections are not being done. Those who carry out the inspections have to man the machines. That is what is happening in South Yorkshire, and it is time that the Minister realised it.

Mr. John Patten: I am listening with great care to what the hon. Gentleman is saying, because he speaks with greater knowledge of South Yorkshire than I have. He will appreciate that. Does he agree that the substantial increase of just under 20 per cent. in expenditure over the past two years can in no way be represented as a cut or diminution of service available to South Yorkshire? That is flying in the face of reality.

Mr. McKay: It is not flying in the face of reality. The Minister should forget his facts and figures, come to South Yorkshire with someone from the Department of the Environment, and look at the books and the stations. If they think that they can do better, they should advise on how it should be done. If they do not think so, they should put on the table the money that should be there.

Mr. Patten: Let me respond to the hon. Gentleman immediately. I am sure that my noble Friend Lord Ferrers, who has ministerial responsibility for the fire service, will be delighted to work with the South Yorkshire board to try to find ways in which greater efficiency in the service could contribute to available fire cover in the area. It is not just a matter of additional money: it is a matter of making the best possible use of the money that is available. The hon. Gentleman has not mentioned that.

Mr. McKay: I was a member of the West Riding fire service for about 14 years, as a retained fireman. I know the area, the turnout, and the number of machines that are needed. Believe me, the Government are undermanning an excellent fire service. All that I am saying to the Minister is: come and look, open the books examine them and advise. If an improvement can be made, let us know about it.

I should like to talk about the £440,000 grant, which was in two phases, for 1986-87 and 1987-88. The 1986-87 part was taken into consideration. The other part has never appeared. The South Yorkshire authority could not take into consideration the money that it had been told was available. It knew about it only when it came down to see Lord Ferrers.

The authority examined the matter and told the Department of the Environment that it could not accept

[Mr. McKay]

that the money had been available. The DOE said that the authority had received about £150,000, when it had not. However, even if that money had been available, and even if the authority had used the £900,000 in reserve, it would still not be manned to the levels that the Home Office has laid down. We are asking the Minister to come and see for himself and sort the problem out.

Nobody wants there to be a major fire, and nobody wants there to be a loss of property or loss of life, but if that happens the buck will stop with the Government, not with the South Yorkshire fire service.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay), but this is a very short debate, so very short speeches might be appropriate.

1 am

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): My hon. Friend is no doubt aware that since 1983 I have made persistent and consistent representations to his right hon. Friend about the level of grant to West Yorkshire.

I recognise that the professional assessment made by Her Majesty's inspector is independent of the Minister and of the fire authority and that the inspector is satisfied with the level of cover in the area.

Fire cover, rightly, is an emotive issue. In west Yorkshire there are many textile mills, the floors of which are steeped in centuries of oils. It is essential that my constituents, and others in west Yorkshire, are satisfied that the level of cover is as the inspector says. To reduce the unease, it would be helpful if my hon. Friend the Minister would persuade my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment that the level of grant now available is not as satisfactory as the level of precept that my hon. Friend has announced. Representations to my hon. Friend have proved successful, but can we hope that representations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be as successful? We might then obtain necessary changes to the grant, which many other hon. Members would support.

1.2 am

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): The debate began with a quick tour of the west midlands and up through west and south Yorkshire. I should like to take the House's attention a little further north, to the area of Tyne and Wear and Northumbria, which is covered by the Northumbria police authority.

In some ways, it is unique in that it covers a shire county and what was a metropolitan county. It covers the low population areas of north and west Northumberland and the inner-city areas, with all their associated problems, of Tyneside and Wearside.

The authority was established in 1974, and at one time I had the honour of being a member of it. Since that time, it has faced severe problems, principally because of the mixed environment of the area.

I remember, as a representative of the police authority from Northumberland, that I and my colleagues from the shire county constantly brought the attention of the authority to the problems faced in the urban south-east and rural part of the county.

We recognised that the problems that the chief constable faced in the inner cities of Tyneside and Wearside were far more difficult to cope with than those in the rural parts. Therefore, we had to accept that manpower had to be redeployed from the rural and urban parts of the authority to the inner cities. It caused severe problems in those areas. It meant that in the rural areas one police constable covered up to 200 sq miles, but when he was redeployed in the more central parts of the police authority area, the other police officers in the area had 400 or 500 sq miles to cover. This was and still is a constant problem.

Ministers consistently stress the need for efficiency. I took part in reviews when I was a member of the authority and they have continued almost yearly since then. There is a review each time the budget is drawn up, and the authority is highly efficient. All credit is due to the chief constable, the officers and the authority for the way in which the service has been run. Like other metropolitan authorities, however, we have suffered as a result of the change in grant-related expenditure allocation last year. The basic problem is that the change was based on police establishment rather than on recognised need. As expected, the proposed maximum precept level of 13·92p effectively reduced the budget by about 10 per cent. Like other authorities, the Northumberland authority made representations to the Home Office. The result was an increase of 0·48p, which brought the precept up to 14·4p for 1988-89, but it did not match the modest requirements of the authority. A realistic increase would have been 1p. In cash terms, the figure was £700,000.

The problems faced by the Northumberland authority are probably greater than those in some metropolitan authorities. It has had a consistently higher percentage of retirements, particularly due to ill health. The figure has doubled since 1982, and that pattern is expected to continue. The number of serious offences per officer is 46·9 — that is 50 per cent. higher than the Metropolitan police in London whose problems are rightly emphasised —and well above that for Greater Manchester, which is the next highest at 43·6. That workload is probably a major factor in the high rate of ill health retirement. Loyalty is certainly not in question as next year a substantial number of those seeking retirement next year will have more than 25 or even 30 years' service.

Mr. John Patten: The expenditure levels take into account additional needs caused by high levels of early retirements and pension requirements.

Mr. Thompson: I am grateful to the Minister for that intervention, but no one can predict the number of ill-health retirements, although the heavy work load increases the likelihood of such retirements. As a result, pension payments are between £3,500,000 and £4 million per year and are expected to rise to £4,250,000.

Mr. Patten *indicated assent.*

Mr. Thompson: The Minister nods, so my figures must be right. They are of course, linked with the increased police pay settlements, so the problem will get worse year by year.

In the 1988-89 projections, no provision was made for expenditure on new initiatives—a proposition that was given up by the authority almost immediately. However, there was a recognition of the need for 529 new officers in

the service. A bid for a further 80 was submitted in April 1987, but, as yet, there has been no response—perhaps the Minister can give me one tonight. In the meantime, the crime figures in our police authority continue to rise, as they do everywhere else, and that is an increasing concern of the population.

The police authority has assessed its requirements for 1988-89, to provide the present level of the service as a minimum, at £51·75 million. That allows for existing commitments, anticipated pay awards and price increases. The Minister spoke about using reserves, but the authority will have none by the beginning of next year. It has £700,000 in balances, which will be gobbled up in paying for pensions.

The authority is in a serious situation, and many of these elements have been ignored by the Home Office in arriving at the assessments. People in Northumbria, like people everywhere, deserve proper police protection, and many in my constituency feel that they are not getting that. The sad thing is that they tend to blame the police constable on the beat, the sergeant, the inspector or even the chief constable, and, eventually, the police authority, when they become aware that there is one running the police affairs, when the blame lies with the Home Office.

1.11 am

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): I agree with the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay), although I shall not go for the throat of my hon. Friend the Minister. An argument is being waged between the Home Office and the Department of the Environment about £500,000. One says that South Yorkshire fire service has the money, and the other says that it is sure that it has, but neither of them can find the money. The situation is not as grim as the hon. Gentleman tried to make out. Damnation and fire are not surging through all of South Yorkshire, but cash is needed. There is a shortfall of £500,000. Thanks to the water authority, which has great powers on maintenance, £200,000 of that has been found, so the shortfall now is £300,000.

My argument is not about how the fire brigade operates in South Yorkshire, or about how good it is, because the capital fund allowed for South Yorkshire is quite good. The problem arises solely from the discrepancy of £500,000. I should welcome an opportunity to come to a meeting with representatives from the two Departments to see whether this can be sorted out and ways found to retrieve the £300,000, which should leave South Yorkshire with a fire brigade of which it can be proud.

1.13 am

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): The Minister has not given a satisfactory answer to West Yorkshire. Why must our ratepayers be obliged to pay almost twice as much as people in other comparable authorities for a broadly similar level of service, not only this year but in the year before and the year before that? As the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) said, both the Home Secretary and the Home Office seem unwilling to acknowledge that, in our case, the police authority's reasonable request for a small increase in precept—to 16·5p—to preserve a realistic balance, cannot be met, in view of the circumstances. I shall be interested to hear what the Minister says about the request for the authorities to be cut, if not abolished. What is the strategy for the next few years, and what are the Government's hopes and intentions? I hope that he will come clean tonight.

There is an underlying political strategy. The Government, through the Home Office and the Department of the Environment, are setting up local authorities in a cynical, political budget manoevre. They want to demonstrate that for the three years of rate capping, the precept was reduced each year. Then, as the authorities are released from that constraint in 1989-90, those reductions will mean that they have to increase their precepts substantially, which will be a massive burden on their ratepayers. They will have to pay the price at a politically sensitive time as we go into the next general election. Service levels can be maintained only by increasing the precept at this stage, or ratepayers will have to pay the price in future.

If the Minister holds his ground and says that he cannot increase the precept, will he tell us what he expects to be the future levels of services in those authorities?

1.16 am

Dr. John G. Blackburn (Dudley, West): So many hon. Members want to contribute to the debate that I shall be brief——

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Where are the Liberals?

Dr. Blackburn: Their policy ends at 10 o'clock.

Although the debate has been centred on Yorkshire, there is a serious problem in the west midlands. Like all hon. Members who serve constituencies there, I have a responsibility to say a few words, especially about the precept for the police authority.

It is almost immoral for the Home Secretary to determine that there should be an inquiry into the Birmingham pub bombings, and then to invite the West Midlands police authority to pick up the bill for £600,000. I know that part of that sum is still under debate, and the problem may well be resolved. However, it is unfair of the Secretary of State to order an inquiry and then expect the police authority to pick up the bill.

When reading the chief constable's annual report,, I was horrified to note that 1,100 police officers in the west midlands had been wounded or assaulted during the past year, resulting in the loss of 7,000 days of police duty. The Home Secretary should address himself to such facts, and ensure that we obtain value for money and that we protect the police service.

I unashamedly tell the House that, for the past eight years, I have had the privilege of being the parliamentary adviser to 90,000 members of the National Association of Retired Police Officers. The Home Office should not point a finger and claim that the problems have arisen because so many police officers have retired. No one in society pays more for his pension than a serving police officer. The way that the matter was handled bordered on the disgraceful. In August 1982, by statutory instrument and without debate, and when the House was in recess, the pension levels were increased from 7 per cent. to 11 per cent. for male officers, and up to 7 per cent. for female officers.

I do not want to hear any arguments about pensions. They are well paid for and well supplied. The Minister must leave an avenue open to review responsible, reasoned argument that is based on fact. I hope that he will give such an assurance to the House.

1.19 am

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): At 7 o'clock in the morning of 13 July last year, the Under-Secretary of State, the then Labour spokesperson, the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) and I were the only people in the House debating the issue. It took from 13 July until last Monday for the Home Office to respond and to meet to discuss the discrepancies between the maximum expenditure limits set by the Home Office and the grant-related expenditure assessments set by the Department of the Environment. The Home Office has lost out in the battle between the two Departments on the issue. All through the summer, meetings between the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the Departments were cancelled and were agreed only at the last minute following the King's Cross disaster. This was because the Department of the Environment has been intransigent and has not made the necessary changes that the Minister knows are necessary to get rid of such discrepancies.

The precept is the difference between what the Home Office says that fire authorities need to provide the services set down by its own inspectorate and what the Department of the Environment is prepared to give in grant-related expenditure assessments. That is the reality. Tragically—it has not been debated so far—in London, not a single penny will go to the fire authority in the nation's capital. Because of that, 800 firemen's jobs are at risk, months after the King's Cross fire disaster. That is the reality of the terrible decision that will be made tonight and of the Home Secretary giving in to the Secretary of State for the Environment.

It is no good Conservative Members parroting on to the local press. They have had all summer to get the Secretary of State for the Department of the Environment to change his mind. They have done nothing. They come to the Chamber tonight to try to give some support. It is too late. The decisions have been made. If they are honest, the only thing that they can do is to go into the Lobby and vote against the proposal.

The hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) made two remarks. It is a pity that he does not communicate with the fire and civil defence authority in Greater Manchester. The changes in communications at fire service and police service headquarters in Greater Manchester were done at their request and with 100 per cent. Home Office funding. The Home Office is so pleased with the savings that have been made by both authorities that, on a regular basis, the fire and police authorities receive requests from other authorities to show them through their facilities. Authorities in Manchester are saving ratepayers' resources.

Stockport borough council's three representatives on the fire authority agreed with the fire authority and voted for the resolution that maximum expenditure limits as affected by GREA are wrong and impose an unnecessary burden on ratepayers and distort what is required. If the hon. Gentleman cannot support his local authority and local ratepayers, he should not be here. Maybe after the general election he will not be.

There is no evidence that the Home Office can produce to show — in accepting the Department of the Environment's analysis of places such as west Yorkshire, whose precept has been doubled—that there is anything like a doubling of services to ratepayers. Millions of pounds are being siphoned from ratepayers as a consequence of the decision.

It is also true that Merseyside in the north-west will be substantially short of what is required. Already, there are discussions about whether there will be job losses for front-line fire-fighters. The Home Office sets the number of front-line fire-fighters, the level of expenditure for fire-fighters, the number of fire stations in each fire authority area and the ridership factor. Such matters have been determined not by the fire authority but by the Home Office.

They are monitored by the Home Office's inspectorate. It is on the basis of monitoring exercises that the Home Office sets the maximum expenditure limit. If the Home Secretary is not prepared to include those figures in the order, it means that he is not prepared to back his own Department, which set out the expenditure required in West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and London. Because of the vagaries of the grant-related expenditure assessment, made by a Department that is not responsible for fire services in the United Kingdom, the authorities and their ratepayers will suffer. They will face both an increase in precept and a reduction in services. That is totally unacceptable.

The King's Cross inquiry is already discussing a clear link between the cut in investment and the provision of fire services. It is astonishing that no London Conservative Member has been prepared to put the case that if the order is passed, not a penny of Government grant will be made available to the capital of the United Kingdom for its fire authority.

If the Home Office has said that this year £370,608,000 is necessary to run the basic fire services in the United Kingdom, why do Conservative Members support the figure of £315,073,000 produced by the Department of the Environment? That represents a cut in grant of nearly £58 million, simply because the Home Secretary could not stand up for the fire authorities. I ask Conservative Members to go into the Lobby to vote this disgraceful decision down.

1.26 am

Mr. David Gilroy Bevan (Birmingham, Yardley): I should like to add my voice to those of my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, West (Dr. Blackburn) and other hon. Members who asked for a more liberal allowance—more liberalisation, if we have to use the word after 10 o'clock—to be made in the precept. I have been along with other hon. Members to see Ministers at the Home Office and have made representations. I have used the summer in trying to argue the case, as a previous speaker advised.

I have already instanced the extreme rise in crime in the centre of the land—the west midlands—and I shall not go over the figures again. They are well known. Therefore, I shall only repeat the words of the chief constable, who feels that policing is almost impossible if the precept is kept down to its present level. Even if £2·4 million from the balances is used in the west midlands, a precept of 14·36p will be required. Even if the police live off capital to that extent, leaving only £1·8 million in the kitty for real emergencies, they will still be well adrift on the figures. They still await the 350 extra officers and civilian personnel whom they need.

It is true that the situation in the west midlands is unique. We are an inland port and an area of immigration with relentless drug-related crime causing more and more resort to the knife and other weapons. It is no good Home Office Ministers simply ignoring those factors and adopting an arbitrary figure without explaining why. My conscience demands that I speak. I cannot remain silent.

There are many pressing matters. The increased demands caused by community watch, the Firearms Act 1982, the pub bombings, drug-related crimes and the repercussions of the Handsworth riots are such that, quite frankly, this precept restriction is out of order and I ask my hon. Friend and the Home Office to think again.

1.30 am

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): The mysteries and intricacies of central Government funding, local government and the police authorities are often beyond the likes of myself and, one suspects, people who are allegedly financially competent. However, although our constituents may not always understand the intricacies, they will see the end product and it is that which they will judge, not the clever words that may claim how much more money is being spent when, in reality, the quality of service is being impaired.

What is readily understandable to my constituents and, I suspect, to the constituents of many hon. Members who are present, is that when one telephones the police, they may not come, or if they come, they come late. The detection rate of the police is, regrettably, very low. Shopkeepers will tell us that they are finding it difficult or impossible to get insurance cover because their shops have been damaged so often that no insurance company will insure them. It is horrendous to discover how few police officers are on duty at some times of the day and night.

When hon. Members look round their own towns and cities, they are more likely to find a Securicor vehicle than a police vehicle because the vacuum that has been left by the Government is being filled by non-accountable private security companies. That is taking us back to the 19th century, prior to the establishment of the modern police system. That is the end product. One finds blocks of council flats being guarded by security officers. I am talking not about Park lane flats but about ordinary council flats. Such is the growth in crime.

It is difficult for me to talk about the growth in crime without being accused of sensationalising, but that growth is obvious to most of us here. The word consensus has almost left the English vocabulary but if there is a near consensus, surely it is that most areas are underpoliced. While one can make political capital out of the position, I make the point that this is not exclusively a political issue. It affects us all because in one way or another we are the guardians of the public interest; it is our job to reflect public anxiety.

A few months ago many Members of Parliament, representing the west midlands area attended a meeting in the House, at which we met the chairmen of the police consultative committees—bodies that were set up by the Government to reflect public opinion. They did so and expressed, rationally, the alarming developments of crime in their own areas.

My own town took about 1,000 years to reach the level of recorded crime that was reached in 1979, but in a few years that figure has doubled from 11,000 to 22,000 recorded crimes. At the same time, the number of police officers has risen fractionally, by 23, but the amount of overtime worked has fallen dramatically and considerably. I would argue that there are now fewer police officers on duty in the town of Walsall than there were a few years ago while, as has been said, the police are now faced with problems that they were not facing several years ago, such as drug-related offences, terrorism and football hooliganism, and as another hon. Member has said, crime watch schemes impose additional demands and problems.

When the West Midlands Police authority asked the Government for additional resources, it was given the cold shoulder. The West Midlands authority asked for £95·481 million to allow for a reasonable increase of 350 police officers and 150 civilians. That is equivalent to a 14·87p increase in precept terms. The Secretary of State for the Home Department imposed a limit of £93·4 million. That does not cover even existing commitments.

The Home Office has been twisting the arms of police authorities to make them more efficient. In my constituency the establishment of administrative support units, the use of computers to greater effect and greater civilianisation have all been to the liking of the Home Office. The consequences of the cut imposed on the West Midlands police authority are that from next year the administrative support unit concept will come to an end, as will the computerisation and the civilianisation programmes.

Mr. Turner: How could my hon. Friend reconcile what he said about Government policy towards the west midlands in regard to the precept, when the most recently recorded figures for Wolverhampton show the highest number of crimes committed in the history of that area? Does my hon. Friend agree that when the party in Government is supposed to be the party of law and order, those figures are a disgrace? Government policy is a betrayal of the people whom I represent in Wolverhampton in the way in which they have treated us in the precept that we are debating.

Mr. George: The picture that my hon. Friend has painted of his part of the west midlands is replicated throughout Britain. When an authority seeks to be prudent and to build up adequate reserves, it is punished. The West Midlands police authority has been landed with a large bill for the Birmingham pub bombings inquiry and has been lumbered with compensation payments amounting to £1 million in respect of the Handsworth riots three years ago. There are additional demands based on incidents such as those that occurred in my hon. Friend's town a couple of years ago. When there are reserves, they can be dissipated very swiftly.

This is not a partisan point, but the Government must recognise that more police officers are required. I understand that only a few hundred extra officers have been appointed. Many authorities will be putting a strong case for the majority of those police officers. The economy is now booming. If people were asked whether they would prefer a small income tax cut or feel more secure in their homes, I suggest that the vast majority would prefer the latter, at least in the area that I represent, and perhaps in the constituencies of other hon. Members.

I am asking Ministers for more police officers in our constituencies. The Government will be judged by their failure to react adequately to the growth in crime. I hope that Conservative Members will not simply exercise their

[Mr. George]

consciences, but will translate that exercise into voting with us in the Lobby. Otherwise, their constituents will be rushing to them and asking for more police officers. If they read their local papers, Conservative Members will make the appropriate judgment.

1.39 am

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): When constituents come to my surgeries they ask for more policemen so that they can walk safely on the streets at night. Small shopkeepers ask for more protection for their property. They know full well that they are not being provided with that protection because there are not enough policemen. They also know that the result of this debate will be even fewer policemen. They understand, however, which party has spoken up on their behalf.

The Minister speaks with a forked tongue. Tonight he is supporting a charter for increased crime in the areas that I represent. The situation in the Northumbria police authority will grow worse. The number of reported crimes per police officer is greater in Northumbria than anywhere else. It is 50 per cent. above the comparative number in the Metropolitan police area.

Northumbria needs an additional 1,700 police officers. If one uses as a measure the number of serious offences recorded by each police officer, Northumbria needs 800 more police officers. Northumbria has carried out an important exercise that shows that it cannot manage without an additional 529 police officers. The Minister will be unable to satisfy that demand if expenditure levels remain as they are now.

My constituents will understand that this debate has resulted in their being given not more but less protection. When they come to my surgeries they will be told why. Unless Conservative Members join us in the Lobby and vote against the order, their words will be shown to have been meaningless.

1.41 am

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Home Office says that South Yorkshire needs 1,114 full-time firemen. Has the Minister any evidence to suggest that the Home Office is wrong? If he accepts that the Home Office is right, will he not assure us that South Yorkshire will have enough money to employ that number of full-time firemen and the appliances they need so that they are able to do their job on a full-time and professional basis? The House is entitled to an answer to that simple question.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 144, Noes 61.

Division No. 171] **[1.48 am**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Favell, Tony
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gow, Ian
Greenway, John *(Rydale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Timothy
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Maclean, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Miss E. *(Devon W)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alan Howarth and
Mr. Stephen Dorrell.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Buckley, George
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, J.
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Fatchett, Derek
George, Bruce
Golding, Mrs Llin
Hardy, Peter
Henderson, Douglas
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAvoy, Tom
McCartney, Ian
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Madden, Max

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Redmond, Martin
Rogers, Allan
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Snape, Peter
Strang, Gavin
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, James

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ray Powell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Local Government Act 1985 (Police and Fire and Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 28th January, be approved.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday, 9th February notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (1)(b) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), Mr. Speaker shall put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Channon relating to Local Government not later than one and a half hours after the first of them has been entered upon.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

PETITION

Motorway Service Area, Hollingbourne

1.53 am

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): On the day that sees the commencement of the relative planning appeal, I rise to present a petition in the name of Michael Nightingale of Wormshill and 842 others from the villages of Hollingbourne, Wormshill, Frinsted, Hucking and Bicknor in my constituency and from the village of Leeds in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), who is also present, against the development of a motorway service area on the edge of an area of outstanding natural beauty at Hollingbourne, adjacent to junction 8 of the M20.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Jim Cormack

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

1.54 am

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): It is a pity that this matter should be restrained by the time afforded to an Adjournment debate, because its ramifications would justify a three-hour debate. It is the case of Mr. Jim Cormack and his service to the country in exposing a fraud of gigantic proportions in the misappropriation of diesel fuel at Faslane nuclear base in Scotland.

On 6 October 1983, Mr. Cormack went, on the instructions of his employers, to Faslane to pick up a load of sullage. Sullage is waste oil that has been contaminated in some way. In addition to his wages and allowances, Mr. Cormack was to receive a £10 kickback for the job. On loading his tanker in Faslane—he was allowed to enter without any security check and without showing any documents—he discovered that what was going into his tank was not sullage but white diesel with a little water added.

Mr. Cormack was allowed to leave the base without excise documents, without a security check and without certificates to the effect that he was carrying a hazardous cargo. He was required to take the load to Potters Oils in Derbyshire, which turned out to be a derelict yard. On the way, he spoke to other drivers who knew of the practice of collecting oil from Faslane and, becoming suspicious, he decided—in a somewhat foolhardy way—to institute his own investigation. Without reporting the matter to the Ministry of Defence police, because he thought that they must be involved in the fraud, he set out to investigate it himself by making inquiries of other transport undertakings and their drivers. He then reported the matter to the civil police.

The upshot of the inquiries that resulted from his blowing the whistle—his words, not mine—was that several people spent periods in gaol and several hundred thousands pounds were repaid to the Government in compensation for the money that was fraudulently taken from the taxpayer. The prosecutions that resulted from the inquiries were instigated almost piecemeal—one here, one there and one in another place—and were the subject of a High Court injunction which was lifted only on 1 December last year. It was imposed in November 1986 in the Supreme Court by Judge Lord Morrison under section 4(2) of the Contempt of Court Act 1981. That meant that reporting of the incidents has been restricted, and the entire case has received little publicity.

I brought the matter to the attention of the Minister on 20 June last year, and the Minister informed me that he was aware of Mr. Cormack's role in the matter and that it had not been overlooked. On 3 September last year, the Minister clarified that by saying that he had been referring to the fact that Mr. Cormack's role as an informant in the matter had not been overlooked.

Shortly after this assurance from the Minister I received the following letter from Mr. Cormack on 10 October:

"I now find myself in a desperate situation regarding paying my way out of Government supplements . . . my search for work as a HGV tanker driver has proved to be nil. I have been offered a job in Germany, and due to my situation, must take the opportunity up. I feel more bitter now that I am forced, in order to pay my way, to work for a

[Mr. Frank Cook]

country that lost the war! I now wish that I had not brought the Faslane rip-off to light, but that is something I have to live with."

So, Cormack claims that as a direct result of having brought the matter to light, he lost his job, his house worth £48,000—his business, and his wife. His sons now live apart from him. He cannot work because he has been identified as the whistle-blower.

Mr. Cormack's hardship has caused several people to write to him expressing sympathy when his case finally came to light in the press. He received one from a Mrs. McLevey from Paisley;

"Dear Mr. Cormack,

I read your story . . . and felt I had to write to you. I'm not in the habit of writing to strangers but I feel you have had such a rotten deal and I wanted to thank you for being honest and for standing up to be counted. Please don't feel bitter. I am sure a person of your integrity will find a job soon . . . You did the right thing by the millions of ordinary taxpayers in this country. What sort of country would this be if we all had little swindles like this on the side? So thank you again from my family. I wish I could enclose more."

That refers to the £2 that the lady enclosed with her letter as a gesture to compensate Mr. Cormack for the service he had done the country.

Shortly after this, I received a letter from the Minister telling me that the outstanding case that had been holding up the release of the High Court injunction had been concluded shortly before, and that active consideration was therefore being given to Mr. Cormack's contribution, in line with agreed policy. Since then, I, too, have received correspondence. I offer one example, as a bona fide of that. It comes from Mrs. Elsmore, of Boon Hill, Stoke-on-Trent, who urges me

"to press the Ministry of Defence for proper payment to this man who saved them a fortune."

That fortune has been estimated by one national newspaper at £6 million, and by *Procurement Weekly* and the purchasing supply management at a figure as high as £10 million.

On 11 January I received a letter from the Minister telling me that he was pleased to inform me that a payment of £1,000 had been authorised by his Department and that a payable order had been posted to Mr. Cormack. On the same day, I got this letter from Mr. Cormack:

"You have to be in my situation to understand the misery it is causing me, not just losing my £200-£300 a week job, but my detached house, the break-up with my wife after 23 years of marriage, through rows over losing my job and reporting Faslane. She was right, I should have kept my mouth shut and minded my own business and let it go on and it would have gone on probably for another 10 years . . . I did not just inform on the matter, I investigated it at the Faslane base and could have reported it there and then to the MOD at the gate house, but I knew they had to be involved as well because the procedure was all wrong. So I carried on to where I had to deliver, staying overnight en route, at South Wood services on the M6, where I knew other drivers of the company I was delivering too would be staying. I was investigating there, talking to the drivers of Potters' Oils, where I was to deliver. They knew what was going on, but kept it quiet, because they had their own fiddles going on as well . . . Put it this way Frank, I put the whole bloody situation on a plate for the police and MOD, how it was done and where it was being done. I even worked out the cost of that one job, and it was over a million pounds. I even told them how many tankers would be there the next day. The other companies that were rounded up was a result of me reporting it in the first place . . . It is over four years now. I have just received a cheque from the MOD for £1,000 which is enclosed and would have you return it to the MOD, as it is like putting the boot in when you are down; most of all an insult . . . It would not even pay my costs to go to tribunal . . . The cheque arrived on its own, no statement for what is was for, and most of all no letter of thank you."

He continues:

"That hurts. I can't live like I used to. I just exist."

I could go on at great length. I have many more details, but I realise that I must give the Minister the opportunity to reply. I gave him warning of what I would say. Let me summarise. I should like to know whether the £1,000 that was offered to Mr. Cormack as reward for that multi-million pound exposé came out of any police snouts' purse, whether it came out of their normal informants' fund, because it seems so paltry. If so, how many policemen received a commendation or perhaps promotion on the strength of the prosecution? I hope that to hear an assurance that the Faslane investigation has cleaned out that nest of vipers because they cannot have been only the civilian personnel who were involved. Mr. Cormack had to pass armed commandos who were guarding that establishment. As he managed to do so without any sort of pass or documentation, we need that assurance. I hope to hear an assurance from the Minister that steps have been taken to ensure that other military establishments have been cleared and vetted, and are not operating a similar fiddle.

I have the £1,000 cheque in my custody, under lock and key. I do not want to give it back to the MOD, but I appeal to the Minister, in view of the hardship that Mr. Cormack has suffered as a direct result of his service to his country. He did not have to do it. He did not have to put his frogman suit on, swim up the Clyde to the Faslane base in the middle of the night, walk around for 20 minutes, swim back out to his Caravette, telephone the police and tell them. He did it simply because he wanted to prove to himself how bad the security arrangements were.

I should like to hear from the Minister that there is a prospect that Mr. Cormack's service and foolhardy dedication to his own public spirit and the penalty that he has imposed upon himself by trying to serve his country might receive better recognition.

2.8 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) for raising this subject because it gives me an opportunity to express in the House my appreciation and that of my Department of Mr. Cormack's action. I hope that that can be passed on by the hon. Gentleman.

It may be helpful if I begin by sketching out more fully some of the background to this particularly complicated case and outline some of the measures that we are taking to ensure that this type of incident will not occur again. I hope that during my remarks I shall be able to satisfy the concern that the hon. Gentleman has expressed on that point.

As a result of extensive Ministry of Defence police investigations into what proved to be an extremely complex case, it has been established that during the period from January 1981 to November 1983, 1 million gallons of misappropriated fuel were illegally removed from the Clyde submarine base at Faslane.

The losses of fuel were possible only because of the unique position then existing at the Clyde submarine base with regard to the disposal of "sullage". In brief, sullage

is dirty oil and tank washings—a mixture of oil, water and acids—that have to be removed from submarines and ships. Unlike other bases, where there are dedicated reception and treatment facilities for sullage handling, sullage at the Clyde submarine base used to be disposed of by commercial contractors. Collusion was, therefore, possible between the contractors and the Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service employees involved with the physical handling, collection and disposal of the sullage. That explains why they, and not others at the base, were involved in the incident. The practice at that time was for the sullage to be accumulated into a dedicated Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service barge and, after a period to allow the oil to settle, to be removed by commercial road tankers called by one of the RMAS staff involved.

In all, only seven RMAS personnel were involved in this case. One of these men died of natural causes shortly after the discovery of the theft. The rest were charged with corruption, and one also with theft, under section 1(i) of the Prevention of Corruption Act 1906. In June 1987, four were sentenced to terms ranging from between three and 12 months. Sentencing of the remaining two has been deferred until June 1988—in effect, under Scottish law, a suspended sentence.

As a result of those court cases, it has been established that inducements were paid by certain contractors to those RMAS personnel in return for fortifying the sullage with good quality fuel, for allowing the unauthorised removal of sullage, and for removing part or all of the water content so that the proportion of recoverable oil was increased. I should stress that not all those men were involved to the same extent.

The contractors involved were prosecuted and sentenced. In all, 14 people were convicted. In addition, disciplinary proceedings are under way against two senior staff who had supervisory responsibilities at the base.

Since the theft was brought to light, steps have been taken to tighten procedures for the disposal of sullage to prevent any repetition. Once the theft had been discovered, the senior officer responsible for logistic matters at the Faslane base assumed full control for the disposal of sullage, and the use of contractors ceased. All accumulations of sullage are now transferred to a mobile barge and landed ashore outside the base through the oil fuel depot at Garelochhead for disposal under strict Ministry of Defence control.

Extensive internal investigations have been carried out and, where necessary, appropriate remedial action has been taken or is in hand. Accounting procedures have been tightened. The lessons learnt have also been read across to other bases, and to the other two services.

Security at the base has also been reviewed since the theft. There was no evidence of inadequate security: indeed, comprehensive security instructions were in force at the time of the theft.

I should like to turn now to the important part played by Mr. Cormack in assisting the Ministry of Defence police in this case.

The information supplied by Mr. Cormack first came to the attention of the Ministry of Defence police on 8 October 1983, via the Scottish crime squad. This report was initially addressed to the regional fraud squad, which was involved throughout, and gave a detailed account of how sullage was removed from the base.

At the time, Mr. Cormack told investigating officers that, although he would be prepared to speak to either police or Customs and Excise officials to substantiate the information that he had provided, and to enable prosecution for what he considered illegal acts to proceed, he would not be willing to give evidence, as he felt that he might, as a result, lose his job and be "blacked" from employment with any other transport firm.

Consequently, Mr. Cormack's identity was not revealed, nor was he a witness during the subsequent court proceedings. His involvement became public only when he approached the hon. Gentleman and made a statement to the *News on Sunday* on 2 August 1987, some considerable time after the original events.

Mr. Cormack then, after this long interval, made contact again with the Ministry of Defence police. He was subsequently interviewed, and it became clear that his intention was to seek financial reward. Mr. Cormack was informed of the progress of the case and reassured that his involvement had not been overlooked.

Mr. Frank Cook: Information about Cormack's involvement came out because of leaks from the Scottish court cases and was known throughout the haulage industry long before the article in *News on Sunday*.

Mr. Sainsbury: I believe I am right in saying that the public appearance of the information in the press dates only from the time that I mentioned.

The very thorough police investigation was completed in April 1985 and was referred to the procurator fiscal. The court proceedings, which involved five separate trials, commenced in December 1986 and lasted until November 1987. The decision to go to separate trials was made by the Scottish Office. During the first trial the presiding judge, Lord Morrison, imposed a reporting restriction, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, for one year because of the other four related cases, allowing the media to report only the result of that particular case. At each subsequent hearing the presiding judge referred to and endorsed that restriction.

The hon. Member for Stockton, North wrote on 20 June 1987 to the Cleveland constabulary, requesting a report of its investigation. Since the matter was being investigated by the Ministry of Defence police, in co-operation with regional and Scottish crime squads, his letter was passed to the Ministry of Defence police headquarters, and I replied, as the hon. Gentleman said, on 22 July. At that stage I was able to say only that Mr. Cormack's part in the matter had not been forgotten. As I have already said, the hearings in the High Court in Edinburgh had not then been completed. A further defendant had been indicted to appear in September or October, and, because of the number of individuals involved and the related nature of the evidence, the judge had placed a restriction on the release of information bearing on the case. In the event, the last defendant was not sentenced until 3 November and reporting restrictions remained in force until 31 December.

Upon the successful conclusion of these proceedings, I advised the hon. Member that recognition of Mr. Cormack's assistance was being actively considered in the light of Ministry of Defence police policy. As the hon. Gentleman said, Mr. Cormack was awarded the sum of £1,000 in recognition of the information that he had volunteered, which, together with subsequent police investigations, enabled successful prosecutions to be brought. Payment was made, as requested, by personal cheque.

[Mr. Sainsbury]

The Ministry of Defence recognises that informants can play an important role in assisting the Ministry of Defence police in criminal investigations. We therefore have a policy whereby, in common with other United Kingdom police forces, provision is available for discretionary payments to be made for information given to the police. As with the Home Office police forces, these payments are a police operational matter, ultimately at the discretion of the chief constable. These payments can be initiated only by the police themselves. So far as I am aware, the only significant difference which distinguishes our policy from that of Home Office police forces is that, because Government funds are used, the administrative arrangements within the Ministry of Defence require the Ministry of Defence police to seek approval for each payment.

I stress that such payments are for information given to the police. They are not rewards, in that they are not payments offered in advance for information leading to the conviction of those involved in a particular crime or to the recovery of specified stolen property. They are a recognition of particular help given to the police and are therefore not related to the value of the goods stolen or recovered. The informant will usually not wish to be identified with the information that he has given, and that was so in this case. To protect the individual, both the policy and its application are normally treated as confidential.

The police request for approval of a payment for information is usually not made until the judicial procedure has been completed. This accounts for the considerable lapse of time in Mr. Cormack's case. As a result of the information that he gave, a police investigation was undertaken which took 18 months to complete. The last of the resulting trials was not completed until November 1987.

It is particularly important to distinguish between payments for information and rewards of the nature that I have described. Mr. Cormack gave the police valuable information, and by doing so he became eligible for consideration for a discretionary award from, and on behalf of, the police for that act. It might be expected that a law-abiding member of the public coming across evidence of a criminal act would tell the police without any thought of receiving a payment for doing so. In this matter, Mr. Cormack has acted as a public-spirited citizen. The £1,000 that he has received is simply a recognition of that fact. We are grateful for what he did.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty minutes past Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 9 February 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Messages from the Queen

AUSTRALIA (GIFT OF VICE-REGAL CHAIR)

THE VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address as follows:

I have received your Address praying that I will give directions that there be presented, on behalf of both Houses of Parliament, a gift of a vice-regal chair to the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia to mark the bicentenary in 1988 of the first European settlement of Australia and the opening of the new Parliament House in Canberra.

It gave me great pleasure to learn that you desire to make such a presentation, and I will gladly give directions for carrying your proposal into effect.

ST. CHRISTOPHER AND NEVIS (GIFT OF SPEAKER'S CHAIR AND DESK)

THE VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address as follows:

I have received your Address praying that I will give directions that there be presented, on behalf of your House, a gift of a Speaker's chair and desk to the National Assembly of St. Christopher and Nevis, and assuring me that your House will make good the expenses attending the same.

It gave me great pleasure to learn that your House desires to make such a presentation, and I will gladly give directions for carrying your proposal into effect.

Royal Assent

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that Her Majesty has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts and measure:

1. Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.
2. Arms Control and Disarmament (Privileges and Immunities) Act 1988.
3. Greater Manchester (Light Rapid Transit System) Act 1988.
4. Greater Manchester (Light Rapid Transit System) (No. 2) Act 1988.
5. University College London Act 1988.
6. Church of England (Legal Aid and Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure 1988.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LIVERPOOL EXCHANGE BILL *[Lords]*

Read a Second time, and committed.

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SERVICES

Winter Warmth Line

1. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many calls have been made to the Winter Warmth line; and what publicity has been provided pointing to its existence.

The Minister for Social Security and the Disabled (Mr. Nicholas Scott): To the end of January there had been approximately 5,000 calls to the Winter Warmth line. The publicity organised by the Department has included the preparation of two short public information films for television, and material for radio broadcasts. We are also placing advertisements in national and selected regional newspapers, and in magazines for elderly people.

Mr. Adley: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Can he confirm that Help the Aged and Age Concern are fully supportive of the Government's initiative and are backing it; and can he tell me whether the information that is to be provided through the programmes will include information about entitlement to assistance under the severe weather payments scheme?

Mr. Scott: Certainly Age Concern and Help the Aged have played a major part in the establishment and operation of the line. I think that it is a major and important example of co-operation between voluntary effort and expertise and public resources.

In answer to the second point, of course advice will be available to callers to the Winter Warmth line about exceptional cold weather payments.

Mr. Fearn: Does the Minister agree that it would be better to increase pensions than to have the means test, which still applies when people have to apply for Winter Warmth?

Mr. Scott: If the hon. Gentleman is talking about exceptional cold weather payments, they are targeted on those people who need particular help. It would be an extremely wasteful use of public resources to provide such help for all pensioners rather than for those who need it most.

Severely Disabled Claimants

2. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultation he has had with Mencap in regard to severely disabled claimants who will have a reduced entitlement in April.

7. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultation his Department has had with the Disablement Income Group concerning the effect on severely disabled people of reducing the entitlements of those applying for benefit after April.

Mr. Scott: I have had a number of informal, confidential talks with a variety of organisations. As a result of these talks we intend setting up a special fund in co-operation with the Disablement Income Group and DIG (Scotland). This fund will make payments to those very severely disabled people who need extensive help to enable them to live independently.

Dr. Moonie: In view of the growing concern over the difficulties that mentally handicapped people experience in transferring from hospital care to the community, of which the Minister will be aware, what steps does he propose to take to ensure that the provisions, that are to come into force in April will not jeopardise such transfers?

Mr. Scott: People leaving institutions to come into the community after April will be entitled, through income support, to community care grants under the social fund as well as to the allowances and premiums to which they would be entitled under the new pattern of income support.

Mr. Hannam: I congratulate my hon. Friend on accepting the need to provide resources for the small but important group of severely disabled people who will be affected after April when the new scheme is brought in, but how many severely disabled people does he expect to be looked after by that fund, and why was it decided not to use the DHSS social fund to provide those resources?

Mr. Scott: We are looking at the criteria that we should apply to establish the size of the group. We are talking of hundreds, rather than thousands, of disabled people, and we shall be seeking to meet their needs in as flexible a way as possible.

The only alternative open to us was to reintroduce a complicated set of regulations. The secret of the arrangement, within which, I hope, lies its success, is its flexibility and its need to use the expertise of the Disablement Income Group, which knows a great deal more about this than anybody in a local social security office.

Mr. Ashley: Is the Minister aware that I am disappointed with his response to our representations, because severely disabled people, like other disabled people, are entitled to statutory benefits administered and monitored by the Government? Will he think again? How can he guarantee equality of payments to those people?

Mr. Scott: I think that the right hon. Gentleman understands the background. When we have Sir Roy Griffiths' report into community care and the results of the survey of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, we shall be able to take a coherent look at the needs of disabled people right across the board. Obviously the needs of this group can be considered within that review and survey, but, in the meantime, we were faced with this particular problem, and this is a sensible, flexible and overwhelmingly fair way of meeting the need.

Mr. Thurnham: The Government are to be congratulated on setting up this new flexible special fund in co-operation with the voluntary sector, and they have a good record of spending on the long-term sick and disabled, but will my hon. Friend confirm that what he is giving away with the one hand he will not take away with the other with a reduction in targeted benefits?

Mr. Scott: These matters have to be considered in due time, but this money is over and above the £60 million to which we are already committed for the long-term sick and disabled in the income support system. This will be extra money to meet this special need while we look at the overall needs of disabled people.

Mr. Wigley: Is not this interim step the privatisation of a facility that was previously available under social security legislation? Did Mencap or the Spastics Society support the proposal? How much money is being made available, and is it cash-limited?

Mr. Scott: I cannot say at the moment what the amount will be, because it will depend upon our assessment of the group, but I am confident that sufficient funds will be available to meet the needs of this particular group. Officials and I had confidential discussions with a number of organisations, which I do not think the House would expect me to reveal. This is a comparatively small group of people with needs which must be met flexibly over a comparatively short period of time, and the expertise of the Disablement Income Group in managing the scheme for us will be of inestimable value.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Does my hon. Friend accept that one of the most interesting features of the fund that he has announced is its flexibility? It will allow the most effective help to be given to this small group of handicapped people.

Mr. Scott: That is right. It will be handled by the Disablement Income Group, which will bring its expertise to bear on the matter, and there will be flexibility and uniformity across the country. That would have been difficult to secure if decisions about that small group of people had been made in individual social security offices.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Should not the Minister say how much money will be available, and what will happen when the money runs out? Is he aware that DIG estimates that we are talking about thousands, not hundreds of severely disabled people? If the scheme cannot be in operation by 1 April, what steps will be taken to ensure that no severely disabled person is forced into an institution before it is introduced? Again, will the scheme merely replace the domestic assistance allowance, loss of which will cost severely disabled people up to £50 per week in April? If payments are to be removed from the social security system, will not the removal of disabled people's basic statutory rights be seen as an abdication of the Government's responsibilities?

Mr. Scott: I do not agree, for the reasons that I have already outlined. We are talking about a small group of people whose needs must be considered flexibly over a comparatively short period of time. There is no long-term intention to remove the allowance from statutory provision.

I shall make every effort to ensure that the fund is in operation by 11 April. If it is not, as I said to the House on another occasion, I shall do my best to ensure that back-dating is possible to 11 April. If it is not 11 April, I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that it will be very shortly afterwards.

We are talking about severely disabled people who need extra help to maintain an independent life. I am confident that we are talking about hundreds, rather than thousands, of people, as are most of those who have studied the problem.

National Health Service

3. Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make it his policy to review the hitherto unimplemented recommendations of the 1979 report of the Royal Commission on the National Health Service; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Tony Newton): While the Royal Commission report remains a valuable survey of the Health Service, I do not consider the hon. Gentleman's suggestion to be a productive way of moving forward the current debate on health issues.

Mr. Cohen: Did not recommendation 112 of the 1979 Royal Commission on the National Health Service say that there was a firm case for a gradual but complete extinction of charges? Have not the Government done exactly the opposite? Have not the new eye test charges and higher dental charges been overwhelmingly condemned? Is not the policy of the Government that of tax cuts for the rich, paid for by making charges on the sick?

Mr. Newton: The answer is no. The reason why we have not accepted the Royal Commission's recommendation is that we do not agree with it.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the 1946 constitution of the National Health Service is becoming increasingly difficult to fund because of the explosive demands of new technology and new courses of treatment? When he examines these recommendations, will my right hon. Friend make explicit what doctors already know—that we must allocate priorities in the National Health Service and keep it open to all, but narrower in its scope?

Mr. Newton: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's constructive comments, which echo much of the general comment of the Royal Commission, to which the original question referred. Our resource management initiatives are directed to the point that my hon. Friend has in mind.

Mrs. Clwyd: As a former member of the Royal Commission—the only such hon. Member—I should tell the Government that they would not be in the mess that they are in now with the National Health Service if they had implemented the recommendations of the Royal Commission. Does the Minister agree that the numbers of late abortions would have been considerably reduced if he had implemented the recommendation of the Royal Commission, that 75 per cent.—rather than the present figure of 46 per cent.—of abortions on resident women in Britain should be carried out by the National Health Service?

Mr. Newton: I simply do not accept the general presumption of the hon. Lady's supplementary question, which is that a good deal of progress has not been made on the general recommendations of the Royal Commission. Great progress has been made in streamlining the administrative structure, by cutting out a tier, and in the development of services such as cancer screening and a number of other important developments.

Mr. Jessel: The Royal Commission referred to the use of hospital beds. Does my right hon. Friend realise how many hospital beds are being wasted because patients are admitted for operations a full day or more before their operations are carried out, principally to ensure that they do not eat anything? In view of the length of waiting lists, can action be taken in appropriate cases to ask patients to certify that they have not eaten anything?

Mr. Newton: I shall consider my hon. Friend's suggestion. He will be aware that there have been considerable improvements in the efficient use of beds. The performance indicators that we publish—a new set is due shortly—will facilitate comparisons between the performances of different health authorities.

Ms. Harman: Will the Government withdraw their plans to charge patients for screening examinations of their eyes, teeth and mouths? Why do the Government persist in thinking that they are right to press ahead with those plans, when everyone else, including family practitioner committees, the British Medical Association, health authorities and consumer associations think that the Government are wrong?

Mr. Newton: Because we believe that these proposals are a reasonable way of contributing a relatively modest sum to the much larger increase in expenditure that we plan on family practitioner services generally, with the emphasis on preventive care.

Mr. Burns: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most telling points of the Royal Commission's report was that the demand for resources in 1979 was so great that we could quite easily have spent the whole of our gross national product on the Health Service?

Mr. Newton: Yes, indeed. As I said a moment ago, the Royal Commission made some sensible comments about the relationship between demand and resources. It is in that spirit that we have been seeking to tackle the problems of the Health Service.

4. **Mr. David Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress has been made in the Government's consideration of the National Health Service; and when he now expects to bring forward proposals for consultation.

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. John Moore): The Government have now embarked on an internal review of the National Health Service. We shall bring forward our proposals in due course.

Mr. Winnick: Why does the Secretary of State not admit that the Government's real purpose is to prepare the ground for the private sector to take over much of the National Health Service? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the British public certainly do not require impertinent lectures from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), about paying for health care? People pay through their taxes and national insurance contributions, and they expect the National Health Service to be adequately funded by whichever party happens to be in government.

Mr. Moore: The British public will share my admiration of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the sensible way in which she addressed the nation about the issues and values that face a free society which, by choice, spends £17 billion on alcohol.

Beyond that, the gravamen of the point made by the hon. Gentleman related to the review. As I have told him in a written answer, the review will be wide-ranging and fundamental. It is clear that we are concerned with the development of the Health Service to meet the country's needs in the years to come. We shall look at all alternatives that allow us to ensure what we care most about—the health of our country.

Dame Jill Knight: May I suggest to my right hon. Friend that many thousands of people are aware from their own personal experience that today the Health Service is treating and curing people who only two or three years ago would have been sent home to die? When my right hon. Friend considers long-term plans, may I suggest to him that the vast majority of people in Britain are willing to pay more money for health services and care, provided that whatever schemes are adopted—and there are many—the money goes to the Health Service and not to the general exchequer?

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend is quite right. That is why we must look so carefully at the way in which resources are used. We must ensure that they are spent on patient care, and not wasted. My hon. Friend was right to identify something that should unite both sides of the House. It is extraordinary that in the past year about 32 million of our citizens have used hospital services in Britain. That is an astonishing example of the achievement, for which we should give credit to all those who work in the Health Service.

Mr. Galbraith: Has the Secretary of State's review made him aware that a more efficient use of resources, such as operating theatres and beds, will require an increase in resources? Therefore, will he guarantee to make more funds available so that we can utilise beds and operating theatres more efficiently?

Mr. Moore: We will consider everything. Obviously we shall consider the way in which increased efficiency improves the ways in which the Health Service can treat more patients. However, as the hon. Gentleman knows from his experience in Scotland, where a greater percentage of GDP resources has been expended on health care, that has not improved the relative ratios of waiting times compared with England. Therefore, it is a matter, not simply of resources, but of the way in which those resources are effectively used in patient care.

Mr. Sims: There is no question of privatising the NHS, as the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) implied, but will my right hon. Friend confirm that there have been many examples of co-operation between the NHS and the private sector, to their mutual advantage? Will his Department collate those examples and circulate them to some of the authorities which, for political or ideological reasons, refuse to use that co-operation for the benefit of patients?

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are concerned with patient care, which means co-operation in the use of all the resources that we have. I draw his attention to an excellent article by the King's Fund, which illustrates the way in which the private and public sectors are already working together. We should encourage that because, as I keep saying, our only concern should be patient care, not sterile politics.

Mr. Redmond: Will the Secretary of State tell the House what monetary value he places on human life?

Mr. Moore: If it is pure money that we are talking about, the Secretary of State and the Government place greater value on human life than did the Labour Government when they reduced the proportion of GDP that they spent on health care. However, if we talk in that kind of sterile language, we shall not rationally find a way to improve the health of our country.

Sir Peter Hordern: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that his review will not be confined to the role of the NHS alone, but will review the other means of providing health services to our people, including possibly a form of national health insurance scheme?

Mr. Moore: Like my hon. Friend, who served for many years on the Public Accounts Committee and who has noticed so many times the way in which we do not necessarily use our resources as effectively as we might, I shall ensure that we examine each and every alternative. All alternatives will be considered on their merits so that we can ensure that our prime goal of improving the health of our nation is uppermost in our minds.

Mr. Robin Cook: Will the Secretary of State now answer the questions that I have put to him twice in writing? What opportunity will there be for the public to join in the review of their Health Service? How will the professional organisations which work in the Health Service get a hearing in the review? Why do Ministers propose to consult us only when they have made up their minds? May we be told even the terms of the review? Does the Secretary of State not appreciate that the NHS belongs to the public and that its future cannot be disposed of in a basement in Downing street, still less in a dining room at the Carlton club?

Mr. Moore: Perhaps I could draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the answers to the written parliamentary questions that were addressed to his hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), who asked the question, in which I made it absolutely clear that any submissions brought forward would be considered. It might also be of interest to the hon. Gentleman to discuss this matter with the Trades Union Congress, most of the general secretaries of which came to see me, because again I made it absolutely clear—they obviously have not communicated it to the Opposition Front Bench—that I look forward to any and all submissions from the TUC and from any other reputable body.

Benefits (Uprating)

5. **Mr. Hanley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the cost of the current year's social security uprating.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Michael Portillo): We estimate that the benefits uprating which takes effect from April 1988 will add more than £1·3 billion to social security expenditure in 1988-89.

Mr. Hanley: While recognising that the uprating represents the most thorough and substantial review of the social security system ever, and that it will make the system simpler to understand, may I ask my hon. Friend to guarantee and confirm to the House that those most in need will be the people targeted by the reforms, and that families with children will benefit even more than they would have done by a simple uprating of child benefit?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to this simplification of the system, which is important, and to the extra money going to families. The sum of £200 million is going to family credit over and above what is available for family income supplement.

Another £100 million is going to families on income support, which compares with the £120 million that it would have cost to uprate child benefit.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that among those losing out will be 100,000 people who will lose housing benefit altogether, 50,000 of whom are pensioners? Six hundred thousand families will also lose out when housing benefit is reviewed downwards in April.

Mr. Portillo: There are some losers from housing benefit, but overall the reforms have produced many more people who gain or suffer no change than people who lose out. The hon. Gentleman makes a mistake to consider housing benefit in isolation.

Mr. Raison: Will my hon. Friend make sure that in the next uprating the capital limits are reconsidered? The present limit of £6,000 bears hardly on a number of people who have been receiving housing benefit. Can we raise that limit next time to at least £10,000?

Mr. Portillo: The £6,000 limit applies across the range of benefits. It is double the present limit for supplementary benefit. Of course the limits can be reviewed, but that would mean that people who were paying taxes and had no savings would be paying tax to pay benefits to people with more than £6,000 in the bank.

Mrs. Beckett: In view of the size of the sums that the Minister has quoted with regard to the uprating, is it not a particularly mean and shoddy trick to cheat pensioners and the disabled out of a fiver a week solely because—often for the convenience of the Department—they have combined payment books?

Mr. Portillo: I think that the hon. Lady has misunderstood the position. Many people are over-compensated by the compensation being paid for the RPI error. Only a very small number of people are losing because they are entitled to a benefit on both their order books.

Mrs. Peacock: I welcome the early part of my hon. Friend's reply, but may I ask what representations he has received about the £8 payment that is being made to all who were underpaid last year? Is he aware of the confusion, concern and anguish that that is causing in many areas?

Mr. Portillo: Some of the confusion arises because people have not understood that on some benefits there has been no loss. Due to the way in which the rounding up is calculated there has been no loss for those on lower rate attendance allowance, invalid care allowance, basic retirement pension for married women on their husband's insurance contribution or on severe disablement allowance. In view of all those, some of the claims are exaggerated.

EC (Health Statistics)

6. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of gross domestic product the public sector contributes to health in each EEC country.

Mr. Moore: As the answer contains a number of figures I will, with permission, circulate it in the *Official Report*. The hon. Lady may wish to know, however, that the figures for net public spending on health range from 4·1 per cent. in Greece and Portugal to 6·7 per cent. in France and 6·9 per cent. in Ireland. For the United Kingdom, the equivalent figure for net public spending is 5·2 per cent.

Ms. Short: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the figures for public spending and total spending show that Britain spends less as a percentage of GDP than most other developed countries in the world? Does that not give the lie to the Government's pretence that the problem has to do with some sort of insatiable demand for health care? Is not the truth that, for ideological reasons, the Government want to destroy the national health system, which is enormously popular and efficient—in terms of the proportion of money that goes on administration—in order to bring in a private health system? They are running down the system when they could well afford to increase expenditure and get rid of the present problems.

Mr. Moore: If there were any truth in the hon. Lady's absurdities it would apply to the previous Labour Government, who reduced the percentage of GDP dedicated to health from the public sector from 5 to 4·7 per cent.—unlike this Government, who have increased it again, to 5·2 per cent. net.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that it is not the percentage of gross national product that we spend on health that is important, but the service that the Health Service gives the people of this country? Does he accept that, despite the problems that we are encountering at the moment, we in the United Kingdom possess the best National Health Service in the modern world? Will he ensure that in the inquiry being carried out by the Government all alternatives to current funding and all alternatives to make the present system more efficient will be considered, and not held to be out of court?

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend can be reassured that I will certainly look at the alternatives and that I am concerned to make sure that we do not get trapped into simplicities such as the percentage of GDP. My hon. Friend will know, as others who ask such questions may not, that, for example, the nation with the lowest percentage of GDP spent on health, Greece, also happens to have the highest male life expectancy rate, whereas the nation with the highest percentage of GDP spent on health, Ireland, probably has the lowest male life expectancy rate. That is a statistical illustration of the fallacy of GDP extrapolations.

Mr. Madden: Does not the protest campaign announced today by the Royal College of Nursing underline the verdict of every test of public opinion, which is that the vast majority of people want available funds to be spent on improving the NHS and not frittered away on tax cuts for the well off? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, instead of a phoney review of the NHS, the Prime Minister would be better employed finding the money urgently to avoid cuts in the Health Service this year?

Mr. Moore: What all this illustrates is the fact that the Opposition are desperate to find ways of spending the Conservative economic success, which has underlain the achievements of this Government. The Government have massively increased funding to the Health Service, as opposed to the reductions under the Labour Government.

Mr. Whitney: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, speaking in round terms, the average of national spending on health in the leading OECD countries is about 9 per cent. compared with about 6 per cent. in this country? The difference is that those countries take into consideration the whole of national spending on health, rather than just Government spending. The message of those figures is that we must look again extremely carefully at how we can find the additional spending on health that the country clearly needs.

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In our main competitor countries an average of about 2 per cent. of funding is provided by the private sector, as opposed to the 0.5 per cent. of private sector funding in this country. It is clear that the overseas private sector makes a far greater contribution to health care, and that is the key distinction illustrated by the national figures.

Following are the figures:

	Proportion of GDP spent on public sector health (1985) Per cent.
Belgium	5·5
Denmark	5·2
France	6·7
Germany	6·4
Greece	4·1
Ireland	6·9
Italy	5·4
Netherlands	5·5
Portugal	4·1
Spain	4·3
United Kingdom	5·2

Source: OECD 1987.

Note: Luxembourg is excluded from the table because of reported inconsistencies in the national health accounts.

Disabled Claimants

8. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what protection he intends to give disabled claimants who will have a reduced entitlement in April.

Mr. Scott: Existing disabled claimants will not have a reduced entitlement, because they will receive transitional protection at the point of change. As I have already announced to the House, for new claimants we intend setting up a special fund in co-operation with the Disablement Income Group.

Mr. McKay: In reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) the Minister said that he had received advice from the Disablement Income Group, and he spoke of hundreds of recipients and beneficiaries. Does the Minister realise that the Disablement Income Group is talking, not about hundreds, but about thousands? Will that fund be sufficient for those thousands of people? Will he consult the Disablement Income Group again? What is he doing to monitor the situation to make sure that those people are fully reimbursed?

Mr. Scott: I believe that the hon. Gentleman is confusing the Disablement Income Group and the Disability Alliance. That is the group that made the statement about thousands being affected. I do not know how that group got that figure. Certainly, given the representations that I have received since we announced the system for income support and the identification of the needs of disabled claimants across the board, we have been talking about hundreds rather than thousands.

Mr. Rowe: I am sure my hon. Friend is aware that there are anxieties among the professionals at anything that starts to rebuild demarcation lines between people who are regarded as severely disabled and those who are regarded as disabled. Can he give us an assurance that, in considering the ways in which the various schemes work, he will take such anxieties into account?

Mr. Scott: I ask my hon. Friend to await the reports from the OPCS and Sir Roy Griffiths and our subsequent conclusions from the results of those surveys. I certainly believe that demarcation disputes do not always serve a suitable purpose, but we shall be subsuming all that in our considerations of the overall needs of disabled people.

Mr. Wareing: If the Minister does not know how the Disablement Income Group and the Disability Alliance came to work out that thousands of people were likely to suffer as a result of the Government's policy from 1 April, why does he not ask them, in view of the fact that he is asking them to administer the fund? Can he not tell the House how much in pounds and pence he will make available to the groups to administer?

Mr. Scott: As I have said to the House, I am confident that sufficient funds will be available to cover the needs of the group. There is a distinction between absolutely every disabled person who received any sort of additional requirement under supplementary benefit and the group which has been identified, which is those severely disabled people who need help to maintain their independence in the community and not have to go into institutional care. That is the group which I believe amounts to hundreds, rather than thousands.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Why do the Government not amend the Social Security Bill, which is now in another place, as proposed by the Disablement Income Group, in the terms of the amendment it has drafted to the Bill, to deal statutorily with this very pressing and deeply serious problem for severely disabled people?

Mr. Scott: Because the whole purpose of moving to income support—that is, allowances and premiums—to meet needs was to simplify the system and get away from the very complicated system of additional requirements which flowed from the supplementary benefits system. We want to move away from that, but we recognise that there is a short-term gap, which is being met flexibly with the help of the Disablement Income Group.

Social Security Act 1986

9. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what recent representations he has received concerning the implementation of the new social security regime under the Social Security Act 1986 in April.

Mr. Portillo: Implementation of the new schemes is generally well advanced, and we continue to receive a variety of representations.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Minister aware of the considerable additional work load that is placed on DHSS employees in local offices in trying to cope with the change? Is he aware that some staff have been working successive

weekends for weeks on end? What proposals does he have to bring additional staff to the offices to make sure that the public do not suffer as a result of the changes?

Mr. Portillo: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his supplementary question because it gives me the opportunity to pay tribute to the staff in local offices who, as the hon. Gentleman says, have been working extremely hard and have the conversion to income support well on track. We have recruited some 9,000 extra staff over the past two years, and additional staff were taken on precisely for the conversion.

Mr. Dickens: Does my hon. Friend agree that the general public demand a welfare state system that is selective, not universal? Does he also agree that that is exactly what the Conservative Government are doing—targeting help to those in genuine need? What is wrong with that? Is it not right that that is the way we should carry on?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend has put his finger on the main issue of the debate. The Government continue to maintain two sorts of benefits — income-related, and universal, such as child benefit. The two sets of benefits have their place in the system.

Mr. Robin Cook: Does the Minister recognise that there must be very severe hardship in those local offices which have received allocations from the social fund for next year which are less than half their expenditure on single payments for last year? Can he come up with a better explanation of why those offices are concentrated in areas of deprivation such as Glasgow, Leeds and Bathgate, and why the offices which do best are those such as Epsom, Tunbridge Wells and Bognor Regis? Can there be any possible explanation for the ludicrous misallocation, other than naked political bias?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman knows that the social fund budget is £210 million, compared with the £190 million being spent this year on single payments. I placed in the Library for the perusal of the hon. Gentleman the method by which this had been calculated. When we last debated the issue, I was not entirely sure that he had read it.

Mr. Favell: If low-income families have to budget, why should not those on supplementary income benefits have to do exactly the same?

Mr. Portillo: The very important consideration in the reforms is that we are giving people on low incomes a sum of money from which they can budget. We are doing away with all the little additions under the supplementary benefit system and are dealing with people by groups, who receive premiums. We think it right that they should manage, but with help from the social fund.

Dental Health

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he takes to monitor the effect of National Health Service charges for dental treatment on dental health in Great Britain; and if he will make regular reports on this to the House.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mrs. Edwina Currie): We conduct dental health surveys of adults and children periodically and the results are reported to the House. The latest one is about to start. The general household survey also monitors dental health every year. The nation's dental health has shown dramatic improvements in recent years and there is no evidence that charges will reverse that trend.

Ms. Walley: Is the Minister aware that the Staffordshire local dental committee has written to me expressing its grave concern that those great advances in dental treatment to which she referred may now be jeopardised because of the policy of imposing charges? Will she tell the House how many similar representations she has received from other dental committees in favour of and against her proposals to charge for what was free dental care?

Mrs. Currie: I am sure that the Staffordshire local dental committee, like many others which have made representations to us, would also agree that there are other measures, such as fluoridation of water, which we support and will pay for, and cleaning teeth, which will have considerable benefits for dental health. As a matter of fact, every family in this country buys, on average, a tube of toothpaste every fortnight and they do not appear to be deterred by the price.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 9 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. I attended the memorial service for Lord Duncan Sandys at St. Margaret's, Westminster. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty The Queen.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Prime Minister aware that it is becoming very noticeable that, during the past few months, she has been reading out long, detailed answers whenever my hon. Friends, with the exception of one, ask her questions? When my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asks a question, he gets a very short answer, something like, "I have nothing further to add." I have some advice for the Prime Minister. [HON. MEMBERS: "Question."]

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us have the question.

Mr. Skinner: When the Prime Minister answers questions about the National Health Service, will she give a short reply and allocate another £3 billion, because that is what is needed? When my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow asks his question, perhaps she will give a long, detailed reply.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman's questions usually have more content than that. As he wants a reply, although I am not sure whether he wants a short or a long one, and as he mentioned the NHS, may I point out that, covering his constituency, phase one of the Chesterfield and North Derbyshire royal hospital, opened by the Queen in March 1985, provides 500 medical and surgical beds and cost £29 million. I could go on, but I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would like it if I did.

Mr. Hill: Does my right hon. Friend agree that defence is probably even more important than the National Health Service? Does she concur with me in recognising that the Western European Union is the European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance and that it is essential to give the WEU guidelines in its reactivation and tasks ahead? Does she further agree that time is running out, due to the presidential elections and the fact that European defence is in a very poor state at the moment?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend is aware, we are always anxious for the European members of NATO to play a very full part in the NATO Alliance. The WEU helps in that, but I believe that all its activities should be directed to strengthening the NATO Alliance and the European part in that Alliance. I believe that that is its purpose.

Mr. Kinnock: Did the Prime Minister mean it when she said two weeks ago:

"I am delighted that people always want to see me. I am absolutely delighted."?—[*Official Report*, 26 January 1988; Vol. 126, c. 168.]

If she did, why is she opposed to the idea of allowing the British people to have the chance to see her on television in this House?

The Prime Minister: My concern is quite simply this: my concern is very much for the good reputation of this House. [HON. MEMBERS "Frit."] I do not think that television will ever televise this House. If it does televise it, it will televise only a televised House, which would be quite different from the House of Commons as we know it.

Mr. Kinnock: For centuries we have had this place reported. The public come into the Gallery and for 10 years we have had the House broadcast. What reasonable cause can be given for not using modern technology—[HON. MEMBERS "You."] What reasonable cause can be given for not reporting and broadcasting this House with moving pictures? What is the Prime Minister afraid of?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman gives me my point. The reputation of this House has not been enhanced by sound broadcasting.

Mr. Evennett: Does my right hon. Friend share my concern and disgust at those teachers who are on strike in London today, and does she agree with me that such action can only prejudice the education of the children of London?

The Prime Minister: Yes. There is absolutely no reason for teachers to go on strike today. I find it very difficult to understand how, one day, teachers themselves can be absent from the classroom and the next day castigate children for truancy. One really cannot expect discipline in the classroom unless one demonstrates it oneself.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 9 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Nellist: Is the Prime Minister aware of the announcement made earlier today by the Confederation of Health Service Employees about a national day of action on 14 March in defence of our Health Service? That will be warmly welcomed by hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of trade unionists who would wish to take part in that day of action, such as the Vauxhall car workers who today voted to strike tomorrow in the north-west in defence of the National Health Service. Why does the Prime Minister not take the pressure out of the situation by getting the Chancellor to announce that the £[illegible],000 million or £4,000 million that he has apparently set aside for tax cuts to the rich will instead be spent on the National Health Service?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, there is an extra amount allocated to the National Health Service for the coming year of £1,100 million, which is being found by the taxpayer. I am in some little difficulty, as I have the results for both the Coventry district health authority and the Birmingham health authority. As they are both very good, I am not quite sure which I should give. Perhaps I should give the results for Coventry as the hon. Gentleman represents part of Coventry. Capital building: completed: a new sub-regional radio therapy treatment centre—£5 million—in 1987, and there is an extra waiting list fund of £272,000. Going over to Birmingham, the record is absolutely superb. Between 1978-79 and 1986-87 health spending in Birmingham—

Mr. Campbell-Savours: No one believes a word of it.

The Prime Minister: What a pity, because they are facts. Health spending has gone up from £122 million to £281 million. That has enabled Birmingham district health authority to employ more than 800 more nurses since 1979.

Q3. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 9 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Ford strike can have only a damaging effect upon jobs and upon exports and will not help that company improve by one iota its productivity, which is already 60 per cent. below similar plants in Germany? Will she reflect upon whether there has been a single time in the last eight years when the Labour party has not supported strike action?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. I cannot recall a time when the Opposition condemned strike action. All major strikes are damaging to the economy. The Ford workers have had two ballots and they must be intended to presume the consequence of their own action, on themselves, on other workers here or overseas, and on future inward investment, and to take responsibility for it.

Q4. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 9 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Lamond: As the Prime Minister has probably come armed with details of the new hospital to be built in my constituency, may I ask her to add one more detail to her file? The hospital medical committee, consisting of all the senior doctors in the hospital, wrote to me yesterday to say that unless there is an increase in the allocation for the running of the hospital when it opens they will be unable to use many of the operating theatres and the waiting list will grow. Why does the Prime Minister refuse point blank

to use even a small part of the money that has been set aside for tax cuts so that the £20 million investment in the hospital in Oldham may be useful economically?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman invited me to give details of capital building, I will. Under construction is the £17·8 million phase 1 redevelopment of Oldham district general hospital, and there is over £250,000 extra this year from the waiting list fund for general surgery, and so on. I find it difficult to take lectures from the hon. Gentleman, whose party treated the Health Service, doctors and nurses shabbily.

Q5. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 9 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sims: Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity to endorse the views expressed by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in a speech in which he advocated a return to traditional moral values? Does she agree that that should apply not only to parents and teachers, but to those who hold positions of responsibility, in Church, state and local government.

The Prime Minister: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I read the full speech of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I thought it was excellent in all respects, as we would all expect. The purpose, as I think is perhaps not fully. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister must have an opportunity to answer questions that have been put to her.

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. The purpose of having religious education as, until now, the only compulsory subject in the curriculum—it goes back to 1944—was to ensure that children were taught what was right and wrong. Strange things have happened to religious education since then. *[Interruption.]* How very interesting. I am amazed that Opposition Members should poke fun at such an important thing. No wonder some of them would like to get rid of religious education. We on this side believe in upholding it.

Q6. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 9 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Reid: Does the Prime Minister recall this time last year when, within days of the nurses' pay review award, she agreed to meet it in full and to fund it in full? I am aware, as is the House, that that was done out of her concern for nurses and the NHS and had nothing at all to do with the impending general election. So that she may confound the cynics who believe otherwise, will she guarantee that this year she will do the same and fund the award in full?

The Prime Minister: For very good reasons, we have never given that guarantee in advance, any more than the Opposition did over its review bodies, which it overturned frequently when they came up. Our record is very good, as the hon. Gentleman has pointed out. When the pay review body reports are in we shall decide precisely what to do with them. He will know that with regard to implementing them, as distinct from funding them, we do implement them in full unless there are strong and compelling reasons not to do so.

Q7. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 9 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pawsey: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Education Reform Bill, which is being considered in Standing Committee, will do much to enhance the quality and standard of state education? Is she aware, however, that a great deal of concern and apprehension are being caused to parents by the black propaganda being circulated by certain irresponsible groups? What advice does she have for parents?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that the Education Reform Bill is meant to give parents more choice and to enhance the quality and standard of education in all schools in the state system. I suggest to my hon. Friend that we must make more strenuous efforts to get across the great advantages of the Bill, in particular the advantages that it will bring to those who live in the inner cities.

BILL PRESENTED

Coal Mining Subsidence (Prevention and Public Awareness)

Mr. Alan Meale, supported by Mr. Frank Haynes, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Mr. Joseph Ashton, Mr. Harry Barnes, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. Jimmy Wray, Mr. Eric Illsley, Mr. Martin Redmond, Mr. John Prescott, Mr. Alex Eadie and Mr. George J. Buckley, presented a Bill to require any body or organisations involved in the working or getting of coal or other minerals to take steps to prevent subsidence damage and to promote public awareness of workings which might give rise to such damage: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday next on Friday 12 February, and to be printed. [Bill 95.]

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that the Standing Orders of the House require priority written questions to be answered by the Minister. You will also be aware that some Ministers are using holding answers, and then delaying answers for a considerable time. I have raised this question with you before, Mr. Speaker. I have checked on the answer board. My question relates to the Department of Health and Social Security. There is an outstanding reply for a priority written question to be answered on 1 December 1987.

It is now two and a half months since that question was due to be answered. That is really an abuse of the House. The fact that that answer has not appeared shows that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Currie), the Under-Secretary of State, is incompetent, indolent or uncaring of her responsibilities to the House. Mr. Speaker, I ask you to use your office to make sure that the Government do not evade their responsibilities in this matter.

Mr. Speaker: That does seem a very long time to wait to receive an answer. I am sure that what the hon. Member has said has been heard by those on the Government Front Bench. He has another recourse, which is to table a Question to ask when he will get that answer.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this afternoon, although you may not have noticed this, when the Vice-Chamberlain of the Household had properly and correctly delivered a message to the House from Her Majesty and was retreating respectfully bowing to the Speaker, at the end of his passage we had to witness the disgraceful episode of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) using a packet of Polos to chalk the Vice-Chamberlain's wand of office.

Apart from the incident of the Vice-Chamberlain having his wand chalked, do you not believe, Mr. Speaker, that that is a typical example of why we do not wish to have disgraceful behaviour televised into the lounges of our constituents?

Mr. Speaker: I did not observe what went on beyond the Bar this afternoon, but I agree that it would not be very good television.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a very important debate this afternoon, and I sense that the House wishes to get on with it.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hope not to detain the House too long, but what I have to say relates to a very important point of principle.

On two occasions this afternoon, when my hon. Friends the Members for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) and for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Lamond) asked the Prime Minister specific questions on the Health Service and not on any specific area, they were treated to a series of figures based on——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a clear case of a continuation of Question Time. I say again to the House that a very large number of right hon. and hon. Members wish to take part in the debate today. If we have too much delay, I shall not be able to call very many of them.

Smoke Detectors in Houses

3.36 pm

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the installation of smoke detectors in all domestic properties by a date to be determined.

This is a simple Bill, but its effects are sweeping. It is designed to require smoke detectors to be placed in all domestic properties over a period, with the aim of saving upwards of 300 lives per year.

On Christmas day 1984, the celebrations in my constituency were muted. Early that morning, fire had swept through a terraced house in Massey street, Bury, and taken nine lives, including those of four children. I went to the house at 8 am, and colleagues in all parts of the House who have been through a similar harrowing task will need no reminding of the grim scene that met me. I made there my first acquaintance with Greater Manchester's assistant chief fire officer, Bob Graham, whose work on fire prevention has guided many over the last few years.

In the years between 1978 and 1986, the number of deaths from accidental fires fluctuated between a low of 626 in 1985 and a high of 799 in 1979—an average of 691. In the same period, injuries from accidental fires averaged 6,344 per year.

What can be done to improve our fire safety record? How can we seek to reduce these numbers, representing two people killed and 17 injured through fire every single day?

Certainly public education plays a part. Few fires start spontaneously, and human carelessness has much to answer for. Legislation governing the flammability of items in the home, from fabrics to furniture, is most definitely useful, and the recent action against foam-filled furniture is to be welcomed. But it will take time for this latest legislation to have effect; furniture will not be thrown out overnight and the risk of terrible fires will continue, as we saw only too sadly in a fire at Watford yesterday.

I put it to the House that there is one simple, straightforward measure which should now be seen as the next logical step in domestic fire safety; that is the widespread use of the smoke detector.

In a paper dated March 1986, Assistant Chief Officer Graham pointed out the difficulty of preventing every single cause of the domestic fire. The completely fireproof house does not exist. If it did, like the accident-proof motor car, it would probably be unpopular. There are elements of risk in every home and we live with those risks, but we can continue to reduce the chance that an accident will take life. Bob Graham's conclusion, after study, was that the best plan for the future was to improve the early alarm of a fire, and that the most promising path to follow was that of the increased use of smoke detectors.

There are a number on the market. Some of them can be hard-wired into the electric circuit, but the most common are battery-operated devices no bigger than a hand which retail for between £10 and £15, with every prospect of the price being reduced. Contrast this with the price people in all kinds of accommodation will pay for security protection against burglary. I do not believe that, if the British public thought about it, they would neglect their families while protecting their property. The detectors take no more than five minutes to install, and fire brigades offer guidance not only on the type of detectors to be fitted but also on their optimum location in the home. The Home Office and fire brigades have leaflets available.

There are now few doubts about the life-saving potential or reliability of smoke detectors, providing, crucially, that they are well maintained. A survey in the United States in 1985 revealed that 74 per cent. of households had detectors. In figures quoted in a Child Accident Prevention Trust paper in 1986, the American fire service estimated that some 50 per cent. of lives then being lost in house fires could be saved by the installation of a smoke detector, and the Canadian fire service estimated the figure at 40 per cent.

In the United Kingdom, Bob Graham examined in his report the statistics for 1983, and concluded:

"For 83 per cent. of fires in dwellings the interval between ignition and discovery of the fire was estimated to be at least 5 minutes and for 48 per cent. of the deaths the interval was estimated to be over 30 minutes. On the face of it at least 48 per cent. would have received an early warning of the fire if detectors had been fitted, and probably this applies to most of the remainder. There is little doubt that detectors would have improved the situation".

We are talking of upwards of 300 saved lives per year. The Bill would begin to translate those chances for life into lives saved.

From 1 January 1989, I propose that all newly built domestic properties should be equipped with smoke detectors. From the same date, any domestic property either sold or being approved by a local authority after improvement would also have to be fitted with adequate smoke alarm protection. That would both stagger their introduction, and thus relieve a potential problem of supply if properties had to be equipped by a target date, and ensure enforcement through the normal house-buying procedure of inquiry and survey.

For rented property, both public and private, I believe that a target date for deployment would be necessary. I propose to leave that date to be determined after consultation with appropriate bodies, to recognise certain public authority difficulties, but clearly it should be as soon as possible, perhaps between three and four years from now.

I also hope that the legislation, and all fire safety legislation, will fall under the supervision of the Home Office and not be split between it, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment—an overdue reform.

Although many people are now installing smoke detectors at home—I am sure that we would all like to encourage that, and urge households not to wait for legislation—I believe that there are two reasons why legislation is needed. First, the House has a good record in passing all kinds of consumer safety legislation, to the general benefit of the people. We desire our children to be free from the risk of cruel injury from an unsafe toy, and from the risk of a burn while they wear flammable nightdresses. I seek to make them less fearful of a fire while they sleep. Secondly, experience tells us that the households most likely to suffer such tragedies are those least likely to fit detectors without being required to do so.

I do not believe that the more widespread use of smoke detectors will encourage a lazier attitude towards fire safety; quite the opposite. No one would emphasise more strongly than I that the detector prevents no fire. What it

[Mr. Alistair Burt]

does is give the vital few extra seconds of warning — which, as we have seen all too recently, can mean the difference between life and death, because of the speed and intensity of the modern house fire.

The proposal carries the support of the Association of Chief Fire Officers — expressed through its president, Brian Fuller of the west midlands — and of the Greater Manchester fire brigade, Help the Aged, the National House-Building Council, the Child Accident Prevention Trust and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents.

In 1929, the Cinematograph Act 1909 was amended soon after 70 children lost their lives in an accident at a Paisley cinema. The Eastwood Mills fire at Keighley, at a cost of eight lives, led to the Factories Act 1961 and the loss of 19 lives in the Top Storey club in Bolton led to the Licensing Act 1964. Here now is an opportunity for this country to take a lead: to put itself in advance of fire safety legislation in many parts of the world, and to act before any more of our own tragedies occur.

The smoke detector harms no one's civil rights. It is cheap, unobtrusive, and effective. Its more widespread use after legislation would be a fine example of the House's leadership and responsible use of its authority. I beg my colleagues to support the proposal.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Alistair Burt, Mr. John Wheeler, Mr. Alfred Morris, Mr. Conal Gregory, Mr. Tony Lloyd, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. David Sumberg, Mr. Ken Hargreaves and Mr. Ian McCartney.

Smoke Detectors in Houses

Mr. Alistair Burt accordingly presented a Bill to require the installation of smoke detectors in all domestic properties by a date to be determined: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 15 April, and to be printed. [Bill 89.]

Televising of the House

Mr. Speaker: Before we start the debate on the televising of proceedings of the House, I should say that I have had to balance the requests of more than 40 right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber who wish to take part. This is very much a House of Commons debate, so I hope that Privy Councillors will understand if they do not receive special precedence.

I noted that, in a recent simulated debate on this subject on television, hon. Members were able to make their speeches briefly. I hope that that will be the case today.

I have not selected any of the amendments on the Order Paper, but the arguments that they contain may be advanced during the course of the debate.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You have just undertaken to the House not to give Privy Councillors precedence — *[Interruption.]* You have just undertaken to give Privy Councillors qualified preference. Will you assure the House that, if the House were to be televised, Privy Councillors would have no preference at all?

Mr. Speaker: That is a hypothetical question if ever I heard one.

3.46 pm

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): I beg to move,

That this House approves in principle the holding of an experiment in the public broadcasting of its proceedings by television; and believes that a Select Committee should be appointed to consider the implementation of such an experiment and to make recommendations.

In inviting right hon. and hon. Members to support the motion, I am conscious that the House zealously and jealously looks after and preserves its character, sovereignty and privileges. I shall seek to argue that those qualities will be enhanced rather than undermined by the adoption of the motion.

As I think you implied, Mr. Speaker, this is essentially a House of Commons matter. There may or may not be an audience of some 55 million people waiting outside to see as well as listen to our proceedings, but whether we consent to that is essentially a matter for us. I welcome the fact, and the assurances that I have received, that there will be a genuinely free vote, and every right hon. and hon. Member will wish to consider where the interests of his constituents and of Parliament lie.

As somebody whose credentials in the debate were originally agnostic, and who has only recently come round to the view that the arguments in favour of the motion by far outweigh those against it, I invite the House to approach the matter with an open mind. I suspect that one or two hon. Members may have firmly made up their minds about the matter, but it is some time since we last debated it, and there are compelling reasons, both technological and with regard to changes in behaviour and public attitudes, that give ample justification for the arguments to be rehearsed again.

Before I seek to present the principal arguments that I would adduce in favour of the motion, let me say specifically what the motion does not do. It is genuinely a modest motion. It will not do anything of itself. Its passage will not bring about the televising of the House or the formation of a Select Committee. Further votes, debates and deliberation of the House will be necessary.

All that we are proposing here is, in principle, an experiment into televising the proceedings of the House and the establishment of a Select Committee to decide how best to implement that — and, I hope, to monitor it thereafter. Therefore, it would be up to the authorities of the House — I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will go into this in detail—to bring forward a motion for the establishment of a Select Committee which would consider how best to implement it, taking into account all the technical and other factors involved.

I hope that the Committee will bring a recommendation back to the House, if the motion is passed, well before the end of the Session. During the ensuing recess, the technical input could be placed here so that the experiment could be conducted from the beginning of the next Session. Even in that instance, we would still have to deliberate on the recommendations of the Select Committee and, if we so decided, positively vote for such an experiment. At the end of that experimental period, there would be a further vote to decide whether it became permanent or whether we wanted the experiment extended for any period.

Many of us may change our minds about televising the House in the light of experience gained during the experiment. Therefore, I urge those who are and remain agnostic to give it a chance. Although seeing is not always believing, the public and those who elected us would have a more certain understanding of our deliberations and the issues involved, and would have more respect for the House.

Three broad themes of argument support an experiment in the broadcasting by television of our proceedings. The first is the well-rehearsed constitutional argument—that the power and influence of Parliament will be enhanced in comparison with that of the Executive. The respect, awareness and support of the public who elected us to this place are essential ingredients of the activities of the House. Their understanding, respect and awareness of what goes on here cannot be complete without seeing as well as hearing and reading what we do.

Is it not at least absurd and anachronistic—at worst, patronising — that one can read reports of this place, listen to proceedings on the radio and come to the Public Gallery and see them, and that they are reported vicariously, but that one is not allowed to view them on television? The time has come to take this modest but historic step.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that television is the most powerful medium of our time? Is it not demeaning that the public—whom my hon. Friend rightly described as having a right to view our proceedings at first hand — will see only censored and very shortened proceedings, which is what the BBC and the IBA propose, if the House accepts the motion?

Mr. Nelson: The question of editing is crucial and I shall come to that later. The extent to which televised proceedings of the House will reflect a microcosm of what happens here is a legitimate subject for debate. The power and influence of Parliament can only be enhanced rather than undermined by this measure.

To some extent, this debate seems to have taken place already this afternoon. I hope that no firm conclusions will have been reached from earlier exchanges, even though they took place at a rarefied level. Although my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is the most eminent Member of the House, in this matter she is, inter pares, a simple Member, with us, of the House — *[Interruption.]* You will recall, Mr. Speaker, my right hon. Friend's concern not about her own position — she would be subject to great coverage if this experiment were to happen — but about respect for the House. However, we are the House, and to some extent the answer to how we are portrayed lies in our own hands.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Will my hon. Friend concede that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has two unique contributions to make to the debate? One is her considerable length of service in the House, and the comparison that she can make on that basis; but more important is her experience at the Dispatch Box during Prime Minister's Questions, about which she can express a concern that probably cannot be felt by any other hon. Member?

Mr. Nelson: I do not concede: I thoroughly agree with my hon. Friend. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has everything to gain and little to lose from the televising of Parliament. I am constantly impressed by the selfless way in which the Leader of the Opposition supports this motion, knowing that if anyone is to get a prize for being the best supporting actor it will be the Leader of the Opposition and that the Prime Minister has a great deal more to gain.

A Government of any political persuasion will have a natural tendency to prevent Parliament from exerting greater influence and power. In 1979, the House made the important decision to establish the Select Committee procedure to mirror the responsibilities of Government Departments and thereby enhance the power and influence of Parliament and hold the Government of the day more accountable. That balance of power seems to have slipped. The televising of Parliament and the greater coverage that that will certainly bring for Front Benchers and Back Benchers will constitutionally improve our ability to do what we are here to do, to represent the interests of our constituents and to hold accountable the Government of the day.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): As another simple Member of Parliament, may I ask the hon. Gentleman whether he agrees that such an experiment should be on the basis of a continuous channel, so that the House could be seen all the time when it is sitting? If the hon. Gentleman cannot give us an assurance that that is what he believes, unless that is the view of the House, I shall not vote for his motion.

Mr. Nelson: The terms of the motion that I have tabled do not rule out that possibility. In all honesty, it will probably be rather difficult, for technical reasons, for that to be done during the experimental period. There have been strong arguments that continuous coverage should be provided thereafter. The Select Committee will have seriously to consider that matter. There will be strong arguments to adduce for exactly what the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) has proposed.

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) has raised an important point, and my hon. Friend should deal with it properly. He should give us his opinion, if it were possible, whether he would want to prohibit the broadcasting authorities from

[Mr. Norman Tebbit]

taking extracts into news programmes. It would be nonsense if we had a continuous channel, which almost nobody would watch, and then prohibited the broadcasting authorities from using extracts from it on the news. Editorial control will apply to the House whether my hon. Friend likes it or not.

Mr. Nelson: I do not deny that editorial control will have to be exercised. In answer to the straight question by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), I would not wish to prevent extracts being used in news and current affairs programmes. All such extracts and portrayals, even during the experimental period, would have to be subject to the ground rules that have been established. That is partly why it would be an experiment and why the Select Committee would be established. The ground rules, by and large, were faithfully observed during the experimental period in the televising of the other place.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Is not the argument advanced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) rather phoney? Do not the public get all their information about Parliament from edited accounts in newspapers and on the radio? How many of our constituents take and read *Hansard*?

Mr. Nelson: My hon. Friend is quite right. It is extraordinary and paradoxical that we seek to portray our views, and we have every interest in our deliberations in the House being promulgated, yet we deny ourselves the principal means of doing so through the most modern communications media. We leave it to others to report. There is editing now.

What reporting is there of Back-Bench proceedings and debates after the Front-Bench speeches have been made? After all, the Government of the day can easily call a press conference, and are seemingly willing to do so frequently. Political commentators are happy to take up suggestions to present programmes. The only body that operates a self-denying ordinance is, for some reason, this House.

I suggest that that is partly patronising, but also stems from the view which has grown up that in some way politics is best left to this place, that we know best, and that perhaps the people will not fully understand. I am not saying that that is the view adopted by all the opponents of this motion. However, we sometimes underestimate the political interest and understanding of people outside who wish to have a more whole appreciation of our activities, which can only be provided——

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West) *rose*——

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton) *rose*——

Mr. Nelson: If my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) will allow me, I shall give way first to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), as he sought to intervene first.

Mr. Madden: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and am sorry to add to the number of interruptions that he has had. He talked about an experiment and about televising the Chamber: will he make it clear that he envisages the experiment including the televising not only of the Chamber but of Select Committees and Standing Committees? That is an important matter to several hon. Members.

Mr. Nelson: I do so with pleasure. I confirm that the terms used in the motion, referring to the proceedings of the House, include proceedings of Select Committees and could also include those of Standing Committees. I for one am very much in favour of the proceedings of some of our Select Committees being subject to televising. An increasing amount of the important work of this House and of right hon. and hon. Members is done in Select Committees. Although it might be slightly more technically difficult to televise Standing Committees, I see every reason why, when major Bills are going through the House, such as the Education Reform Bill and the Local Government Finance Bill, which are issues of great national importance to many people, those proceedings should be subject to televising, and extracts from them should be included in the programmes.

Mr. Tracey: I apologise to my hon. Friend for this further interruption but I should like to bring him to what I think is the heart of the matter. Will he explain to the House how he thinks its proceedings will be enhanced by televising them, when it is presently possible to broadcast them through the radio channels, but the broadcasting authorities are not using that existing power fully?

Mr. Nelson: There are two principal reasons for that. The first is that sound broadcasting provides an incomplete and possibly even a misrepresentative picture of what happens in this place. Many of our constituents have said to us from time to time that the hubbub of Question Time and other proceedings appears shocking. That is accentuated through the sound broadcasting system. It would be much better if people could see what was going on, as well as listen to it.

Secondly — this is a difficult argument, but I hope that the House will understand what I am trying to say — there are occasions when the emotion of the House must be seen, as well as listened to and read. There are great debates in this place — for example, the great debate that took place on the Saturday following the invasion of the Falkland Islands—when the mood of the House reflected the mood of the nation and had a demonstrable impact on the Government. That was an important occasion on which the public should have been able to see what was going on.

I adduce a couple of other instances. There are great debates on moral issues on which, of course, the public are often split. People find it difficult to understand why majorities are for or against issues such as abortion or capital punishment. Our ability to explain to the public and to enable them to understand why we reach decisions will be enhanced by their being able to see as well as to hear and read our proceedings.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury) *rose*——

Mr. Nelson: I think the House will agree that I have been fairly generous in giving way, so if my hon. Friend will permit me, I should like to advance my argument a little further.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: I have a particular point to make.

Mr. Nelson: Very well, I give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: In November I wrote to Mr. Bernard Tate, the head of BBC parliamentary broadcasting, asking him what representations the public had made to the BBC about the broadcasting of Parliament. He said that the BBC had not received any requests from viewers,

and that as far as he knew ITN had received only two requests. I have not received any letters from my constituents asking for the televising of our proceedings. I suggest that my hon. Friend considers those facts.

Mr. Nelson: I recognise that people tend to write not in favour of things, but more often against them. However, putting that to one side, we must consider the extent to which there has been interest in the televised proceedings of the House of Lords. The fact is that, despite being broadcast late at night, the programmes frequently attract audiences of 500,000 and upwards. Many of the extracts that are used on other programmes have enhanced the ratings of those programmes. Therefore, there is an interest. I believe that there will be demand if the facility is available.

In seeking to argue that televising our proceedings will enhance the influence and reputation of Back Benchers and Parliament, it is important that I emphasise that there will be more coverage of Back Benchers, rather than the monopoly of Front Benchers and of Question Time.

Of course, one may say that the broadcasting stations would say that. However, we have assurances from the BBC that in its judgment, televising would result in

"greatly increased coverage of the Commons, at both national and regional levels."

The ITN editor has stated:

"I would like to stress the increased coverage of Parliament that would result from televising".

Channel 4 has stated:

"By any standard it has to be an improvement on the numbers"

of Back Bench Members

"who presently get a mention on television."

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): My hon. Friend has been generous in the number of interventions that he has allowed in his speech; perhaps that would be an example to Parliament if we were to televise our proceedings. If a Back Bencher sought to take advantage of the offer made by the regional television stations to carry locally any contributions that they make, they would have to intervene early in the speech of a Minister, Opposition spokesman or Privy Councillor, because, as my hon. Friend will know, most Back Benchers are rarely called before the 5 o'clock deadline for regional news programmes.

Mr. Nelson: There would undoubtedly be an improvement over the present situation because of the establishment of new programmes by the network to cover our proceedings on a daily basis and a weekly round-up basis. What is more—this is an important part of the argument — regional coverage of our debates and interventions will be greater. I understand that there are fears among certain Members of Parliament from the north of England that television might provide an opportunity for monopoly by some of the London or southern Members.

Members of all parties have legitimate concerns, but the regional possibilities of televising will be considerable. They will enable people in different parts of the country to see directly and to listen in to a particular aspect of a debate on the Floor of the House and in Committees which affects them. After all, few issues which we debate and on which we take decisions in the House do not directly touch the lives of individuals outside. They should have an opportunity to see as well as to listen to our proceedings.

The second broad theme of argument that I would adduce in favour of televising our proceedings, at least on an experimental basis, is that it would promote a greater understanding of our parliamentary proceedings and the issues involved. We should ask why we, and the public who are affected by everything that happens here, have to rely on reports at third hand. Government and political commentators have numerous and easy opportunities to publicise their views. I believe that hon. Members should be able to communicate their views directly, rather than vicariously.

When it comes to the third major issue — whether televising our proceedings would enhance or detract from the respect and character of this place—some cynics and pessimists might say, "Could the behaviour possibly get worse?" I do not adopt that view. I believe that the character of this place would be faithfully reflected and that it would not be damaged by what would happen.

The incidents that have occurred and which have been cited as reasons why hon. Members should vote against the Motion, are largely unaffected by the existence, or otherwise, of television. The abseiling of lesbians in the House of Lords a week or so ago was not covered or televised on any of the major stations that covered the proceedings of the House that day. I suggest that that and similar incidents are not determined by the existence of television in the House but by the existence and status of the House itself. After all, the suffragettes chained themselves to the railings long before television was invented, and there have been other incidents in the past. There are incidents now and, sadly, there will probably be more in the future.

The ground rules that must be observed by the broadcasters are an essential part of ensuring that we have fair representation of what happens in the House and that there is not undue or avoidable publicity for outside interventions of strangers.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a fourth main element to his argument, which is a matter of principle? The right to know what happens here was conceded many centuries ago, and my hon. Friend has mentioned the right to read and hear our proceedings. Surely we now have a right to see, and the only issue to which we are addressing ourselves is that of cosmetics. Surely we should be seen without our make-up as well as with it?

Mr. Nelson: I am obliged to my hon. Friend for making that point of principle, and he is right. As my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Drake (Miss Fookes) said when this matter was last debated, we have come a long way in the past 400 years since the time when our proceedings were secret. The evolution of our democratic system has been one of gradual and increasing openness, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) suggests.

I believe and hope that we shall enhance the character and standing of this place in the world outside. If the public live in ignorance because they are unable to see what happens here, that will ferment and breed suspicion and misunderstanding of our proceedings.

There are genuine and understandable fears about editing. There is concern that our proceedings will be trivialised or misrepresented, but there have been few complaints about the coverage of the Lords. I am the first

[Mr. Nelson]

to recognise that covering the House of Lords by television is different from covering the House of Commons—but not entirely different. We can learn from that experience, if only from what it shows about the integrity of the broadcasting networks, which have kept to the ground rules set.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart), who chaired the Select Committee on Sound Broadcasting, and to the other hon. Members who served on that Committee, which played a significant role in monitoring these affairs. By and large, it found that the worst fears were not realised in that experiment, and so it will be in this House.

Many of the fears legitimately expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House are not so much misconceived as actively alarmist, and some of them verge on paranoia. This is a time for the House to make a more sober, careful judgment and to move slowly forward to set up a Select Committee and establish an experimental period. Let us then decide whether televising is right or wrong.

There has been some suggestion that once we have an experiment we shall follow the secular trend and inevitably end up with permanent broadcasting. Not at all; the matter is in our hands. In fact, those who present that argument are implicitly recognising that there will be demand to see the proceedings of the House.

The editorial control that has been exercised has faithfully reflected the ground rules that were agreed between the House of Lords Select Committee and the broadcasters. Those rules are, for example, that no material can be used for light entertainment or satirical programmes. The Committee has qualified privilege, and copyright rests with it. Material should never be used for party political broadcasts. The supply of material to others in the BBC and to those under the authority of the IBA can be done only with the consent of the Broadcasting Committee.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Nelson: I want to conclude now; I have spoken for long enough. I have given the main argument in support of the motion, and I want to give the maximum number of right hon. and hon. Members the chance to contribute to the debate.

Although we have debated this subject many times in the past 20 years, the changes in technology that would make such an experiment less intrusive, the changes in public attitudes, as reflected in people's greater interest in and awareness of what goes on here, and, to some extent, the change in the behaviour of the House, which wants to communicate more to counter the power of the executive by making it more accountable, are all strong reasons for giving the experiment the go-ahead. This is a modest motion; it will require more motions if we proceed, but that is a matter for the House. This is a modest but historic step, and I invite the House to take it.

4.6 pm

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): I listened with great attention to the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson), but to say, as he did, that television would ignore incidents that might take place is rather like saying that if television has been there when Abraham Lincoln got shot it would have concentrated on the play. The essence of television is this: it is about entertainment, not government. It is about ratings and about competition between channels to pull in the most viewers to watch "EastEnders", "Coronation Street" or whatever. Ultimately, television will do the same for politics as it has done for football — the crowds have decreased. Religion on Sunday is now Harry Secombe singing 1950s songs at 6.30 pm on "Songs of Praise". That is what television is about—it is a branch of show business.

If television were allowed to choose anying it would like to show, it would go into a courtroom to watch the trial of a woman who had been raped. There stands the rapist and all the gory evidence, with the cameras watching the victim weeping—television would love nothing better. It loves an IRA funeral, and disasters. It has to go for the juicy bits. Any producer who did not show an incident in the Chamber, once the trial period was over, would get the sack. The abseiling that took place last week would happen every day.

I have been in the House for 20 years. I have seen a bomb thrown from the Strangers Gallery — before television — and watched it roll up to Barbara Castle's handbag——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I hope my hon. Friend will correct that. I was here when the bomb rolled under a seat on the Government side, and Tom Swain went to get it out after the smoke had disappeared.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): There were two bombs.

Mr. Ashton: I still say that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is wrong. Anyway, the bomb was thrown. The press sat laughing in the Press Gallery, and we were all in tears. Five minutes later they were all in tears, too, and ran out as fast as we did.

Since then, I have seen a bag of horse manure thrown — it just missed my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover.

Mr. Skinner: We are discussing a new motion.

Mr. Ashton: I am being serious now.

There is a plaque on the wall of the Chamber to commemorate Airey Neave, who was blown up. We live in a violent world, a world of government different from what it was 20 or 30 years ago. When they first started putting Ministers on television, broadcasters were very deferential to them. In 1951 or so, they used to go on their knees to get Ministers on television. It was a case of "Yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir." That soon changed, and so it should have done. The deferential attitude to this House would change quickly too, once people became used to it. Then, when it went out at 12.15 am on Channel 4 with 100,000 viewers, like the House of Lords, they would soon be pushing for the ratings. Soon there would be stunts and gimmicks to get the proceedings on to television——

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The whole thrust of the hon. Gentleman's speech is to compare unfavourably the standards of news and current affairs reporting on television with those that obtain elsewhere. How can he possibly take the view that the standards of probity, accuracy and honesty, as exhibited day by day in the television news on both channels, compare unfavourably with the nonsense that goes into the newspapers, which do not care about the facts?

Mr. Ashton: The hon. Member has admitted that newspapers do not report Parliament. They report the merry quip, the heckles, somebody being sent off; they report the characters in parliamentary sketches, and they have cartoons. In fact, they do anything but report the actual policies debated in the House and in the Committees.

If we consider the hours in the year in which Parliament sits and subtract the Privy Councillors' time and Front Bench time, we must accept that the poor Back Bencher gets less than one hour per year to put forward his point of view. He certainly will get a lot of time on television! Today, 117 questions were put down on social services and there were 134 questions to the Prime Minister. We put our names in a raffle and hope to be drawn in the top 12 questions to Ministers or the top four or five questions to the Prime Minister. It is a matter of luck rather than the authenticity of the question—it has nothing to do with policy. Indeed, asking the Prime Minister to list her engagements is a damned stupid question. However, that practice has grown up over the years.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): What has this got to do with television?

Mr. Ashton: My hon. Friend will find out, if he listens.

Twenty years ago there used to be only six questions put down to the Prime Minister. Those questions related to matters of great importance, such as an economic summit. There were only about 15 questions put down to other Ministers. Indeed, hon. Members could even put down two questions to a Minister. To put down such a question was a serious matter. However, hon. Members are now put under pressure from their constituents, who demand what they are going to do about the closure of a hospital or a factory. They demand that their Member of Parliament is one of 600 who gets into the limelight. They have put pressure on their Member and he is being pushed and forced into putting something down.

Often hon. Members do not know what the question should be about, but simply put something down because they are under pressure from their constituents to get publicity. Those hon. Members are not putting down questions to do with the running of the country or analysing what happens in the Select and Standing Committees, but solely to satisfy some pressure group within their constituency.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ashton: I will just make this point.

Ultimately, if an hon. Member is not lucky in the ballot to get to the Prime Minister and he goes three or four months without getting the chance, he is put under great pressure. Constituents ask, "When are you going to raise this matter? When are you going to get up and shout?" The hon. Member is then faced with a choice of either making a row during Prayers and getting sent off or standing up to be sent off for some other reason. They stage a demonstration to show off and when they go back home they are heroes. Make no mistake, the idea that people will not show off in front of cameras is nonsense.

When those people who have shown off go back to their pubs and clubs, they are heroes. The hon. Member in the neighbouring constituency is then attacked and asked, "Why don't you stand up? Why can't you kick up a row? Why don't you get your name in the headlines and on television?"

Mr. Dalyell: My hon. Friend has chosen the example of today's Prime Minister's Question Time. If the cameras had been present, the Prime Minister might not have got away quite so easily as she did when answering the question on Westland put by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), because people would see the extent to which the Prime Minister evades crunch questions on such issues.

Mr. Ashton: I admire my hon. Friend's integrity and his worthiness — indeed, he is the most able Back-Bench performer in the House—but I must tell him that the public are bored stiff with Westland, the Belgrano and everything else. Television is about ratings and, in common with newspapers, about what the mass of the people are interested in. Therefore, no matter how worthy such a question may be, it would not be selected for coverage.

Mr. Dalyell: I concede that the public may be bored with Westland and with the Belgrano, but they are not bored with the question whether the Head of Government tells the truth to Parliament.

Mr. Ashton: I doubt whether that would come across on television, because the sophisticated nature of the cut and thrust of Question Time is totally baffling. I have had people who have been in the Gallery and who have come down saying that they could not understand nine tenths of what was happening.

Indeed, one Friday afternoon a newspaper editor from Sheffield was in the Gallery at 2.30 pm for an Adjournment debate. I believe that an hon. Member from Bradford was raising the problem of the economic situation in Yorkshire or something like that. When that editor came down from the Gallery, he was absolutely livid. He demanded, "Where were the other Yorkshire Members? Why were they not supporting the hon. Member? Why was the House not packed for this important Adjournment debate?" If an editor of a newspaper cannot understand the situation, who can?

Last night my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) had intended to speak about the Merseyside health authority on the Adjournment. The debate started at about 2 o'clock in the morning and I can imagine that on television. People watching would ask, "Where were the other Members?" Yet we already come here at 10.30 am for Committees. If we are supposed to stay here until perhaps 4 am the following morning for Adjournment debates, when are we supposed to do our jobs?

Mr. Skinner: It is still easier than the pits.

Mr. Ashton: They do not ask miners to go down a pit at 10.30 am until 4 o'clock the following morning.

Mr. Skinner: This is a lot easier, and better paid.

Mr. Ashton: I do not want to start talking about the pits. We are talking about the House of Commons.

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend is right to say that luck plays a large part in all of this, and of course he is extremely lucky to have been called so early in this debate. Given everything that my hon. Friend has said, I do not understand how television would affect the matter. After

[Mr. Tony Banks]

all, my hon. Friend, with great respect, is the last person who should get up and complain about not having a platform, because his newspaper column reaches more people than the questions that he asks here.

Mr. Ashton: My newspaper column is read by 9 million people. The people who decide whether I write a newspaper column are the readers. *[Laughter.]* Hon. Members may laugh, but if the readers stopped reading my column, it would not last two weeks. Plenty of hon. Members have tried to write such columns and they have not lasted two weeks. Such columns are about entertainment as well as politics. One cannot force people to watch or read something that bores them stiff. That is why newspaper editors lighten politics; otherwise, people would turn over the page. They would behave exactly the same if the House was televised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is on about television, and he is a strong CND supporter. What happens every time there is a march at which 20,000 people turn out to support CND? Are those arguments reported on television? No, the cameras go straight in for the punk rocker with the yellow hair and green painted head or someone with a symbol painted on their face or the banners proclaiming some gay-lesbian front. That is the prominence that television gives to CND.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To get my hon. Friend back to the argument, why should we believe his assertion of what television coverage of this place will be like rather than the evidence of our own eyes as a result of a properly conducted experiment?

Mr. Ashton: That experiment has been conducted in the knowledge that the vote must be taken here. While the House of Lords has been filmed, the television producers have been walking on eggshells. Once television cameras are brought into this House, it will be turned into a party conference. I have seen what happened at our party conference. I remember when my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition was making a speech about Militants in Liverpool—a magnificent speech I might add—and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Walton (Mr. Heffer)—I do not know whether he did it deliberately—stood up and walked round the screen.

Mr. Heffer *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. One at a time.

Mr. Heffer: The Leader of the Opposition did not mention Militants, he mentioned Liverpool city council; and that is why I walked off. It had nothing to do with Militants.

Mr. Ashton: I accept what my hon. Friend says, but the fact is that the picture was better than the words, and the producers went for the picture.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): If my hon. Friend feels so strongly about the distortion of the proceedings of the House, let him answer one question: would he ban the press from the Press Gallery?

Mr. Ashton: I wish the press would attend in the Press Gallery. When we had the demonstration on clause 28 of the Local Government Finance Bill at 10.45 pm on the Wednesday before Christmas, the Press Gallery was deserted. I ask my hon. Friend why every newspaper editor in Fleet Street—everybody is on our side; they malign the Tory press—wants to televise the House. The answer is that they all want to sit at home or in the bar and watch it and write features about it, without having to sit for four boring hours upstairs listening to all this. If we want to catch a poacher, we should set a poacher to do the job.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) is an actor, and he is totally against televising Parliament. I am a journalist, and I am against it. The hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) is a television producer, and he is totally against it. We know and understand what will happen. If we televise the House, the Back Benchers will be Lobby fodder. It will be a Cecil B. de Mille cast, with the Lobby fodder to provide the entertainment for the Galleries.

Mr. Gorst: Surely the logic of the hon. Gentleman's position is that, if there is hooligan behaviour from the Gallery or unseemly conduct here, we should not exclude the cameras but exclude the public who commit the unseemly behaviour, or give Mr. Speaker more power to deal with it.

Mr. Ashton: I said earlier that, if cameras appear, hooliganism gets worse. It has happened at football matches and on picket lines. I went to a lot of picket lines in the miners' strike where there was no problem at all. The miners would be giving cigarettes to the police, having a chat about football, friendly as anything. There was no problem at all until the cameras rolled up, when you could guarantee that one idiot would pick up a stone, or one copper would move the horses back and shift the men out of the way, and off it went. It happens every time. It happened at the boxing match on Sunday. If no television cameras had been there, there would have been no gas canister; I can assure hon. Members of that.

I have had my time, which is why I strenuously recommend the House to vote against cameras coming in.

4.32 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) has, I think, done the whole House a service by the way in which he moved the motion. Although he has been among the foremost proponents of introducing television cameras into the Chamber, his speech showed an awareness that by no means all hon. Members are as enthusiastic on this matter as he is. Whatever view of the issue one takes, I think we would all agree that this is a most important debate and I congratulate my hon. Friend on the start that he gave it. I congratulate also the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) on his speech. If it maintains the standard of the first two speeches, we will have a good debate today.

Traditionally, the role of the Leader of the House in these debates is to provide the House with certain information which may be helpful to hon. Members in reaching a view on the decision in principle. I propose to follow this course today, dealing first with issues directly related to the motion, and then turning to wider matters relevant to the debate. Finally, although not because I am so unrealistic as to expect that my words alone are likely to sway hon. Members' judgment, I shall briefly give the House my personal views.

So far as the motion is concerned, I know that a number of hon. Members, among them my hon. Friend the

Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), whose amendment is on the Order Paper, believe that the experiment should include the televising of Select Committees. I can confirm that my understanding is that the work of Select Committees falls within the term "proceedings" of the House to which the motion refers, and thus could be included in the experiment, but of course the Select Committee considering how an experiment might be implemented would have its remit set by this motion and the approval in principle that it would give, if passed, to an experiment in televising our proceedings generally. It could not limit itself to consideration just of televising Select Committees, as I believe my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) would wish it to do.

I note that the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Bar (Mr. Rooker) would also have restricted the scope of the experiment to proceedings in Standing Committees and Select Committees, but under the terms of the motion before us that is not an option for which the House can vote.

I can also confirm that if the House voted today in favour of televising our proceedings, I would bring forward at the earliest convenient opportunity a motion to establish the Select Committee mentioned in the motion and to provide it with the customary powers to send for persons and papers.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Would the Leader of the House expect such a Select Committee to have adequate representation from all parties?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot discuss the exact composition of the Select Committee, but I envisage that it would have as wide a representation as possible of all shades of opinion in all parties in the House, but I cannot give the absolute undertaking for which the hon. Lady asks.

I envisage that the House would wish to consider and debate the Committee's report before proceeding to the experiment itself. In view of the time that would be needed for the installation of equipment if the House decided to proceed along this path, I would hope to arrange this debate before the summer recess, but this would depend on when the Select Committee reported and on the other business before us.

As many hon. Members will know, the all-party group on televising organised an exhibition last November to demonstrate the level of lighting and type of remote-controlled camera which the BBC and the IBA might use. Like others who went to see it, I noted the technical advances that seem to have been made since our debate in November 1985. The broadcasters envisage that seven remote-controlled cameras would be mounted permanently under the Galleries for the duration of the experiment. This is, of course, in contrast to the arrangements in the House of Lords, where manned cameras are operated on a "drive in" basis. I am more confident than in the past that the technical difficulties of lighting and cameras can be overcome satisfactorily, but I recognise that not all hon. Members accept this.

As for the experiment, I know from my discussions with the BBC and the IBA that the broadcasters would recommend that it last six months. It might run from state opening of Parliament at the beginning of the next Session through to, perhaps, the Whit recess next year.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the Select Committee could recommend 24-hour, round-the-clock televising of Parliament from funds voted by Parliament? I have tabled two amendments to the motion.

Mr. Wakeham: I shall deal directly with the hon. Gentleman's amendments later in my speech. I think that that is probably the best way to do it.

As their letters to Members explain in detail, both the BBC and the independent broadcasters would plan on the basis of using selected extracts for a daily programme on parliamentary proceedings, a weekly programme, which might well include edited coverage of Committees, and the use of some material in the regular news and current affairs programmes. The broadcasters would also envisage live coverage from time to time of what they would see as the most important parliamentary occasions, such as the Budget. In addition, they would propose a service to the regional television stations so that these could concentrate on the activities of their own local Members and on local issues raised in the House. This would inevitably raise its own questions of balance.

I have also discussed editorial control with the broadcasters. They took the view that they should retain editorial control over the use in their own programmes of television pictures of the House. How those pictures might be provided seems to me a matter on which the Select Committee might well wish to consider a number of options if the motion is passed this evening. For their part, the BBC and IBA have expressed a willingness to mount the experiment jointly and share the 'feed' coming from the Chamber. "Feed" is the technical phrase for "signal". If this course were adopted, they have said that they would pay for the staff and equipment for the experiment. Other possibilities could include a parliamentary broadcasting unit, or indeed an independent company under contract, producing the 'feed' and making it available to the main network channels and to anyone else the House wished.

I hope that it will also be helpful to the House if I say a few words about the prospect of a television channel dedicated to the live coverage of proceedings. This is the course that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) has been urging on the House — he has tabled an amendment to his effect — and I can see its attraction. The advice that I have received from the Home Office is, however, that in the immediate future this is not a practical option.

Certainly in the longer term there seems to be the possibility of producing a fifth terrestrial channel from the UHF spectrum currently allocated to the broadcasters, but, even if this were pursued, it would take some time to accomplish, both technically and administratively. It would also be a question for decision whether the best use of a fifth channel would be the continuous live coverage of our proceedings.

The other ways by which a dedicated channel might be made available involve the use of satellites in one form or another. At present only a very small number — just a few thousand — are equipped to receive satellite transmissions direct. Although the possibilities in this area will increase over the next few years with the development of medium and high-powered satellite services, at this stage it is too early to predict how many people will actually have the equipment to receive them. Of course,

[Mr. Wakeham]

these services would be available only to those who had the money and the inclination to acquire the necessary receivers.

I will now offer the House a number of considerations which, from a personal perspective, I believe are important and which hon. Members might wish to bear in mind. The first is that, if the motion is carried, in my view we will have taken a decision in principle which would be very hard to reverse. Although the motion itself refers only to an experiment, I do not believe that this is a practical option. The effective decision that the House is taking tonight is whether the House as a whole should be televised.

The second point is that, although televising proceedings arouses a great deal of interest in the House and in the media, judging by my own postbag, there is no overwhelming evidence that the electorate more generally regard this as a priority. I suspect that even the broadcasters themselves realise that some of our best debates might not attract large audiences. In recent weeks, there have been important debates on, for example, the Criminal Justice Bill and on the recommendations of the Warnock committee on human fertilisation, but I am not aware of the sound broadcasters taking steps to transmit them live.

The main considerations on which I believe a judgment should be made are based on more fundamental issues. Given the scope of parliamentary privilege, some hon. Members, myself among them, are very concerned about the way in which allegations can be made in this place about people outside this place who are not here to defend themselves. I am very doubtful whether we should give such allegations the impact and currency that they would acquire from the immediacy of television.

Mr. Nelson: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that qualified privilege would apply to such statements and that, even at present, when it is possible for a television company to broadcast the words being spoken in the House making similar allegations, these are covered by qualified privilege? In other words, the public interest must be taken into account, as well as the malevolent motive of the individual concerned. Therefore, what is being proposed here would not be markedly different from existing practice.

Mr. Wakeham: There should not be any confusion about this. I am not arguing that there is a difference in principle between the privileges accorded to sound and to television. My argument is that the immediacy of the television medium makes different considerations apply.

There is also the fear that televising our proceedings would inevitably mean a drift away from serious argument towards the sensational. Even now, the suspension of a Member for disobeying the rules of the House gets the headlines at the expense of the real issues before us.

These points show that it is the issue of editorial control that lies at the heart of this debate. I have already mentioned why a dedicated channel is not a realistic prospect at present, but, even if it were, most people would still get their impression of parliamentary proceedings from the main network channels' news programmes. Within that limited context, and despite their experience in televising another place, I remain sceptical that the broadcasters would be able to provide coverage in which there would be general confidence on both sides of the House. There are many more complexities and subtleties in editing a piece of film to produce a balanced item of just a few minutes than there are in editing a column of print or even a sound recording. Indeed, in some of the moments of high drama, which is when the controversy would arise, I suspect that there might well be no one right and generally accepted answer, however skilful the editing.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, for I know that a great many Members wish to speak in this debate, I would just say this. My right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) in 1985 urged the House to take this "leap in the dark". His advice now is, "Ready, steady, jump." Being more cautious than my right hon. Friend, I think that we should look before we leap. I have looked and I do not like the prospect. I shall vote against the motion.

4.45 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Most hon. Members are usually all too keen to appear on television. We are so keen that we are prepared to be interviewed in pouring rain on St. Stephen's green, or to get up at some ungodly hour to appear on breakfast television, only to be upstaged by Roland Rat. Why, then, are there doubts about us allowing ourselves to be shown, live or recorded, going about our work in our own chosen habitat, the familiar, warm, well-lit, rain-proof and relatively rodent-free Chamber of the House of Commons and its Committee Rooms? Are Members objecting to the principle, or is it just a matter of practical snags?

In an elected democracy, based on the concept of accountability to those who elect us, the principle is clear and has been conceded. Newspapers can report us. Radio broadcasts are made of our proceedings, live or recorded, so there can be no objection in principle to showing us on television, live or recorded.

Clearly, then, the objections are practical. In my view, the main reason for reluctance to let cameras in is that it suits the Government in general and the Prime Minister in particular to keep them out. I shall deal with that in a moment.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No, I shall not.

Some hon. Members have doubts about televising this place that are both rational and legitimate. The principal reasons for these doubts seem to hinge on the following propositions. First, to portray the House of Commons as it is at present would damage the reputation of us all. Secondly, television is, by its nature, a trivialising medium whose impact is based on the image rather than the substance of debate. Thirdly, television coverage would concentrate on bizarre incidents or on a limited number of self-serving self-publicists and the hard-working Members on Committees would be ignored and their absence from the Chamber misunderstood. Fourthly, the coverage would be greatly to the advantage of the Front Benches and, in particular, the Government Front Bench.

If we are truthful, we must acknowledge that there is an element of truth in most, if not all, of these propositions, but I do not believe that, even taken together, they justify keeping the cameras out. If, for example, it is felt that the way we go about our business at present is too awful to be shown on television, then

surely it is time that we mended our ways, rather than shelter behind the thought that, because the Galleries are small, only a few hundred people will be appalled when they see what we get up to. Surely anything would be better than the present disembodied "Goon Show" noises on the radio which bring us into such disrepute.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Get the mikes out.

Mr. Dobson: In respect of our behaviour, I doubt whether we have a reputation to damage. The present arrangement for sound broadcasting gives the worst of all worlds. Logically, as my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) says, we should either get the cameras in or get the microphones out.

The charge that television can often be a trivialising medium scarcely needs to be argued. Most television news bulletins show that it tends to concentrate on incidents and personality rather than on hard work or policy. But it has to be said that that objection does not apply only to television. Some newspapers with representatives in the Press Gallery make television news bulletins look like the height of intellectual argument.

Clearly, we need to make rules to preclude the coverage of incidents in the Galleries and so on. Perhaps we should prohibit changes being made in the order of contributions to a debate that would make them more dramatic or funny. The problem of editing and bias is difficult, but it needs to be tackled head on. If the justification for having the cameras in is to let people see and hear for themselves what is going on—and that surely is the justification—the public could well do that for themselves, without the need for much interpretation or critique by television political correspondents. The viewers will not need the pundits' comments on what they have just seen.

I am sure that we should require of the television authorities straight coverage, on the lines of BBC radio's "Today in Parliament", rather than the clever-dick approach of "Yesterday in Parliament", which daily gives more prominence to the views of Noel or Rodney than to the views of all of us MPs put together. I would go so far as to say that the smart-Alec approach of "Yesterday in Parliament" probably turns more hon. Members off the idea of televising Parliament than any other aspect of the present sound broadcasting arrangements.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the worst aspects of television reporting of Parliament at the moment is that one sees one television journalist interviewing another journalist rather than a politician, on the assumption that that other journalist is giving an independent and unbiased view. Of course that is not the case, and the way to get around that might be to televise Parliament.

Mr. Dobson: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend.

Some of my hon. Friends fear the extent to which television will give advantage to self-publicists, but self-publicists get on television anyway—at the whim of television producers. At least if the House is televised the short list of those who appear will be decided initially by Mr. Speaker, which can only be a step forward.

Finally, there is the objection that televising Parliament will give advantage to the Front Benches and in particular to the Government.

Mr Skinner: It will.

Mr. Dobson: I agree. It has to be said that coverage has usually gone to the Front Bench, and when I am speaking from the Front Bench I find that a fairly good arrangement. It was ever thus.

At the turn of the century, *Hansard* reported Front-Bench speeches in full but gave only about a third of the content of other speeches. I understand that the decision which third to include was made not but by editors by by the printers. Some unfortunate people were simply listed as "Also Spoke". I am convinced that any hon. Member—Back-Bench or Front-Bench—fired by the desire to right a wrong or call attention to a public scandal will get the television attention that he deserves, possibly to the disadvantage of a Front-Bench speaker obliged that day to deal with rather less gripping generalities.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): As an experienced parliamentarian, will the hon. Gentleman answer this one question? If there was a 10-second slot on the television news tonight, would it deal with the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) covering smoke detectors in houses, which affects millions of people, or would it show the "Maggie and Neil Show" which took place this afternoon?

Mr. Dobson: It might show either, but there would be a good chance that the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) would get himself on to the regional television programme for the north-west.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Does my hon. Friend agree that editors — whether press, sound broadcasting or television editors—are more concerned with publishing what the public finds interesting than with the public interest, which could be a million miles away from that?

Mr. Dobson: That is certainly true, but it applies to every other news medium. Personally, I am rather happier with news people who say that they are interested in what the public is interested in than with those who go on about what is in the public interest. No one is more dubious than a journalist talking about the public interest, because journalists have never subscribed to that idea, except by way of argument.

We are in a position to lay down the ground rules for the coverage to be given by the television authorities, and I therefore hope that most hon. Members welcome the undertaking given by both ITN and the BBC to step up the coverage of individual Members' activities, particularly by way of providing a feed to regional programmes.

It is also important to hold the television authorities to their commitment to cover Select Committee proceedings as well as the Chamber, and we should require them also to cover Standing Committees. If, at some later stage, the television authorities ask to be excused on the ground that Committee proceedings are boring and, as is true, tend to go unreported by the other news media, we can always remind them that when the last dispute closed down ITV, many viewers were satisfied with watching the test card, and we ought to be more interesting than that.

Mr. Stan Crowther (Rotherham): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Americans discovered many years ago that select committees make excellent television?

Mr. Dobson: I agree with my hon. Friend, although to be fair, there are certain characteristics of American select

[Mr. Dobson]

committees which make them rather more attractive than ours—including their powers and their willingness to set about those in authority.

While on the subject of undertakings from the television authorities, I hope that, if television coverage is introduced, ITN will undertake not to withdraw the financial support that it gives to Independent Radio News, which makes viable that excellent sound broadcasting service.

I return to the position of the principal opponent of the idea of the British people being allowed to see their elected representatives at work. I refer, of course, to the Prime Minister. Why is she so opposed to the cameras? It is not as if she is shy of appearing on television. Indeed, nothing delights her more. The telephoto opportunity has been her political stock in trade. Commendably devoid of personal vanity, the Prime Minister has changed her voice, her hair style and her clothes to appear more attractive on television. If last Sunday's Murdoch-owned *Sunday Times* is to be believed, she was even taught when sitting to shift her weight from one buttock to another in order to appear more interesting on television.

In foreign affairs, the televised visit abroad has been perfected to a turn, as witness the recent visit to Kenya and Nigeria, which featured the Prime Minister in the starring role in what seemed at times to be a remake of "The African Queen" with Humphrey Bogart's part played by Bernard Ingham, her principal press officer. At home, her television appearances are carefully planned, with terms and conditions laid down by Downing street, and usually with interviewers made pliable by a knighthood given or a knighthood hoped for.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): If the hon. Gentleman does not stop casting ungentlemanly aspersions on the Prime Minister's appearance both personally and physically, he may well make me vote against the motion.

Mr. Dobson: I have cast no aspersions whatever on the Prime Minister's appearance. I said that she had adjusted herself in response to advice from her advisers to make herself more attractive, and I did not doubt that she had done so.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The hon. Gentleman is making a good point against the televising of Parliament, although he may not realise it. He has illustrated the power of television to change things. Many Conservative Members — and, I am sure, Opposition Members, too — are concerned that whatever television touches it changes to its own image. One has only to look at the general election campaign to see what has happened to elections in this country.

Mr. Dobson: I am sure that, when accurate reports were first available in newspapers of what went on in the House people naturally adjusted their behaviour. That was an improvement at the time. Any adjustments in our behaviour as a result of televising Parliament would probably be beneficial.

Whatever else can be said about the appearances that the Prime Minister makes on television, there is no doubt that she calls the shots, with most of the editorial discretion being exercised not by the television people but by the Prime Minister's own news managers—for news management is the name of the game, and it already applies in the House, without television. The news coverage of speeches, statements and answers by the Prime Minister and other Ministers in the House usually springs not from what is said in the Chamber but from press conferences and briefings conducted before or after—for the alleged benefit of journalists, but really for the benefit of Ministers.

The total number of journalists with passes for the Press Gallery is about 400. The total number of Government press officers with passes for that self-same Gallery exceeds 150. That means one Government handout officer for every two and a half journalists. No wonder these sophisticated investigative journalists usually find themselves peddling the Government line. Indeed, some Press Gallery journalists devote so much time to transcribing Government handouts that it is a puzzle how they find time to file their criticisms of the Opposition.

The task of the press officers is to manage the news for the benefit of the Government, not on the basis of what actually happens in the House but on the basis of what they can say off the record. The Government spend over £30 million on press relations. It has to be said that they get good value for money on the coverage they receive. All this is masterminded from 10 Downing street by Mr. Bernard Ingham, using taxpayers' money. When the Prime Minister increasingly uses the word "we" instead of "I" she is sometimes accused of using the royal "we" but I think that she is referring to herself and Mr. Ingham.

Mr. Cormack: This is a House of Commons occasion and the hon. Gentleman is trivialising it. He is in danger of losing support. I wish to vote for the motion and I came here determined to do so, but if the hon. Gentleman continues in such a partisan way on what should be a House of Commons occasion, he will do his cause enormous damage.

Mr. Dobson: I have always found it difficult to accept that anything in the House is non-political. That is a bizarre suggestion, because the House is full of people who have got here only because they are political. If people hold views, they should stick to them. I do not think that anything I say today will shift votes, the Tory Benches having got their instructions clearly from the Prime Minister at Prime Minister's Question Time. If we say that coverage of the House of Commons is a House of Commons matter, is not the spending of £30 million on Government press officers to rearrange the coverage of what happens in this place a House of Commons matter? When did any Tory Member raise that?

How do the Government's news managers and the Prime Minister look on the Commons? They see it as a place where mishaps may occur, and where the Prime Minister may be questioned not by complacent television interviewers but by people on both sides of the House, with knowledge, commitment and passion. The Government news managers think that hon. Members are literally unmanageable.

Mr. Heffer: Following the logic of my hon. Friend's argument about the Government spending so much money on people making handouts to journalists in the Press Gallery, surely if we have television, the Government will employ more people to deal with the television people.

Mr. Dobson: They will indeed; I have no doubt about that. I shall attempt to deal with that valid point.

The Prime Minister's friends know from the Tory party's private polls that the present compromise — sound but no vision—suits the Prime Minister very well. An hon. Member asks a question and the unseen audience hears her reply at length and in detail. The polls show that most listeners believe that she does this from memory. Television would show the truth—that she recites these replies not from memory but from her briefing folder.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): I am finding it difficult to understand whether the hon. Gentleman is for the motion or against it. We are being asked to support an experiment. Why has the hon. Gentleman not mentioned that the House of Lords has had its proceedings televised for some time in a way which has, if anything, enhanced the reputation of the Upper House, with none of the disadvantages that are being talked about? Why will the hon. Gentleman not address himself to that if he is supposed to be supporting the motion?

Mr. Dobson: I am sorry if I have not made the position clear to the right hon. Gentleman and possibly even to others. The objections that I am reciting are not objections that I hold but the objections that I understand the Prime Minister holds to the televising of Parliament.

The Prime Minister has said that she is against television in the House — she said it again today — because she thinks it might damage our reputation. I do not think that she has broken the habit of a lifetime. I think that she wants television kept out of the House because she fears that her public image will suffer. That is not a good reason to keep the cameras out.

Those who struggled for two centuries for newspaper reporting of the proceedings of the House made a greater contribution to the development of democracy than did most of the people on whom they wanted to report. They got leave to report what was said long before the House of Commons was democratically elected.

Technological change now makes it possible for the people to see and hear their elected representatives at work. The televising of the House was suggested a long time ago. It was suggested in the year I left school by that great democratic Socialist, Aneurin Bevan, on the grounds that it could bring about a direct relationship between the electors and the people they elected and that it would partly dispense with the need for fallible intermediaries. The principles which he enunciated were sound and visionary. In our democracy, the people who elect us are entitled to see and hear what we are doing and saying in their name. Television makes it possible for all the people, not just a privileged few, to see and hear what we are doing.

If Members of Parliament do not trust the television authorities or will not trust one another if the cameras are allowed in, they should remember that democracy is based on a deeper and wider trust. They should trust the people. If any Tory wants an incentive to vote for the cameras coming in, he or she should remember that "Trust the people" was the motto of the Churchill family.

5.8 pm

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): It was only in the last few moments of the speech by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) that it became clear what his theme was. I am grateful to him for his closing words.

I can understand the anxieties of right hon. and hon. Members who feel that the televising of our proceedings might tend to trivialise Parliament and that it might encourage a small minority of hon. Members who enjoy disrupting the business and howling down others to continue to behave in such a way, but I still do not agree with them. I have some sympathy also with those who argue that the intrusion of the cameras will somehow change the atmosphere of this sentient place and the way that we do things. Lighting will be obtrusive. It may be that modern technology can soften the effect, but most of us fear that lighting will be intrusive.

Background noise will be amplified. Unless there is continuous broadcasting, there will be problems regarding selectivity and balance. Frankly, I must say that it might be difficult unless a glass screen is interposed between the Strangers' Gallery and the Chamber below, to prevent an upsurge in the number and variety of demonstrations from the visiting public.

The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) mentioned incidents which I remember well. We witnessed them with great sadness and, at the time, anger. With television or not, it might be necessary to do something about this anyway, after the events of a week ago in the other place, although that may be difficult to accept. The fact is that in this day and age we can no longer keep television out, any more than our predecessors in the 18th century were able to prevent publication of their debates.

For a long time we have been fortunate in having an official report of what takes place here, which is faithfully recorded and edited by our superb *Hansard* staff. The Press Gallery is usually full on important occasions. I make no criticism at all of the experienced journalists of the Press Gallery, who are present on important occasions. However, I am talking about the House, rather than the press, who can look after themselves.

A great newspaper, as Arthur Miller once said, is a mirror for society. If there is something wrong with newspapers, there is something wrong with society. In that, the politicians themselves have something to answer for. It is no part of any of my remarks this afternoon to criticise the press.

I think it is worth reminding ourselves that once upon a time it was felt in the House that if the mob outside know what was going on inside, all hell would break out. In the early 18th century, Edward Cave, the publisher of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, was hauled before the Bar of the House, reprimanded, heavily fined and sent to prison for faithfully reporting our debates. The result of that, if I recall the account, was that attempts were then made to invent the debates of the House.

Samuel Johnson, for example, published the debates of the "Senate of Magna Lilliputia". He wrote all the speeches himself. Voltaire was so impressed by them that he remarked:

"the eloquence of Greece and Rome is revived in the British Senate."

When Johnson was told about this, he was horrified, and he desisted. He said later to Boswell that when he was writing the speeches he took good care that the "Whig dogs did not get the best of it." That is an example of what happened when the House was timorous and unable to allow the people outside to hear what was being said.

[Sir Bernard Braine]

It was inevitable, as we moved into the 19th century and effected reform, that debates should be edited responsibly, and they were. We are now living in an age when television has brought the whole world into the living room of almost every household in the land.

Mr. Forth: Is my right hon. Friend satisfied with the presentation of the proceedings of the House on radio? Is he happy that the public out there, the electorate, when listening to what they are allowed to hear on the radio, get a balanced view of the proceedings of the House? What conclusions does he draw from that as to what might happen if we approved the televising of proceedings tonight?

Sir Bernard Braine: My hon. Friend has not been in the House one tenth of the time that I have. I have listened to the BBC radio reports year in, year out, and I have never felt that they were unfair or unbalanced. I have felt that they were sometimes incomplete, that is true, but that is in the nature of the programmes. There is no point in criticising what has been done by the BBC on sound radio, or in considering that in relation to what we should do in connection with television.

I repeat: television has brought the world into the living room of almost every household in this land. People can hear some part of our proceedings on the radio now, and I pay tribute to the BBC journalists who have reported our debates live over the years. But the public are denied seeing their elected representatives take part in debate, which, after all, is the essence of parliamentary democracy. I do not see how that can be defended.

Mr. Allan Roberts *rose*——

Sir Bernard Braine: Television has done no damage to democratic government in other countries, and it has certainly done no damage to the other place, and I would judge——

Mr. Roberts: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dennis Skinner: Come back in a few years.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Member is in the middle of a sentence.

Sir Bernard Braine: As I was saying, televising the other place has certainly done no harm there. I would judge that their Lordships, the quality of whose debates has always been high, have gained in public esteem. That is the impression that I get from those of my constituents who have raised the matter with me. They enjoy listening to debates in the House of Lords. [AN HON. MEMBER: "They are boring."] I hear somebody say that the debates in the other place are boring. That is a matter of personal judgment. I do not think they are. Only somebody who does not follow the proceedings in the other place or listen to what is said would make such a foolish remark.

Why should our elected Chamber be afraid of this innovation? We are all experienced in this place in facing audience criticism, and the overwhelming majority of us believe passionately in parliamentary government. We are the heirs to a great tradition. This place is one of the most precious possessions that our democracy has, with all its faults and all its warts. This is where the buck stops. The courts can do so much, where justice is concerned, and the press can give information; but it is here that people's rights can be guaranteed.

We therefore have a duty to preserve the House for the future, and I want to see the reputation of this place enhanced for the general public. By shutting out the public, I do not think that we enhance our reputation. Allowing the public to see how we tackle problems, and the entertaining cut and thrust of debate, reveals the democratic process to them.

There are difficulties, of course, but I do not think that they are difficulties of principle. It must surely be right to heighten the awareness of our people as to the work and worth of Parliament. The difficulties, surely, are technical ones — including the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who, with running commentaries, interrupts the speeches of all hon. Members; but that, too, is a technical difficulty that can be overcome.

Mr. Tracey: My right hon. Friend, as the Father of the House, said that he felt that allowing television cameras in would enhance the proceedings of the House. I want to ask him the question that I put to my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson), who moved the motion: how does he feel that television will enhance the proceedings of the House whereas radio, presumably, has not, and the radio authorities have full power to broadcast all the proceedings of the House? Where does he think the difference lies?

Sir Bernard Braine: I do not think that there is a difference. "Today in Parliament" has done a great service to Parliament. My constituents comment on what they have heard. They sometimes comment adversely, but, generally speaking, they feel better informed. I feel that television would add to that dimension. I quite agree that bringing in cameras is obtrusive. I am only in favour of an experiment, with the most careful control, to see how it works.

Mr. Allan Roberts: I am on the right hon. Gentleman's side, Mr. Speaker, in that I am going to vote for the televising of Parliament after the experiment. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that one of the things that brings the House into disrepute is the fact that the other House is televised? When there is a television broadcast of events that take place in this House, it shows a picture of the Member of Parliament speaking—whether it is the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister or a Back Bencher—and then superimposes the radio transcript on the picture? That makes us seem ridiculous. We let radio in, but we have to see a still picture with a radio speech in the background on television. Surely that is absolutely farcical and should be put right.

Sir Bernard Braine: We are not talking about that particular practice; we are talking about something quite different—showing live exactly what happens here, how we conduct ourselves and the views we express.

I allow that there will be one considerable difficulty, and I want to mention it because nobody else has so far. It is the need to help the public to understand the intricacies of our procedures, the odd terms that we use and the conventions that we observe. All these will have to be explained if much of what we do and say is to be intelligible. But I do not think that that is an insuperable obstacle to presenting Parliament visually to the nation.

It is not a matter that can be left to the media, and I want to make it quite plain that they must be guided and controlled in this connection. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Yes,

certainly; this place is far too precious to run the risk of things going wildly wrong. They must be guided and controlled, and I favour the proposal for a Select Committee, which I would expect to seek the views of you, Mr. Speaker, the Clerk of the House and the Editor of the *Official Report*, as well as senior Members of the House. I hope that collectively we would see that there was no nonsense about the way all this was done. From the start there would have to be very strict ground rules.

My conclusion is that there is a case for televising our proceedings, but it should be done by way of an experiment, watched over by the sort of supervising body that I know my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) has in mind. I thought that my hon. Friend made an admirable and very clear speech, and an unanswerable case.

After many years in the House, in 12 successive Parliaments, I am confident that if this matter is properly prepared and supervised, the experiment will become the common practice and at long last the nation will be able to see the House, where the Queen's Ministers give an account of what they do in our name, where grievances are aired and redress is sought, where the national interest in any matter can be debated and defended and where genuine dissent can be decently expressed.

The press and the rest of the media can report what is going on in the outside world, the courts of the land may dispense justice, but it is essential to demonstrate that in our democracy Parliament is central to our life and liberty. Surely the public, used to being shown other matters of importance on television, have a right to see how we discharge our duty here.

I shall vote for the motion.

5.25 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I think that it is important that the Father of the House, the right hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), put this debate in its historical context, looking back at the difficulties of those who wanted to introduce reporting of the procedures of the House, and that, while voicing some of the concerns that inevitably bother all hon. Members, he nevertheless came down in favour of the conclusion that we should proceed with this experiment and set up a Select Committee to investigate the ground rules for it.

It is perhaps an appalling cliché of our time that television is the medium of our age. However often the House has rejected television cameras coming in to record and televise our proceedings, few people would deny that television has considerable influence on what goes on in the House. Few would say that the tragic and horrific scenes of famine and starvation in Eritrea and Ethiopia that were brought into our living rooms and those of our constituents did not have an effect on what subsequently took place in the House in terms of parliamentary questions, the statements that were called for and the debate that took place shortly after.

The Prime Minister recently made her announcement on the review of the National Health Service on a television programme—she did not come to the House to do it—and one surely cannot believe that political parties would spend so much money on television election broadcasts, with the leaders trying to find suitable picture opportunities, unless they thought that these televised events would have some effect on the electorate, and subsequently even on the composition of the House.

I believe that television has an influence on what we do, but, because we exclude it, that influence inevitably forces us to be reactive and not to take the initiative. If we are to be relevant, if we are to have more opportunities for taking the initiative in the TV age, the admission of cameras to televise our proceedings is a logical and natural step.

That case is underpinned by other arguments based more on principle. If we believe, as many of us do, in the case for open government, I cannot readily see any argument in principle why the affairs of this Chamber should be excluded from the eye of the camera. I believe that by having television we are allowing more people, more of our electors, to see what we do here as their representatives. The Public Gallery holds relatively few people and, if many of the concerns about our being rather exclusive are carried through to their logical conclusion, perhaps we should not have anyone in the Public Gallery.

Why should those who are fortunate enough to be able to queue for tickets or get them from their Members be allowed to see what we do, while those many millions of people who for one reason or other cannot do so are not allowed to see what we do? I represent the constituency that is furthest from the Chamber, so my constituents in particular have great difficulty in getting here. Why should they not be able to see, with those in the Public Gallery, what goes on in the House?

It is interesting that a survey by Pye, the electronics and television company, in 1985 showed that in Scotland there was the greatest support, 82 per cent., for the principle of televising the proceedings of the House.

One further point, which has perhaps been ignored, is that radio broadcasting, which we have at present, does not do anything to help deaf people follow what goes on in the Chamber. I hope that if a Select Committee is set up it will give some consideration to the need for broadcasters to provide a sign commentary when the proceedings of the House are televised.

Not only will the public see the House, but they will see the real thing. Because of the absence of cameras, we have had the 20th century equivalent of Voltaire and Samuel Johnson. We have had the diet of debates and confrontations in the studio, but not in the Chamber. They have been there as a substitute, and I do not decry them. In the absence of televised proceedings, televised studio debates have been an important part of our democratic procedure, but let me pose the questions posed by Sir Robin Day in his article in *The Times* last Thursday:

> "Were not television interviews and discussions beginning to usurp the function of Parliament? Was it not absurd that our political leaders should be judged by how they answered questions put to them in a television studio by a non-elected interviewer? Why should they not be seen being questioned and challenged in Parliament by those elected for that purpose?"

It is not unknown for some statesmen who may think themselves greater than they are to be rather choosy about whom they will join in a televised studio debate. In this House, you, Mr. Speaker, will call hon. Members as they catch your eye, to ask questions of Ministers. They will rightly not be able to avoid the questions put by the Opposition Front and Back Benches, and those of the minority parties — and often, most pertinently, from their own Back Benches. When Ministers know that they will be under that kind of public scrutiny, and that the way in which they defend their statements and policies will be seen by the public, that will to some extent redress the

[Mr. James Wallace]

balance between the Executive and the Chamber, which for too long has been going in the direction of the Executive.

I have spoken of "the real thing". There has already been discussion about the effect of sound broadcasting and the many criticisms by the public of the noise that they hear when the listen to such broadcasts. However, in my experience — and, I suspect, that of many other hon. Members — visitors to the Public Gallery have said that the noise is not as bad as it sounds on the radio. Some constituents have sat and watched Prime Minister's Question Time and later have heard the recorded version on the radio, and have not been able to believe that they were one and the same. When the noise is considered in context, it is not as bad as it sometimes sounds on the radio.

Mr. Ashton: Is not one of the reasons for that the fact that, when broadcasting of the House first started, the BBC broadcast everything that could be heard on one of these small microphones? There were some very ribald, vulgar, witty comments about hon. Members' love lives and "love children", and all the usual banter that never appears in *Hansard*. Within a few days the BBC panicked, because of complaints and the prospect of libel suits. That is when the BBC began to garble and jam the broadcasts, because it was afraid of those interjections which do not appear in *Hansard* being heard on the radio. That is one instance of how the distortion arises.

Mr. Wallace: I do not know whether what the hon. Gentleman says is correct, but I do not think that it detracts from my point, that those who see our proceedings in context have not found the noise as bad as they believe it to be when they hear it on the radio.

Obviously, when there are 400 people in a crowded Chamber — most of whom, we assume, are here because they hold strong political views — it is not surprising that, when views are expressed with which they strongly agree or passionately disagree, there will be some noise. Mr. Speaker is on record as saying that if there are to be explosions he would prefer verbal explosions in the Chamber to real explosions in the street.

Mr. Tony Banks: When Granada produced a mock-up of the debate on the televising of Parliament, most of the people there were constituents of the Members of Parliament who had come along as visitors. Within minutes, because of the atmosphere of the place — which was like the atmosphere here — they were all yelling at each other. It would not matter if all the Members of Parliament were sent away and replaced with 650 people who had been picked afresh. The same action would be taken. It is part of the atmosphere of this place.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. Perhaps if the Prime Minister, for example, says something with which the Opposition passionately disagree, our constituents at home will experience a similar reaction and will understand ours.

Where I believe that the public will make a distinction, and will be discriminating, is when there is synthetic anger or organised barracking. Yesterday's exchanges on Parliament in the days of Sir Robert Peel showed that what happens today is not necessarily anything new. When the public see what happens, they will make their own judgments. I suspect that when they observe synthetic emotion, or organised barracking intended for no other purpose than to put a speaker off his stride, they will judge it somewhat harshly.

Mr. Tracey: Will the hon. Gentleman give us a bit more detail on the point that he has just made? He talks of the public being able to analyse the rage that may erupt in the Chamber. Does that mean that he envisages cameras being able to pan across the Benches to show it? That is not the impression that most hon. Members have of the way in which Parliament should be televised.

Mr. Wallace: Obviously, how it is done will be up to the Select Committee. I do not envisage anything like the Canadian model, in which the person who is speaking is shown narrowly in the camera. In the other place, although the camera shows the person who is speaking, there is a more general panorama. If, for example, a statement were made on the National Health Service from the Dispatch Box with the Opposition did not agree, and there was a surge of opinion, in such a general panorama that would readily be seen as genuine rather than synthetic emotion.

I consider it important to televise Select Committees — and, indeed, when important Bills are under consideration, Standing Committees. When Select Committees are doing their job properly, they are probably working in a non-partisan manner. The public might find it a refreshing eye-opener if they saw hon. Members from different parties co-operating in a Select Committee.

In answer to the exchanges between the hon. Members for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) about the Westland debate being boring, I doubt that the public would have found it so boring if they had been able to see the televised proceedings of the Select Committee when the former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Sir Robert Armstrong appeared before it. Such genuine parliamentary occasions can never be properly communicated to the public in print, or in a radio or television commentary.

Having said that, I should like to enter some caveats. We all have our caveats, and I make no apology if some of mine appear to be based on party political self-interest. It will come as no surprise to hon. Members that the interests of the minority parties, and of those of us who fought the last election under the alliance banner, are of concern to me, and how we would be portrayed if any editing took place. We hope that the Select Committee will take that into account.

Mr. Dalyell: Does the hon. Gentleman not think that, had the Westland Select Committee been televised, the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) would have had to answer, possibly very much for his own good?

Mr. Wallace: That is a matter for speculation. Either he would have had to answer, or failure to answer would perhaps have attracted more public comment and judgment than occurred without its being televised.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Mr. Wallace: I have given way a number of times. I should like now to move on to some of our reservations on this matter.

We feel that there could be a danger of exclusion or unfair coverage—not only of alliance Members, but of the Nationalist parties, the parties from Northern Ireland and Back Benchers from all parties. After all, nearly a quarter of those who voted at the last general election voted for the third force in British politics, but the procedures of the House are very much geared to a two-party system. When we last debated this matter, in November 1985, Mr. Hugo Young, writing in *The Guardian*, said that he thought the Government would favour televising Parliament because it would

"exclude the Alliance from public view, in line with the Parliamentary procedures which similarly exclude it."

At Prime Minister's Question Time the Leader of the Opposition has the opportunity to ask one, two or sometimes three supplementary questions. The leader of the Liberal party is allowed to ask only one question, and is allowed no comeback. Obviously, that would have to be explained.

I do not expect the Opposition Front Bench necessarily to go along with me. I am not arguing against what happens, although I should like to do so. I am saying that that is the fact of the matter, and no doubt that is how it would come over on television, much to our disadvantage.

Last week the Secretary of State for Education and Science made a statement on the decision to abolish the Inner London education authority which took up one and a half columns in *Hansard*. The response of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), on behalf of the official Opposition, also took up one and a half columns. Two questions later, my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) asked a question which took up nine lines.

One quarter of those who voted at the last election voted for a third force in British politics, yet the procedures of the House do not allow us adequate time to reflect that. Undoubtedly that would be reflected, to a greater or lesser extent, in any broadcasting of the proceedings in the Chamber.

Mr. Tebbit: The hon. Gentleman has made an important point. As he knows, at election time the broadcasting authorities allocate party political broadcasts—I am not sure whether to do parties harm or to help them—equally between the three principal parties. What they will do next time with seven or eight alliance Members scattered around, I do not know. Would the hon. Gentleman expect broadcasting authorities to have the responsibility to adjust what happens here in order to give fair coverage? Indeed, has the hon. Gentleman's party made any representations recently to the broadcasting authorities that they should do so in some way?

Mr. Wallace: Representations have been made in the past, although I cannot tell the right hon. Gentleman when. I am setting down one of the markers on which we would wish to address the Select Committee. Given the nature of the proceedings here and the fact that it is a two-party Chamber, however much we might desire it, it would be impossible to be allocated the same proportions of time as we are given for party political broadcasts. We would wish to see something better than what comes out of a Chamber with proceedings that are very much geared to a two-party system. It is not unfair to alert the House to our reservations on a serious consideration.

The more outlets that there are for the televised proceedings of the House, the fewer difficulties there will be in achieving some form of editorial balance. It would be essential to have a televised programme in the same way as we have "Today in Parliament". Indeed, if funds would allow it, I would go along with the proposal of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and have continuous broadcasting, but even then some editorial decisions would have to be made for other programmes.

I accept that the procedures in the House are as they are. We would wish to campaign to reform them. It may be said that all is fair in love, war and politics, but we are not in the business of giving yet another weapon to our political opponents. Therefore, we approach the matter with some caution. We do not say that because of our concerns and reservations we should say no to the experiment, but I have mentioned some of the points that we shall be making to the Select Committee. If the intention is to take the political debate in the House into Britain's homes, it is important that all aspects of that debate are properly taken into Britain's homes, and that is our concern.

5.42 pm

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): The speech made by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) has been one of the most important contributions to the debate so far. The case of many of us who oppose television coming into the House is that we will be manipulated, and Parliament will be manipulated, by the producers and the editors. The hon. Gentleman has made it plain that his support for the proposition is based on exactly that. He is not content that Mr. Speaker should allocate time between the various interests in the House; he wants a fairer allocation.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): In inverted commas.

Mr. Tebbit: Yes, indeed. The only case for television that I could make is that the viewer might have seen me indicate that commas should be around the word "fairer".

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland is saying that, through the introduction of television, he expects the way in which the House works and its procedures will be changed, or that what is depicted on the screen is essentially different from what is happening in the House.

Mr. Wallace: So that there can be no misunderstanding, I said that that would be the tenor of what we wished to say to the Select Committee. I did not say that at the end of the day we would give producers carte blanche. It is up to the Select Committee to lay down guidelines and ground rules for the producers.

Mr. Tebbit: It does not matter how the hon. Gentleman wriggles. He is saying that he wants television to be introduced into the House so that he can use the cameras as a lever to change what is going on here to the advantage of his party.

Mr. Wallace *indicated assent.*

Mr. Tebbit: He is kind enough to nod. There could be no clearer indication why many of us, on both sides of the House, regardless of the way in which we feel about each other's party politics, mistrust and resent the idea of those cameras coming here. It is precisely because, as the hon. Gentleman has made plain, they would be coming here in the expectation that they would do something for particular interests and would be an outside influence coming in here, designed to change what we are doing.

Mr. Forth: Is my right hon. Friend aware that it might be worse than that? Is he aware that it is possible that some of the minority parties may have sought to bargain in advance of the event by suggesting that they would only vote for televising the House if the television channels would guarantee them a certain amount of coverage in advance? If that were true, does it advance the case for televising the House?

Mr. Tebbit: I have some hesitation about introducing this matter, Madam Deputy Speaker, but several hon. Members have been circulated with a copy of what purports to be a letter dated 4 February over the signatures of the leaders of the Plaid Cymru and Scottish National party group in the House. My copy does not have their signature, but no doubt I shall be told at once whether it is true or false.

The letter is addressed to David Nicholas, the editor of ITN News. I shall not go through it all but one paragraph says:

"As you will be aware, Tuesday's vote is expected to be a close one, and a handful of votes either way could decide the issue for the next four or five years. It is our feeling that the six votes of the Plaid Cymru SNP members, together with those of the SDLP members, could prove to be of crucial importance in the division lobbies on Tuesday night.

Our natural instinct, as evidenced by our voting record in the past, is to support the introduction of television cameras into the House. However, on this occasion we have decided that we are prepared to vote against Tuesday's motion unless we can be given assurances from both ITN and the BBC that the rights of minority parties, such as our own, will be upheld.

We would, therefore, be grateful if you could bring with you on Tuesday your proposals indicating how these rights will be upheld. In particular, it would be of some assistance to us if you were able to inform us how ITN intends to maintain a fair balance of representative views among the parties, and whether or not judgments of what is newsworthy will follow what we would describe as 'pre-conceived' notions. In other words, we are seeking guarantees that important Scottish, Welsh and Irish issues will *not* be covered solely by regional television stations but also by the various UK programmes outlined in your letter."

Mr. Cormack: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker——

Mr. Tebbit: I hope that my hon. Friend will not pursue his point of order.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): If a point of order is put to the Chair, I must take it.

Mr. Cormack: Is not this a matter of such grave importance that the letter should be referred to the Committee of Privileges?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am sure that at this juncture, that is not the case. The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) should be allowed to make his speech.

Mr. Tebbit: I am glad that you took that attitude, Madam Deputy Speaker, because we have not established whether the letter is a spoof. I am sure that before long we shall hear whether such a letter has been sent.

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): We had a full and frank discussion this morning with the broadcasting authorities and representatives of the ITN and BBC; those discussions are normal. We do not conduct vendettas against the broadcasting authorities—unlike the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). That letter is part of an on-going discussion — *[Interruption.]* I believe that such discussion between political parties and broadcasting authorities is an inherent part of our democratic process, and if I am called to speak later in the debate I shall refer to the substance of those discussions.

Mr. Tebbit: That is a most useful explanation. The hon. Gentleman is right—such letters are exchanged between the parties, the usual channels and the broadcasting authorities. What is unusual—I suggest, unprecedented—is the suggestion that parties should engage in what one might call "vote bargaining." In other words, "We will not vote for letting the cameras in unless you give certain undertakings." They say that they believe that the cameras should come in, but they are saying, "Unless we get guarantees, we shall not vote in the way that we believe."

Dr. Thomas *rose*——

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield) *rose*——

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin) *rose*——

Mr. Tebbit: In fairness, I should give way to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas).

Dr. Thomas: Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that the discussions arose specifically out of a letter sent to us by the broadcasting authorities? *[Interruption.]* I certainly received a letter; Conservative Members may not read their correspondence. It arose particularly out of the various emphases on the kinds of programming being offered to us, and we wanted to establish the facts as between regional and national programmes.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Guarantees.

Dr. Thomas: Not guarantees. We wanted to establish the facts as between regional and national programming and the United Kingdom coverage.

For the benefit of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), we did not receive any such guarantees. The broadcasting authorities are not in a position to give such guarantees. As part of the review, if the experiment takes place, the broadcasting authorities were keen for politicians to be actively involved in reviewing the process after the experiment had started. I think that that is quite acceptable as part of our democratic work.

Mr. Tebbit: The hon. Gentleman has made his point and has erected the scaffold from which he can hang himself.

Mr. Benn *rose*——

Mr. Grocott: Which does the right hon. Gentleman think is a greater threat to democracy and the freedom of the media—an exchange of letters between a minority party and the broadcasting authorities, or thinly veiled threats from a senior member of a Government with a large majority, with hints of licence fee threats in the background, in correspondence with the BBC?

Mr. Tebbit: Most hon. Members know that if I have ever made a threat against anyone it has never been thinly veiled.

Mr. Benn: People reading the right hon. Gentleman's speech should not be under any misapprehension. He will know—I know to my certain knowledge that this has been the case for the 38 years that I have been here—

that there have been annual meetings between the parties and the broadcasting authorities, in which agreement has been sought on the allocation of party political and election broadcasts. In these negotiations there has always been a triple veto. If the BBC withdrew, these broadcasts would not take place; if a party would not take part, they would not take place either.

Going back to earlier days, there was the 14-day rule, under which broadcasters could not discuss what was to be debated in Parliament. As a result of discussions in which I was involved—I was a member of the Select Committee—the 14-day rule was lifted. Whatever merit there may be in the right hon. Gentleman's argument, please do not let him give the impression that it was our hon. Friends in the nationalist parties who introduced some new principle of negotiation.

Mr. Tebbit: The right hon. Gentleman has missed the point, and we must not escape it. What is new is not that the discussions take place but that we have vote bargaining—

"on this occasion, we have decided that we are prepared to vote against Tuesday's motion".

Having explained that they believe in televising the House, they are prepared to vote against their principles, unless they get the bargain they want.

Mr. Cormack *rose*——

Mr. Austin Mitchell *rose*——

Mr. Tebbit: I do not want to take up too much time. In the limited time still available to me, I should like to dispose of three misconceptions, red herrings or fallacies that have been put forward by some of those who favour televising the House.

First—I am glad that this is becoming accepted—there is no inevitability or historical movement that says that sooner or later cameras must come into the House. We are masters of our own affairs and we can, without any sense of guilt, decline to allow the television producers to use Parliament for so long as we wish—and for ever, if we wish. We have no need to be pushed around to please television interests. Our responsibility is to Parliament and to our electors, not to the BBC or ITV.

Secondly, if we allowed the so-called experiment, the television producers would behave most properly during their time on probation. They would willingly keep their noses clean for six months to dirty ours for ever afterwards.

The experiment will show that modern cameras will work without excessive lighting. We know that from watching outdoor sporting events and the sporting events in the other place. The experiment will show that remote camera control will work. But it will show us nothing about the intention of the producers. We can be sure that while, according to the motion on the Order Paper, a yes vote would be for a six-month experiment and the establishment of a Select Committee, the experiment would prove nothing more than the one in the Upper House. The television interests know that softly softly, catchee monkey, and this House would be the monkey.

Thirdly, those who oppose the televising of the House do not do so because we do not wish the public to know what goes on. On the contrary, the more that the public know of what goes on here the better—I say that in the national interest and, having watched Opposition Members, also in my party's interest.

My objection is that I do not want television to manipulate what goes on here. I should be happy, not only because of my commercial interests but also in the public interest, if the public could dial in through the telephone system to listen to our parliamentary proceedings every day; not only those in the Chamber but those in the Standing and Select Committees. I do not think that would be a great money maker for British Telecom, but it would be agreeable to have the facility.

I shall develop my argument concerning manipulation, because it lies at the heart of my objection to this proposal, which at best would amount to putting the House in the hands of the entertainment industry — which, in the main, is what television is. Who could believe that, with television cameras present at Prime Minister's Question Time, the Leader of the Opposition would not feel impelled to wear a red nose to show that his interest in famine relief was greater than that of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister? At worst, it would allow unelected politicians behind the cameras to use us, the elected politicians in front of the cameras, to make the points or create the issues that they want to make, not those that we want to make.

I need not claim that producers, editors or journalists favour the Labour or Conservative parties, or, indeed, the alliance — Steelites, Owenites, Maclennanites, Ashdownites or any of the sub-species thereof. No self-respecting parliamentarian would want the House to become television producers' putty.

The television lobby says that that would not happen. Would it not? Let us look at the evidence. The television authorities say that they would not show anything other than the proceedings of the House. So far, they have stood by their word. Yet on the first day of televising "Their Lordships' House", there was trouble in the Public Gallery. *The Times* of 24 January 1985 said:

"The Labour Party was again in turmoil over the miners' strike last night after the party's Chief Whip"—

I hasten to say that the Chief Whip was the noble Lord Cocks—

"condemned the action of Labour MPs in taking a group of miners into the House of Lords, where they later staged a demonstration during the first televised debate."

It continues:

"The demonstrators, it emerged last night, had been taken into the lobby of the Lords by left-wing Labour MPs who included Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, and Ms. Clare Short."

I suspect that those miners did not realise that their protest would not be shown. That is why they went there on the first day of television.

More recently, we have had the lesbian invasion of the Upper House—I hasten to add, from the Gallery—after those ladies had been admitted to the Gallery by a Labour peer. I put it to the House that in both those cases the demonstrators might have believed that they would appear on television.

As the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) put it, television cameras attract demonstrators, just as iron filings go to a magnet. Indeed, many of us—I suspect that the hon. Gentleman is one—believe that television cameras actually create demonstrations. I believe that that is the case.

Of course, there is no need to assume that such demonstrations would always be hostile to the Government. I understand that it would be the intention of the television interest to broadcast live the whole of the Budget proceedings in the House. I am not quite sure how

[Mr. Tebbit]

television producers would cope if members of a union of taxpayers positioned themselves in the Strangers Gallery to fling bouquets of flowers, even red roses, at the Chancellor when he cut taxes. How would they deal with that? Would they black out the Chancellor or would they show the demonstration? Such problems would be bound to arise sooner or later.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: The right hon. Gentleman's speech is a disgraceful attempt to drag red herrings into the proceedings. He knows full well that the coverage of demonstrations and events in the Gallery is precluded by the rules. None of the demonstrations that he mentioned was covered. It is about as logical as asserting that the throwing of horse manure was in anticipation of television coming to Parliament eight years later.

Mr. Tebbit: With respect, the hon. Gentleman was not listening. I postulated a situation where one could not show the Chancellor speaking without showing the roses descending upon him. What would the cameras do then?

In any case, if we had a few demonstrations, I am quite sure that it would not be long before the television lobbyists began to say, "How absurd. Everyone knows that these demonstrations are going on. The public can read about them in the newspapers, they are reported by the pressmen in the Gallery, they can hear the noise over the radio. How ridiculous that it is not shown on television." There is not a single argument left against that, if we accept the argument of the television lobbyists tonight.

I would go even further. The events of 21 November 1984 are well within the recollection of Mr. Speaker, because he was in the Chair that night. At 10.16 pm, because of the grave disorder by certain Opposition Members, Mr. Speaker suspended the Sitting for 10 minutes, and subsequently, when the disorders continued on the Floor of the House—not up in the Gallery—and hon. Members refused to obey Mr. Speaker, the House was adjourned at 10.27 pm. Columns 385-86 of *Hansard* refer to those incidents taking place.

Would television show that? I do not think it could avoid showing it. Would not television showing that encourage it to happen more often? If such an incident arose during live coverage, would the television editors decide to black it out or to broadcast it? Would they not be considered to be wrong either way?

Mr. Cormack: Is it not equally conceivable that constituents of the hon. Members who behaved in such a disreputable manner would subject them to such criticism that they would desist from that behaviour?

Mr. Tebbit: I shall return to my hon. Friend's point in a moment. First, I ask him to consider why hon. Members behaved in that way in the first place, if it was not to let their constituents know that they were doing it. They would be delighted if their constituents not only read about it and heard it on the radio, but also saw them on television. Would not the constituents and some of the political parties backing Opposition Members who were not taking part ask them why they were not there?

We all know that the political parties who select us and who help us to get into the House, the activists for the Labour party or the Conservative party, are always somewhat more extreme in their views than the generality of our constituents. Those people hold the nominations in their gift. We all know the fears that have been expressed by hon. Members opposite about reselection procedures.

Of course, Opposition Members may say that it is not just them. I am sure that before long someone will mention the incident when Opposition Members were singing "The Red Flag" and my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) happened to find his hand upon the Mace. He said, "Mr. Speaker, I never knew I had it in my hand. Somebody must have planted it on me." I will let my right hon. Friend answer for himself. That only goes to show that anybody can become involved in such incidents.

Some of my right hon. and hon. Friends may say that cameras will improve behaviour. In many cases that may be true, but of course it will not happen in all cases. The former Labour Chief Whip, Lord Cocks, could see the dangers, because he is a dedicated parliamentarian, but things seem to have changed. *The Guardian* of 16 November 1987 said:

> "Mr. Derek Foster, the Labour Chief Whip, yesterday promised more rowdy scenes in the Commons, similar to those seen last week . . . He added: 'If you think that last week was bad, stick around.'"

I am sure that the television cameras would.

Not all hon. Members regard the House as the ultimate place in which to make political decisions. Some people on the extreme Left advocate extra-parliamentary activity—it is called taking the battle on to the streets. They see television as the way to bring the battle off the streets and into the House.

Some of my right hon. and hon. Friends say—quite rightly—so much the worse for the Labour party, what a bonus for us, the Conservatives. The public would see the unacceptable face of the Labour party even more clearly. The Leader of the Opposition would have even more to say, in public and in private, about the activities of some sections of his party, in the way that he has criticised the London Labour party, which gave us a particular bonus in terms of votes at the last general election.

Mr. Heffer: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tebbit: I shall give way in a moment.

If we gain a party advantage at the expense of Parliament, that advantage is not worth the price.

Mr. Heffer: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that he is likely to lose a number of supporters for the case against television, by the speech he is now making? Surely, we should discuss the merits of television. It is obvious that the right hon. Gentleman thinks only in terms of narrow political arguments in the interests of his own political party.

I can make a comment about the Mace. It nearly hit me. I can also comment about the pennies that were thrown by Opposition Members at that time. However, those issues are irrelevant to whether we should have television in the House. The right hon. Gentleman is not helping his case or mine.

Mr. Tebbit: If the hon. Gentleman thinks about it, I am. He knows that I have mentioned incidents of disorder which have occurred from both sides of the House. There is no exclusive on that. My point is that the presence of the cameras would engender more such incidents.

None of us in the House have not been tempted to breach the rules of order. Indeed, most of us have succumbed to that temptation at some time or another. However, the key question is whether the Chair is obeyed and whether the House is brought into disrepute. It would be regrettable if we brought the cameras in here and encouraged more of that sort of thing.

I have no doubt that such incidents would appear more often if we had the cameras in. Do not tell me that the television editors will not broadcast those incidents, because if they occur during a live broadcast, they would have no choice. Anyway, they will take the view that the printed press is already recording it. No one should talk about the responsibility of the producers.

I agree with one thing that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench, said—what he said about the degradation of the programme "Yesterday in Parliament". It contains more and more subjective comment. Even matters that did not take place are coming into the programme. This morning's report failed to quote the initial answer given yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment to the private notice question tabled by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). That distorted the remainder of the report, which then included remarks about what the broadcaster thought was in the mind of my right hon. Friend, and which misreported what he said.

Finally, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House mentioned the abuse of privilege. I regard that as a serious issue. Too often, innocent people have been pilloried in this House and accused of criminal offences without a scrap of evidence. If that abuse grows and is magnified by the publicity of television, sooner or later there will be pressure for Parliament to lose that privilege. Without it, hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), would probably not be able to expose wrongdoing in the way in which he exposed the child abuse scandal in his constituency by a very proper use of privilege.

As I have said, I have no doubt that cameras in this place would be used by those in this House who have no respect for Parliament and its procedures—those who defy the Chair and even vote against acceptance of the authority of the Chair. It would be used by some broadcasters as "entertainment" and by others, not least in concert with those who have no respect for Parliament, to create events and to dictate the agenda of this House for their purpose.

Tonight, either television or Parliament will win the vote. They cannot both win. I will cast my vote for Parliament.

6.12 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The most striking thing about the speeches that we have heard throughout the debate has been the timidity, fear and, at times, even the paranoia of those who are opposed to the introduction of television into this Chamber. The speech of the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) was no exception. I find it extraordinary that some of the more robust Members of the House, who are not afraid of dealing with hostility in defending their point of view or their position either in the country or in the House, should be associated with such a timid approach towards the televising of Parliament. It is a strange paradox.

I do not believe that the examples that we have been given and the various attempts to explain why we should be so afraid of the introduction of television are convincing. First, I certainly do not accept the idea that the BBC or ITV will set the agenda of the House by being allowed to bring in their television cameras. The plain truth is that it is outside this House, in the television studios, that the other politicians—the unacknowledged politicians of television and radio—set the agenda of politics and seek to make Members of Parliament respond to their agenda and their order of priorities.

In this House it is the Government and the Opposition who determine the major business of the House which is, after all, chaired by Mr. Speaker or his Deputies. That is very different from being in a television studio and being subjected to interrogation by one or another of their interrogators, within a limited time span and within a set-up that is entirely controlled by the television producers.

Therefore, I do not think for a moment that we would be manipulated by television, whether it be the BBC or ITV. After all, the proposal is not merely that we should now set up a Select Committee to go into the detail of having an experiment, but when the experiment takes place, as has happened in the Lords—we already have sound broadcasting in this House—there is then to be set up a Select Committee to monitor, supervise and lay down the rules and, if need be, to change the modus operandi of the television and the sound radio producers who follow the House.

That is not being in a position where we can be manipulated and controlled. We are in a position in which we have far more control over the media here in the House, if we bother to use our powers properly, than we have over the Government's conduct of business here. Certainly, that is an entirely different regime from that which exists between this House and its Members and, of course, the press.

Mr. Tebbit: I hope the right hon. Gentleman does not think that I am being unduly simple about these things, but his views could have been heard to be expressed in the Marylebone Cricket Club a few years ago about the game of cricket. However, I must advise him that it was not the MCC which decided to go for one-day cricket instead of three-day cricket. Television caused that to happen. That is an example of the way in which television will change things, even if others have the authority.

Mr. Shore: I do not think for a moment that anyone who has followed in detail the conduct of this now 10-year-old sound radio experiment in the House could possibly agree with the right hon. Gentleman's assertion that it is the broadcasters who manipulate and shape what we do, rather than the other way round. It is not so.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh) *rose*——

Mr. Shore: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

I now come to the one illustration that is always cited by hon. Members who are opposed to the televising of the House. I am referring to the noise that upsets many people who listen to the exchanges—in many ways the most untypical exchanges of the House—when the House is at its most excited and the protagonists and leaders of the two political parties are engaged in head-on collision. As we well know, that occurs twice a week for 15 minutes.

[Mr. Shore]

The steady dissemination of news and reports about Parliament through "Today in Parliament", which we listen to every evening, and through other programmes, and which sometimes appear on independent radio in a much fuller form than on the BBC, no doubt adds to the understanding and knowledge and the sense of participation that people have about what goes on in the House.

I have said that there is timidity and fear that we cannot ourselves, in this House, with all its resources, control the BBC and ITV producers, who are dependent on our continuing good will for access here with their cameras; but, my God, if we cannot control them, how on earth can this House ever control Ministers with their powerful civil servants sitting behind them? If we cannot make television and radio accountable to us, we will never be able to make Ministers accountable either. That is a counsel of despair whih reflects an extraordinary paranoia about the introduction of the cameras.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North) *rose*——

Mr. Shore: I shall give way later to the hon. Gentleman.

There is not only a fear that we shall be manipulated by the media. The other fear is that fallen political human nature will show itself in a new, novel and appallingly perverse way if the cameras are introduced. There is plenty of fallen political human nature to be observed in the House; there has been ever since I have been a Member. I have probably been a good part of it, but 20 years ago there was no radio here.

I can remember the two most extraordinary incidents that impressed themselves on my memory. The first was when Bernadette Devlin crossed the Floor of the House and attacked the then Home Secretary, Reginald Maudling, by pulling his hair and slapping his face in a fit of passion. On another occasion the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) seized the Mace and waved it above his head in an extraordinary and disgraceful way. Both those incidents occurred before radio was introduced. I do not think the right hon. Member for Henley would have behaved any better or worse if cameras had been here. And I am willing to bet that a Miss Bernadette Devlin of the future will behave in exactly the same fashion as her counterpart of the past.

Hon. Members are far more honest in their emotions, and far less constrained by factors that other people believe they are aiming at than is generally understood. There is spontaneity in politics. Miss Devlin did not plan to do what she did in a manner deliberately aimed at catching the eye of the press. However, if she did, the Press Gallery was there to report it—it cannot be turned off. No one seriously suggests that we should switch off sound radio now. The electorate would think that an extraordinary, self-damaging act, motivated by fear and paranoia.

Mr. Gale *rose*——

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes) *rose*——

Mr. Shore: I promised earlier to give way to the hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), so I shall give way to him now.

Mr. Gale: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, although it would have been more helpful if he had allowed me to intervene earlier when my point was more appropriate. The right hon. Gentleman was suggesting state control of television. Is he aware that, when launching the proposals to televise the House, the editor of ITN, David Nicholas, when asked if he would surrender his editorial control, said — quite properly, as a journalist—that he would not?

Mr. Shore: There is a difference between editorial control and general supervision by the House by laying down rules and procedures that are already accepted and operated in the House of Lords, where the television experiment is now in its third year. It is all very well to say that the cameras would be on their best behaviour to con us for six months, but three years later they are still on their best behaviour. Sound radio has been well behaved for 10 years, so I do not see why we should take these arguments against television seriously. The arguments for introducing television are much more positive.

Some people say that television is only about entertainment, but it is not. It is written into the charter of the BBC that the purpose of broadcasting is to inform, educate and entertain. Similar obligations are written into the Act that set up ITV. Television and radio have concerns other than merely entertaining and trivialising.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Does the right hon. Gentleman recall the charter of TV-am to explain and inform? What happened to that?

Mr. Shore: I do not know about that.

It is a major obligation of broadcasting authorities that they should maintain balance. It is about that that the minority parties are concerned, and about what sort of protection they might receive. That is a legitimate concern that should be taken up with the proposed Select Committee rather than with the television authorities. We want more balanced reporting of Parliament's proceedings. The lack of that is one of the principal defects in the way in which the press treats us today.

There are serious accounts in the five large newspapers, and they are helpful to Parliament. They help to disseminate information about ideas and arguments. However, most of the press ignores the House completely. It has no obligation to report its affairs. The Gallery comments only on the trivia of the House—some of it is entertaining and I do not object to that, but it does not tell people what has happened.

If we televise the House, that will not happen. Of course, there will have to be selection. It is implicit and inevitable in any sort of programme other than a full version of everything we say. We have already laid down rules. I quote from the ground rules for television, which is asked

> "to limit our coverage to 'the strict confines of the Chamber'. This means in particular no shots of the Stranger's Gallery or the other Galleries, even if there are interruptions from these."

That is dated 1984, more than three years ago—before the events of the week before last when people swarmed down the ropes in the House of Lords. That went unreported. It would have been outside the terms of reference to report what went on in the Galleries. So the arguments for having stronger coverage of what goes on in Parliament through the introduction of television are incomparably better than those advanced against it.

Ever since democracy was born in Athens and the city state, the problem has always been that it cannot be direct.

It has had to be representative democracy. As such, there has been a problem of communication—of the gap that arises between those who represent and those who are represented. Our technology and ingenuity have presented us in the second half of the 20th century with a most marvellous and remarkable way of closing that gap. I am strongly in favour of the experiment and, more than that, I am in favour of introducing television into the House.

6.28 pm

Miss Janet Fookes (Plymouth, Drake): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) on the skilled way in which he introduced the debate. I also congratulate him on his wisdom in reproducing exactly the same motion as the one that I introduced in a similar debate more than two years ago.

It is wise to televise the proceedings of Parliament in the form of an experiment. I do not understand the point made by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who seemed to suggest that a vote tonight in favour of television would close the door on time for changes of mind. The terms of the motion clearly state that that is not the case. It commits us only to the principle of an experiment, and there would be further opportunities to judge whether to go ahead with it and have it on a permanent basis.

Mr. James Wallace: Does the hon. Lady accept that the only possible explanation for the comments by the Leader of the House is that the experiment would prove so successful that it would be impossible thereafter to turn the clock back?

Miss Fookes: That is one possible interpretation, but I shall not try to read the mind of my right hon. Friend. I do not think that the terms of the motion will bear the construction that he put upon them.

I turn now to the heart of the matter. We pride ourselves on being a parliamentary democracy, in which we hope that the electors will take an ever closer interest in what we do. If they have aspirations to join us in the House, they will be free to do so. Therefore, I believe that it is logical to make use of the most direct and up-to-date means of communication now available to us, and that means televising the House.

Historically, the House has been extraordinarily reluctant to share its deliberations with the outside world. In the 18th century, we know, the House hated being reported, and there was a great struggle before newspapers gained the right to report the proceedings. Indeed, even those who sought to report for *Hansard*—as it then was—ran into difficulties. We had the same problems when radio was introduced, and now the same sort of problems are being advanced against television.

Although I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) on many things, I cannot agree with his analysis of the evils that will flow from televising the House. Just as people have a right to sit in the Strangers' Gallery, so they have a right to see something of our deliberations on televison. I believe that that is the essential principle.

Mr. John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): My hon. Friend and I have been in the House for 18 years, and in all that time not one of my 80,000 constituents has written to me about this matter. Therefore, I very much doubt whether there is a public demand to televise the House. I believe that that demand comes mainly from the communications industry.

Miss Fookes: Contrary to my hon. Friend's experience, I have received letters from constituents and, indeed, on many more occasions, people have talked to me about it at various functions and expressed their wish that the House should be televised.

I believe that the important arguments against televising the House should be closely analysed. The technical arguments against televising the House that were strongly advanced two years ago and well before have been largely disposed of. It seems clear that remote-controlled cameras of a modest nature, with no personnel on the Floor of the House and with modest additional lighting —I would not mind a modest addition to the lighting, whether or not we are televised — would not present insuperable barriers to the deliberations of the House. There might have been a problem when the apparatus was far less sophisticated, but that is not the case now. An experiment would enable us to test whether we could operate comfortably under the modern conditions of televising for a period of six months. That is a good reason for having such an experiment.

We must also consider the knotty problem of editorial control. Of course there will be some difficulties. I cannot imagine any course of action involving such control in any sphere where there are not problems and difficulties, but I believe that they are there to be overcome. They should not be used as an argument against televising the House. The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) was right to point out that it is possible for the House to lay down the ground rules. Within those ground rules the broadcasters would have editorial control, but they would be unable to move outside the general arrangements that we should lay down as to how the televising of Parliament should be conducted. That is more than we can say about what happens when we are reported by newspapers.

The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney also touched upon the important fact that television "manipulates" us, to use such a phrase, by having parallel debates and parallel programmes outside the House. The producers choose whom they will have on their programmes. They choose the format and the length of time. In fact, all the controls are in their hands. Of course, they would be unable to do that if hon. Members did not agree to take part, but there seems to be no shortage of those who are willing to offer their services outside the House, reluctant though they are to be seen here.

Mr. Faulds: With respect to the hon. Lady, such comments have been made before. We do not all rush to accept television invitations. I make a point of turning them down. I have better things to do with my Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings.

Miss Fookes: I do not believe that I said that all hon. Members did. I said that a sufficient number did, to make it possible to go ahead with such programmes, and that is the important point, but the *Official Report* will prove me right or wrong.

We must also consider the argument that the character of the House will be changed, especially as a result of individuals who behave, or would be encouraged to behave, in a rowdy way and flout the conventions of the

[Miss Fookes]

House. There has always been a problem with Members of that type. Indeed, as an aside, I believe that it is time that the House took a firmer grip on them.

However, that is not an argument for saying no to television. I believe that greater powers given to you, Mr. Speaker, would be salutary, and I should be extremely happy to see those who offend grievously against order and you, Mr. Speaker, paying a penalty and forfeiting part of their salary. That might clip their wings a little. We can take such action irrespective of whether the House is televised. I believe that that action needs to be taken in any case.

The House has existed for hundreds of years, and I do not believe that it is such a delicate institution that it could not take the fairly modest changes that might come about as the result of the influence of television. Frankly, the House bears no resemblance to the House that existed hundreds of years ago. Over the centuries, in response to all kinds of influences and changes, both inside and outside the House, it has altered to meet modern needs. To assume that the House would somehow disintegrate as the result of television is to treat it as though it were some kind of precious medieval manuscript — delicate, fragile, having to be kept under strictly controlled light and temperature conditions and not breathed upon. This House is a living, robust institution, and I believe that it can take the impact of the cameras and, indeed, make good use of them to bring the proceedings of the House closer to the people.

I shall vote firmly in favour of the motion tonight.

6.37 pm

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): Had this debate taken place some three weeks ago, I doubt whether I would have attempted to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker. However, since that time I have observed the results of an exercise in which I took part along with some of my colleagues. That exercise was the "World in Action" programme that was recorded in November which related to the matter under discussion.

Together with 15 of my parliamentary colleagues, I was asked—no doubt because of my opposition to televising of proceedings of the Chamber — to take part in the programme. The pros and cons of the debate were well and truly aired within the time allocated. I was asked by Granada, the company that made the programme, if I would wind up for the opposition. I know that many hon. and right hon. Members watched that programme and anyone could be forgiven for believing—certainly after watching my 40-second participation — that the opposition was extremely negative. Indeed, such comments have been made.

My remarks, instead of being an attempt to wind up the opposition's case, were reduced to the light-hearted piece with which I concluded.

Mr. Heffer: Can my hon. Friend tell me how long he spoke for and how long he actually got on television?

Mr. Pendry: I believe that I spoke for about 10 minutes, but I actually got about 40 seconds on television.

One of the points that I raised in my 10 minutes concerned the dangers of editorial decisions and how essential it was to have balance in programmes. Precisely because balance did not take place, the House should be aware of what is in store for it if the motion is carried tonight.

I have every admiration for the programme makers at Granada and the "World in Action" programme in particular, and perhaps even they now regret asking 16 Members of Parliament to debate an issue as important as that in less than half an hour. In my view, it was a very foolhardy decision on their part. Almost all of those I have spoken to who care about the institution and who saw the debate have said that it was not fair to the debater. To be fair to Granada, I have spoken to many more people who said that they thought it was compelling television.

There lies the key. What is to a television company good, sexy television does not necessarily equate with an accurate portrayal of events. When it comes to the portrayal of Parliament, I hope that every hon. Member would want the television companies to get it right.

Mr. Tony Banks: I was also on that programme, and I believe that I also suffered very badly from the editing. It looked as though I was either on drugs or totally demented, but on that occasion I was neither. While I understand what my hon. Friend is saying, would all his doubts be answered if Parliament were televised around the clock? Would he support that?

Mr. Pendry: I am glad that I gave way to my hon. Friend, because he made a telling contribution in that programme but it did not come out in the editing, as he rightly points out. I agree with him and say that, had his amendment (f) on the Order paper been called today, I would have supported it.

The programme was edited from some two hours debate to some 24 minutes. The proposers in the debate had 7 per cent. more time than the opposition. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), who believes that there will not be manipulation, was my counterpart in the debate. He had 80 per cent. more time to wind up the debate for the proposition than I had to do my piece.

I will list the speakers: one had three minutes 10 seconds, two had over two minutes, eight had over one minute, four had 50 seconds, and there are no prizes for guessing who got 40 seconds. That clearly demonstrates that fairness and balance were not introduced, or even attempted. If that were a showcase demonstration by a television programme in an attempt to convince Members of Parliament that there is justice in televising the House, then woe betide us when it happens daily.

Dr. Thomas: Hon. Members on these Benches were not given the opportunity to appear on that programme, which might form the grounds for some of the concerns discussed earlier.

Mr. Pendry: The hon. Member should count his blessings that he did not spend the whole of his Sunday going up there, only to be cut down to a few seconds.

Mr. Holt: I was one of those in that debate who was anti-televising and I was one of the hon. Members who was given 50 seconds at the end, which was the longest speech then. More significant and important is that, unless one analyses the film, one will not see that after my contribution there is an instant insert from another camera of another hon. Member who disagreed with me. That was

the commentary by the producer on my contribution, being reflected through another Member of Parliament in the way they showed that face.

Mr. Pendry: The hon. Member's intervention is telling, and it will be noted.

It is possible that the producer of the programme thought that some of us did not present our case very well. That is fair enough, but I would rather that that judgment were made by the viewer, the constituent, than by someone who has not offered himself or herself to the electorate and gained their support. If a programme of this type is to be edited, let it be done by the elector turning the on-off switch. If the elected representative is curtailed in this way, let it be at the wish of the elector.

I do not apologise for dwelling on the Granada programme, because it illustrates the point I make: that unless we have a separate channel—I come to the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West — with all-day or all-night viewing, coupled with coverage of Standing and Select Committees, people will see the televising of Parliament only through the blinkered eyes of the television producers, who are often interested only in the level of ratings or keeping their franchise when it comes up for renewal, as is the case currently.

I have spent many years in the Opposition Whips and Government Whips Offices and I know that many hon. Members refuse to serve on Standing or Select Committees, whether they be the legal brigade who spend the lucrative mornings in the courts and the odd hour or two in the Chamber, or those who wish to shine in this forum because it suits their. Unfortunately, they are the ones whom our constituents would wish the rest of us to emulate, even though we may be working positively— although away from the glare of the cameras — in another parliamentary forum, in Committee on the Floor above this one or in the other 101 ways that we try to represent our constituents.

I am attracted to the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West, as I think that that is the way forward. Unfortunately, some hon. Members, particularly many new Members, may be attracted by the experiment, which they may consider is a rather modest motion asking for the principles to be accepted. The Leader of the House was right when he said that experiments tend to become a permanent fixture, for good or ill, and often by default. I feel that the same would happen if the motion were carried.

In conclusion, there are times when the House, across the party divide, speaks and votes with an almost uncanny sense of perspicacity. It did so on this question in 1980, 1981, 1983 and 1985. My earnest hope is that it will continue to do so tonight and that the motion will be resisted.

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the next speaker, I thank the last two speakers, who spoke for 10 minutes each. If other hon. Members follow that example, many more will be called.

6.47 pm

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): This is not the first time, nor I hope the last, that I find myself in broad agreement with the views expressed by the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry). There has been considerable discussion of the possibility of having tight ground rules to govern the television cameras if they come into the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson), who made such a splendid speech in introducing the debate, concentrated strongly on the point.

In the last Parliament I was Chairman of the Select Committee on Sound Broadcasting and had some responsibility for that, so I know how difficult it is to draw up adequate ground rules and to ensure that they are enforced. I have no doubt that if we allow cameras into the House there will be increased disorder and that the programme makers will tend to concentrate upon that disorder. Most of the scenes that I have witnessed on news programmes taken from other Parliaments have tended to concentrate on the rows rather than on constructive debate. It would not be entirely surprising if that were to happen, because most speeches in Parliament are exceptionally dull and make exceptionally bad television.

The first televised speech from the other place to which I listened was on Second Reading of a Bill to abolish the Greater London council. Lord Elton was delivering a powerful speech, and it was plain that it was going to be a long speech, as it was an important Bill. The cameras spent 90 seconds on Lord Elton's left profile and 90 seconds on his full profile. Then they came in from the right and concentrated on the back of his head. That was going to continue for at least another 40 minutes. Fortunately, however, a strap on Lady Seear's shoulder slipped and she started to try and retrieve it. Cameras on each side of the House zoomed in on poor Lady Seear's left shoulder, not because Lord Elton was making a bad speech, but because the producers needed some relief.

If we are to have the cameras in the House, I fear that, on many occasions, they will need some relief, so they will concentrate on disturbances. Producers will think that bad Parliament is good television. If we have the cameras, we shall have to give you, Mr. Speaker, greater powers to send out of the Chamber Members who misbehave and to deal with those who raise bogus points of order.

Before we decide on this matter, we should consider what happens in other Parliaments. I should like to consider, in particular, what has happened in that other most important parliamentary body, the Senate of the United States. Thirty years ago it decided to admit cameras into Senate Committees, but to keep them off the floor of the Senate. Speeches in the Senate are infinitely more boring than ours.

During the past 30 years, television from the Senate Committees has at times changed the tide of politics. Thirty years ago, Senator McCarthy, who had a tremendous reputation in the United States for his anti-Communist witch-hunt, appeared before the Senate Armed Forces Committee. He was cross-examined hour after hour in front of the cameras, and his reputation slowly deflated. Twenty years later came the televised hearings of the Watergate Committee in the Senate. Again, it would have been an important parliamentary occasion, but the presence of the television cameras made the impact of that Committee overwhelming and led directly to the resignation of President Nixon. In recent months, the destiny of Colonel Oliver North in front of a Senate Committee has been televised and that has had a major impact on political life in the United States.

We should start by televising the Select Committees of the House. The question and answer cross-examination techniques in those Committees lend themselves readily to

[Sir Philip Goodhart]

good television. Television would bring fresh life and influence to those Committees. Too often in recent years the recommendations of those Committees have been ignored by the Government and the public.

I hope that the motion will be defeated this evening, but that that will not be the end of the matter. I hope that the next question that we seriously consider is whether to allow cameras into Select Committees. The presence of cameras in Select Committees would be good for those Committees, but the presence of cameras in the House would be bad for the House.

6.55 pm

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I am glad that the hon. Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) has declared himself in favour of televising Select Committees, because that is a step forward. When he rose, I feared that he may be about to repeat some of the myths perpetrated on both sides of the House about the dangers of television. I strongly favour the televising of our proceedings. I favour the motion as a whole, not just in respect of Select Committees.

In my brief speech, I want to explain my reasons for supporting the motion. However, I fear that this may be becoming a party political occasion after Prime Minister's Question Time and some of the comments which have been made since. It is not a party political occasion. I am glad that the Father of the House, the right hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), spoke as he did. It is important to recognise that this is a House of Commons occasion, and I hope that hon. Members on both sides will feel free to go ahead and vote for the motion, regardless of what the Prime Minister or Labour Members have said against televising our proceedings. We must avoid the trap of a party political issue.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) is not present, because he gave us a great knockabout time. It was the kind of circus act that we have seen time and again, and he is good value. He is also a good friend of mine. He said today what he said in his newspaper column last Sunday. I read it with great interest, but he was 10 times better on the Floor of the House than he was in print. That is a good argument for televising the House.

I see that my hon. Friend has returned to the Chamber. I was saying that his Sunday column was reasonable, but he was 10 times times better on the Floor of the House. If our proceedings were televised, the impact of my hon. Friend's remarks would have been 20 times greater. That is a good reason for televising our proceedings. I am glad that he made my case for me by that admirable act on the Floor. We should have seen it on television. I greatly regret that we shall not.

My hon. Friend visited the sins of the press on the broadcasters, which is a grave error of judgment. The broadcasters are the very people who have shown balance in programmes such as "Yesterday in Parliament". They are the pearls, the proud possessions, of broadcasters. "Yesterday in Parliament" and other similar programmes are not the tabloid press. We can be proud of them. We should stress what the broadcasters have done through their radio coverage here and their television coverage of the House of Lords.

I hope that the House will not be frightened by the scare stories that we have heard from some right hon. and hon. Members, including the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). He would readily concede, I hope, that he is engaged in a vendetta against some broadcasters. On that account, I hope that hon. Members will discount the scare stories that he told with such great relish. They had nothing whatever to do with televising the House of Commons, and I hope to goodness that no children were listening to the right hon. Gentleman's speech.

The case for televising the House is essentially the case for democracy. It means trusting the people to have an interest in the issues, to make a judgment on those issues and to reach sensible conclusions. That is what democracy is all about and that is what televising the House is all about. The people who will view our proceedings if the motion is carried are the same people who elected us. They were no doubt wise to elect us as 640-odd individuals, and they will be wise to support a proposal such as this.

Those who voted for us in the election have a right not only to listen to but to see our debates. They have a right to evaluate all that goes on in the House of Commons. Those who elect us are losing interest in our proceedings. We are beginning to drift into a backwater. No matter how passionately we argue with and shout at each other or how emotional we are in the House, people do not want to know if they cannot follow our proceedings. It is through television that they will follow our proceedings.

It is ironic that the proceedings of the House are glossily packaged in the television studios. They ought to be seen as they are in the House of Commons. That is why our proceedings should be televised. It is absurd when the television news broadcasts disembodied voices of hon. Members with still photographs and tries to give some idea of our proceedings. It is absurd, ridiculous and misleading. We should have full coverage of hon. Members speaking as they are, with all the power, eloquence and absurdity with which they speak. We should see the reality.

I hope that we shall not allow ourselves to go on drifting into this cosy backwater, but will recognise the basic issue. The House of Commons is the prime forum of debate in the land and it needs to be linked with the prime method of news dissemination. That is why we should televise the House. The broadcasters would welcome it, but that is not the reason for accepting it. We would do it not for the broadcasters, but because we need it. Any democracy needs its legislative assembly and any modern Parliament needs modern methods of communication; otherwise it is misunderstood and disregarded. I believe that the televising of the proceedings of the House will deepen public understanding of our affairs.

Mr. Nelson: May I ask the right hon. Gentleman to say a word or two about one very important group that will be affected by the decision that the House makes tonight —the 50,000 profoundly deaf people who rely on British sign language and for whom television would be a new entree into the understanding of our proceedings?

Mr. Ashley: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I do not want to take the time of the House, but, now that I have been invited, may I say that deaf people would warmly appreciate the televising of the House, which should be accompanied by both subtitles and sign language. I must not go on because I have already spoken for too long, but I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

Those who think that the public will not understand the empty Benches and the fact that hon. Members are busy with Committees or constituency work insult the people who sent them here. Of course those outside will understand. It is very important to recognise that. I do not think that the public are as daft as some people would have us believe.

The House may well change a little when it is televised but, like all other great living institutions, it is capable of adapting to change and it is far better to change with changing times than to ossify in the outmoded structures of the past. The greatest effect of any change would be that the House would be regarded not only as the main forum of public debate but as a vital element in the political life of our people, which it is not at present. The drift to irrelevance would be effectively stopped and reversed if the House were televised. The House would move into the late 1980s and the next century in close touch with the people, exercising the influence that belongs to the mother of Parliaments. Tonight we have a great opportunity to put the House in touch with the people. I hope that we shall not miss it. Let us try for and go forward with this experiment.

7.7 pm

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): There has been much ado in this debate — my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) has contributed to it —about the danger of encouraging rowdy behaviour by allowing the television cameras in. We have spasms of misbehaviour, and the situation at the moment is not good, but I suspect that we have not reached anything resembling what the Irish Members produced in the last century. My right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) did not get very far with the Mace, but if I am not mistaken an ILP Member got it well into the Members' Lobby before he was stopped. My own father knocked out Geordie Buchanan on the steps of the Chamber below the Gangway because of a disagreement. My father was short of stature but he had quite a punch. The two made good friends afterwards, and when I celebrated my father's 80th birthday Geordie came to the party.

The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) talked about manipulation. There has always been some manipulation. When I first came to the House, there were press lords who had some Members of Parliament at their beck and call. We must not exaggerate these problems.

I hope that I shall not be thought a bore if I bring the debate back to the point raised by the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley). Surely the essence of the matter is connection between Parliament —nowadays, since the reform of the House of Lords, the House of Commons—with the people who sent us here. That is the central issue. It is instructive to look back a little. For almost 200 years before the second world war this — the Chamber — was the arena in which all the political battles were settled. Speeches were made in the provinces—by Peel at Tamworth and by Gladstone in Midlothian — but this was where the decisions were made.

If any hon. Member cares to look back at *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, the *Morning Post*, or any of the heavy newspapers, he will find that quite junior Back Benchers scored a column for any serious speech, up to the first world war and even after it. Why was that? It has been said in the debate that editors will publish only what they think is useful and what sells newspapers. There were three or four pages of parliamentary news right up to the second world war. Then we had the rationing of newsprint and the radio became the main source of information.

But I think that older Members will agree that, when we got back to something like normal political life, public opinion was riveted by the House of Commons. There were many reasons. There were the great personalities who had been built up in the war — Churchill, Attlee and others. There were the great issues, such as the controversy over Suez. Big decisions hung on the House of Commons such as when Mr. Wyatt and Mr. Donnelly paralysed the attempt to renationalise steel. What happened in the House mattered.

At that point, the television revolution began. Then we lost a great opportunity. Had we brought the cameras in then and told the television people how to behave and what to do, I think that we would have built a new link with a public who could not read about us in the press, at first because the press was too small and later because the press was not interested. We could have established a link which would have kept Parliament in a much stronger position.

We have to ask ourselves, what are we doing here, and who are we? A right hon. Member or an hon. Member has a certain status; I am not sure that it is quite what it used to be. He has a salary, rather better than it was. He can have some influence on the policy of his party, lobbying what he wants it to do. He can push a particular cause. He could even get a slot on television occasionally or write an article. But what he says and what is said to him in debate here might as well be said in Cabinet. Indeed, Cabinet discussions are leaked much more than our debates are reported.

What are we doing here? We have become a sort of Augustan senate. We are paid, we have status and all that, but what part do we really play in what I always assumed was the role of a Member of Parliament in helping to lead opinion. I am not talking about reflecting opinion. I am not sure about that; I think our job is to lead opinion. How do we lead opinion except through a process of debate which allows potential followers to judge which lead to follow?

The present position is convenient for the establishment on both sides. They are interviewed by Day or Dimbleby. The interviewers have become the third party, I am sorry to say. They are the people who appear to take a moderate stance and ask the questions. Does that matter? It is very convenient. The rest of us are left out. Do we mind? I do, for a rather basic reason. Things are going along all right, and I am not too worried—indeed, I am happy about the present Executive—but the real safety valve between excessive authority on the part of the Executive and excessive populist investigation by the critics is open debate in this House.

Would televising the proceedings bring us into disrepute? If it does, like the Long Parliament, we had better go. As Leo Amery's son, I will not quote Cromwell's words again: if we have become disreputable, there is no place for us. But my judgment is different. It is that the British people are very attached to the parliamentary system. I think it was Disraeli — I am not speaking in code—who said:

[Mr. Julian Amery]

"A country subject to fogs and possessing a large middle class wants grave statesmen."

The Labour party has discovered, because it is now listening, that the majority have become middle class. I think that the country as a whole wants grave statesmen. I do not think that the sight of eccentric rowdy Members will please the mass of the people. It is not Parliament that will suffer: it is some Members as they may be reformed by the people.

The decision is not easy. It is more difficult than it was when we had the great opportunity to introduce television 25 or 30 years ago. But having thought about it carefully, I shall vote for the motion, as I did the first time it came before the House.

7.16 pm

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnyd Nant Conwy): It is a great privilege for me to follow the right hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery); I agree with all he said. I also agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley). I regret that this has become a partisan political debate in the worst sense of that word. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] For those of us who have sat through the debate, there have been tones within it that I regret. It is important that we should debate the issue of what a modern parliamentary democracy should be about.

I make the simple point that, in terms of the theory of what we are debating, representation in a democracy is certainly a two-way street. We are here to represent the people who elected us, but as we are presenting arguments on their behalf, so too our proceedings have to be represented to them. In the memorable phrase of the now, sadly, late Raymond Williams, we have to have an educated and participating democracy. It was in the context of this book "The Long Revolution" that he first used the phrase. The development of the process of parliamentary democracy in the British state has indeed been a long revolution.

One reason for the long revolution is the failure of the institutions of democracy to catch up with what is going on in the broader civil society. I agree that we should have taken advantage of the communications revolution much earlier. All the arguments that have been rehearsed about a threat of change to our institutions represent the worst traditionalism. I believe in tradition, but I also understand that traditions have to develop and be adapted. Bringing the mass media into the work of politics has changed politics outside the Chamber. The politics which is conducted through the party system and through current affairs programmes is radically different from the politics of 10 or 20 years ago.

The Chamber has not played a central role in such politics. What goes on here is heard but it is not seen to be central to our politics. It is absurd that, on Budget day, television should show general views of Big Ben and red buses, with just the voice of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and that major events in the Chamber are not seen fully on television. Similarly, it is absurd that we see the 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock news with voice-overs of Members of Parliament and slides being shown. It demeans the image of Parliament. We are not seen communicating directly on the media.

Not only that, but it is equally important that the argument about editorial control of presentation of our proceedings should be taken seriously. That was the whole point of the meeting, now well publicised—thanks to the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit)—that we had with the broadcasting authorities. It is all about ensuring that minority parties are heard outside the House and broadcast, as I am being heard in the House now.

One matter that I feel strongly about is that the House has adapted itself to the position of minority parties. We are able to present our position on the Floor of the House, and we are concerned that that position should be represented, although not over-represented, in any experiment to broadcast Parliament. That brings me to the other point that I want to make about the nature of the experiment.

In the terms of the motion, and as I understand discussions with the broadcasting authorities, it is likely that the broadcasting authorities will service this experiment. I make a plea for the Select Committee to take the most radical approach. We are living in a society that has pluralist television, where the institutions of the BBC and ITV have to adapt to Channel 4 and independent production. Let the Select Committee consider why the House should not become the independent producer of its own television station.

Why should the House not set itself up as an independent producer and sell its message to Channel 4, the BBC and Independent Television News? Let us have our own audio-visual *Hansard* to control the dissemination of information from the House. That is precisely the outcome that the establishment of *Hansard* created in printed form. Let us have the imagination to do the same thing in the audio-visual medium at the end of the 20th century.

7.23 pm

Mr. John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): I was one of the 16 Members of Parliament who were recently asked by Granada Television to go to Manchester to take part in a mock Parliament, in a set-up that cost £250,000 to build. The programme lasted nearly two hours. The quality of debate was very good and I came away feeling that the long journey on a Sunday was well worth it, although the fee was very small indeed.

A little later on, however, I saw the programme in the House, and I was most disappointed. The broadcast, which was originally some one and a half to two hours long, was reduced to 25 minutes. My stirring speech, and all of the others of six minutes duration, was reduced to one minute, so the final programme was quite appalling.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Stokes: Will my hon. Friend forgive me? There are many hon. Members waiting to speak. I do not intend to be long.

So, if that was television, it was a disaster.

With regard to what we are debating tonight, I want to speak particularly to some of those hon. Members who have come to the House more recently than I have. This is one of the most serious subjects that we have to consider, although many hon. Members have been over this course many times before.

I love this place, but I believe that our future and the way in which we conduct our business will be once more

at stake if the motion is passed. Of course this will not be an experiment, for, once television comes in, we shall never get the cameras out.

This morning, I attended the General Synod, which is televised. Not only were the lights very bright, but the heat was appalling. I hate it. I would not want to have that here. Quite apart from that physical presence, the fact of cameras being here at all will change utterly the character of this Chamber and the behaviour of everybody here, as well as those in the Gallery and elsewhere. We have seen that with regard to the recent antics in the House of Lords. Why did those horrible women go into the House of Lords rather than the House of Commons? Because the cameras were there.

As I have said so often in the House, television is primarily a branch of show business, which takes over from serious reality. It is preposterous to suggest, as some hon. Members have suggested in the debate, that television is a mirror of life; of course it is not. Television almost always distorts, and often trivialises matters. That is clearly shown in the difference between television news, which picks up anything that happens to come along—usually the Birmingham hospital—and news on the sound radio, which is much more sober and balanced. Television must have attractive pictures with which to hold viewers. Unfortunately, the mass of our proceedings in the House are not very attractive.

Television changes personal behaviour, too, as one sees frequently in relation to demonstrations. I have seen that happen here and in Europe. The moment the cameras come along, people start shaking their fists and shouting slogans. We see that happening with strikers as well.

In my experience, there has not been a great demand for cameras in the House. What worries me is that those who say that there is a demand are connected with or have something to do with television, the communications industry or newspapers. Those who make and produce the news think that they are as important as the news, but they are only scribblers. I am amazed that they think that they are so important. They are television personalities, but what does that mean? I want to see a real flesh and blood man on television, not a cardboard man.

We have heard about television recording "Their Lordships' House". My goodness, I back the Upper House and wish that there were more hereditary peers there. But we have to remember that the peers have neither constituents nor a gallery to play to. Much as I admire them, many of their debates are boring to the point of tedium.

What does television do? Why do tired workers and their wives switch on their sets at the end of the day? Because they want to see excitement, scenes, rows and crises, whereas here, hour after hour of debates are conducted, often in almost total silence, and certainly without excitement. Prime Minister's Question Time has been broadcast on sound radio. It has been utterly ruined. How much worse would it be if it was televised? The conduct of our debates and the timing of our business and procedures, and even the numbers of hon. Members attending on the Government and Opposition Benches would all be altered, primarily by television. The parliamentary programme would disappear, and be put in prime viewing time. Prime Minister's Question Time would take place not at 3.15 pm, but at 7.15 pm, when viewers have their high tea. *[Interruption.]*

The vital and difficult question of who would edit the programmes and choose the passages to be screened would follow a decision to allow our proceedings to be televised. There is also a danger that minorities such as Militant would make a mockery of our proceedings. There would also be — and how some would love this — grand inquisitions, especially about security matters, which might damage the safety of our nation and inflate the egos of the questioners, who would imagine that they lived in America and were members of a Senate committee.

As we have heard, too, hon. Members could damage the reputations of innocent people, who could not reply, by the abuse of parliamentary privilege on the screen, in programmes shown in the front room of every family in the land. These are serious disadvantages, which cannot be glossed over. There are difficulties and dangers, which I want to point out.

Anyway, in my view, there is far too much television today. It enters into every walk of life. We have become a nation of television watchers, rather than sportsmen and doers. If the cameras came into the House, the next step would be to demand that cameras went elsewhere. Where is the next place but the law courts? Television is bound to go there. Television is a monster that would devour us all in the end.

I believe that television has corrupted our English civilisation, our taste and our morals. England was certainly a happier and healthier place before television came in. I am certain, as we all admit, that there was much less violence and sexual crime before that time.

Who are these mysterious television producers who manipulate events behind the scenes? They are usually, in my experience, "ideas men." They have never had to pay the wages on Friday. They know nothing about the realities of life, but they tend to turn ordinary and decent things upside down. They tend to question every accepted practice and to dissect it minutely, even though these are good things that we have had in our country for ages.

Television, in my view therefore, is harmful and it would be a crime to have it in the Chamber. The House would be dragged to even lower levels than it has reached lately, and they have been pretty low.

I know good men and women not only on the Government Benches but on the Opposition Benches too, but, speaking for my own party now, what is this great party of ours? Are we not supposed to be the gentlemen of England, and are the gentlemen of England going to allow this act of vulgarity?

I have listened to most of the debate. I believe that we have had the better of the argument. I still believe, even today, in 1988, that the House possesses innate wisdom and common sense, and that it will surely throw this motion out.

7.31 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I want to raise an issue that was raised briefly by the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit)—privilege. I am one of those who have been accused of abusing privilege, and I want to see this argument debated in the context of the use or abuse of privilege.

I shall oppose the televising of Parliament on the basis that this debate is not about a dedicated channel, but about edited highlights being transmitted on British television and, in effect, the censoring of our comments. When I have used privilege in the Chamber in a way that

[Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours]

hon. Members may have found objectionable, I have done so on the basis that I believed I was right. I have never done it in the belief that a majority of the House of Commons would necessarily accept my view. Indeed, in the very limited, contentious areas in which I have raised issues under privilege, I knew that I could expect only hostility. I see this debate not in a political context, but in the context of issues that I have raised, expecting the majority of hon. Members, being Conservatives, to oppose what I was doing.

In the event that we extend my right to abuse privilege in such a way that the media, in the form of television, are able to transmit what I am doing when I believe that I am right but others believe that I might be wrong, we shall provoke in the Select Committee on Privileges a very important argument which was begun—I hope that I am not breaching privilege by referring to debates within that Committee — in our proceedings prior to the publication of our last report.

One member of that Committee, who is no longer a Member of the House, clearly wanted to interfere with the rights of privilege of Members in the House of Commons. He was not alone. Other hon. Members were privately talking in terms of modifying the right of privilege to defend those whom they believed to be innocent, if I may use that term, but whom I thought were guilty.

The context of the argument was the debate, raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), on the financial scandals that pervaded the City of London some 12 or 18 months ago.

My view is that if hon. Members like me, believing they are right, have what they say transmitted, not in the way that a newspaper can print or even a radio can transmit, because that is a far more limited access by the public to what is happening here, but in a real way across the television screens in millions of homes in this country, that argument will develop in the Committee on Privileges. I would go so far as to predict that when that happens—[AN HON. MEMBER: "My hon. Friend is destroying his own case."] My hon. Friend says that I am destroying my own case. He may wish to intervene and say how, because I do not understand how I am doing so.

In the event that that is raised in the Committee of Privileges, it may well be that there will be that modification.

The right hon. Member for Chingford, referring to my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), said that in his view he, on that occasion, used privilege correctly to draw attention to an abuse that he felt—perhaps others did not on that occasion, as they did not in my case—had legitimately to be raised, yet could be raised only behind this shield or under this umbrella of privilege.

Mr. Tebbit: The hon. Gentleman is dealing fairly with a matter of very great contention and importance. He knows that I felt very deeply about a particular case of a man to whom I believe the hon. Gentleman did a very grave injustice, a case in which he used privilege wrongly.

My concern—and I believe that it is his concern—is that the advent of television cameras into the House might cause a modification — a loss of privilege. The hon. Gentleman is nodding agreement. That is a view that the two of us share. I share the hon. Gentleman's view that it is absolutely vital that we keep that privilege. Therefore, we must be exceptionally careful about the television cameras, how we use privilege and how we make sure that we say things not just that we believe but for which there is a great deal of evidence.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I think that the right hon. Gentleman fully understands the case that I make. I know the point that he wishes to make, because he made it himself when he referred to the whole question of what can be transmitted under qualified privilege arrangements.

We would provoke this argument in our Committee on Privileges and my view is that at the end of that argument that right would be qualified against the interests of many of my hon. Friends.

7.36 pm

Mr. Leon Brittan (Richmond, Yorks): I find the argument that has just been put forward by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) most extraordinary. He has said that he is willing to wound but afraid to strike. He does not mind, with limited evidence, casting slurs on people, as long as what he says is reported and perhaps recorded on radio, but he is afraid that if it were on television he might be called to order by the House, which would be ashamed of the enormity of what was given wider coverage. I do not find that a persuasive argument. Fortunately, it is not the main point of contention in this debate.

The main focus of the opposition to the televising of these proceedings — which I hasten to make clear I support — is that television would do harm to the reputation of the House and would have a deleterious effect on the way in which we conduct our affairs. I will come to those arguments, but it seems to me that, important as they are, that is a false basis on which to take this decision.

My starting point is quite different; it is the same as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Drake (Miss Fookes). We are here only because we have been elected by our constituents. We are accountable to them and to the country as a whole for what we do when we get here. They therefore have the right to know what we do here. If modern technology makes it possible for them to see us as well as hear us or read the words that we have spoken, we have no right to deny them that opportunity.

The arguments against televising the House are no different from those put forward 150 years ago and more against the verbatim reports of our proceedings. Yet today we honour the name of Hansard, who fought for the right to report, and we have named a respected parliamentary society after him. This is not a private club where we are entitled to let our hair down without the outside world knowing what we are up to. If letting the cameras in makes the people think less of us, we have no right to an inflated reputation based on ignorance of what really happens here.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the arguments that he is adducing are arguments in favour of the continuous broadcasting of the proceedings of the House by television, and not arguments in favour of the selection of snippets by television editors?

Mr. Brittan: Not necessarily. I shall come to that point immediately. I was going to say that I would oppose

televising the House — which I support, for the fundamental, basic, constitutional reasons that I have just given — only if I thought that it would give an inaccurate picture of our proceedings. Reading very carefully what the BBC and ITV have in mind, I do not think that it would. In any event, for the reasons given by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), the House must, and would, have complete control of the ground rules on which televising would take place.

I do not take the view expressed by some hon. Members that, once the film starts to roll, there is no way in which it can be stopped or reversed. This is a sovereign assembly. If what was done presented over a period of time a distorted view of our proceedings, we would have the absolute right and duty to change or to stop it.

We have considerable experience of radio, and, although all of us can pick on examples—indeed, whole programmes—with which we have not been happy, I do not think that the use of radio as a whole gives a false view of the House, or that it is used irresponsibly. What it does is give an incomplete picture of the House, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) pointed out. I think that a fairer view of Parliament would be given if what is heard on the radio were supplemented by television pictures.

The example of Prime Minister's Question Time has been cited again and again, and rightly so. On the radio it sounds like the tower of Babel. However, I recall on one occasion trying to get here in time for Prime Minister's Questions, being late and listening to it on the radio. It did sound like the tower of Babel. When I entered the Chamber the same question was still being dealt with, with the same degree of passion, but I could see what was going on, and I could see that the unrestrained yelling—which had seemed to be all that was happening when I was listening to the radio — was only a small part of the proceedings. The vast majority of the crowded House sat listening attentively and not participating. Television would give a truer picture of the House than radio does. It is also important, when fixing the rules, to make it absolutely clear that what is televised is the proceedings of Parliament, and not any demonstration. That, I think, can be done.

What, then, of the argument that television, if it intrudes, may present an accurate picture of Parliament, but will lower our reputation? I do not consider that that is a criterion to apply, as I said at the outset, but is it in any event true? In my view, one of two things will happen. If people receive a misleading view of Parliament because they do not understand what we are doing — if, for example, they do not understand that, although the Chamber may be empty, hon. Members may be working in other ways—I find it difficult to believe that, over a period, it will be beyond our wit and capability to explain the workings of the House. It is absurd to say that that task is so insuperable that, instead, the public should continue in blissful and benign ignorance of what is happening.

The other, more uncomfortable hypothesis is that people will see us as we are; that they will understand exactly what we are doing and will not like it. If that happens, again, over a period there will be a dialogue between the House and the electorate. Either we will persuade the public that, contrary to their initial belief, the way in which we conduct our affairs is, after all, reasonable, or they will force us to change it—and they will be right to do so. That seems to me exactly the sort of process that should take place in a democracy. We would be foolish to resist it, and obscurantist to evade it.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): As one of the waverers, let me say that a point which concerns me, and which has not really been debated tonight, is one that was raised as a point of order by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Cambpell-Savours) and ruled out by Mr. Speaker as being rather hypothetical.

If the cameras are brought in, what will happen to the privileges of right hon. Members, senior Members and ex-Prime Ministers, who are given preference over Back Benchers? What chance would we have? Fifty-eight hon. Members put their names down to speak in the debate on the National Health Service, and I was fortunate enough to be called. However, I believe that if Parliament were televised, four times that number would put their names forward, and Back Benchers would therefore be precluded from speaking.

Mr. Brittan: I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman's problem, but I do not believe that it would be affected by the televising of the House. Responsibility for the selection of speakers would remain with the Chair, where it has always been. If the House felt that the system of selection required giving the Chair guidance different from that which now applies, it would be open to the House to do so. As for what the television companies would do with the proceedings of the House, it would be no different from what radio does today, or from what the press has done for 150 years. I am not saying that the hon. Gentleman's point is not of legitimate concern; I am merely saying that the position would not be worsened by the televising of the House.

Finally, let me turn to the argument that has, perhaps, carried the most weight up to now with the waverers: the argument that the introduction of television would not only lower our reputations by showing us as we truly are to people who did not realise how we are, but would actually cause our behaviour to change, that it would debase and trivialise our debates, and encourage sensationalism and exhibitionism. At its most extreme, that argument took the form of a suggestion that hordes of demonstrators would descend on the House in a manner beyond control, caused and provoked by the presence of the television cameras.

I think that my right hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) put that argument in its proper historical perspective when he described the far worse demonstrations to which we were subjected in the 19th century, when Irish Members sought to disrupt the proceedings of the House without anticipating the advent of radio, let alone that of television.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Brittan: I shall not give way. I want to bring my remarks to a close.

Another point on which there has rightly been comment is that, if demonstrations prevailed more than before, it would be for the House to stop them by exerting its authority, changing its rules or doing whatever was necessary. As the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney rightly pointed out, it seems extraordinary that we should give ourselves, and accept, the power to alter, affect and shape all the affairs of the land, but should

[Mr. Brittan]

be afraid to admit television cameras because that would attract demonstrations that we would not have the power to control.

Mr. Tebbit: My right hon. and learned Friend has raised an interesting argument. Would he want television cameras in the law courts, in which he normally performs as an advocate?

Mr. Brittan: That is a different argument. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will appreciate the difference between an elected democracy, directly accountable to the people, and the law. If he does not appreciate that difference, I shall take him aside and explain it to him over a drink.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Brittan: I am afraid that I cannot give way any more. I must bring my remarks to an end.

I regard it as extremely pessimistic of the House and the public to believe that the advent of television would lead to such disruptive demonstrations or appalling misconduct on the part of hon. Members that we should not allow the cameras in. There is no evidence that television has had such an effect where it has been introduced. People say that the House of Lords is different, because it is not an elected Chamber, or because television there has been an experiment, but other countries have introduced it, and it has not been an experiment. The suggestion that that has led to the kind of abuse that has been described is entirely unfounded.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Brittan: No.

It is possible that during the first few months the exhibitionists among our number will see television as a glorious opportunity, but I do not think that the public reaction will be what they expect. Exhibitionism will not be seen to pay and will recede from our proceedings.

Surely a democratic and accountable assembly can dare to trust the people. But, as I said at the outset, I do not rest my case on what the effects of television will or will not be. I do not even rest it on the important point that has been made by several right hon. and hon. Members —that we, through not having television, have allowed the centre of the national stage to escape elsewhere—to the television studios, to other events and other institutions.

I rest my case rather on the fundamental principle with which I began, that those who send us here have the right to see what we are doing. We have no right to seek to enjoy a higher reputation than we would have if those who elected us knew the reality. We should have no wish to enjoy a false reputation based on ignorance of the reality. If we have enough respect for the electorate to accept their franchise, we should not be afraid that, if they see what we are doing, we shall be led to debase our own proceedings.

7.50 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I hope that the debate will not be diverted into minor matters. As some hon. Members may know, there is a periscope in the Gallery and anyone can watch the House at any time. In the 30 years that I have been here I have often taken children to see it. I do not know whether a camera could be attached to that, but the technical obstacles to televising the House do not exist. Nor is the argument about violence necessarily so. A tragic death at a Conservative party conference has not stopped them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) talked about Privy Councillors. Why does the House not pass a resolution on a Friday stopping the precedence of Privy Councillors? My hon. Friend sits here as though they are the result of some law of God. It is only because the House lets Mr. Speaker get away with the practice, which is wholly unjustified—I say this as a Privy Councillor — that some hon. Members have precedence over others. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend has been sitting here grumbling about it. More people are not Privy Councillors than are, and that right should not exist.

I was also amazed at my hon. Friend's argument on privilege. He said that he had important privileges but that if he used them, and that was shown on television, they would be taken away. They would be taken away because my hon. Friend has not got the guts to stand up for them in the way that American Congressmen have. In the Irangate hearings, Colonel Oliver North said things which were shown on American television.

What is wrong with the House is that it has given up fighting for its rights. This debate is not about television at all; it is about the role of Parliament in a modern society. The right hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) and the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) put their fingers on the real question.

Walter Bagehot, in his famous book on the English constitution, gave us a completely new perception of the British constitution—which at that time people thought was run by the King or Queen — by dividing the constitution into the dignified and the efficient. The Crown he defined as the dignified; the Executive as the efficient. The House of Commons is now part of the dignified part of the constitution. It is not at the heart of anything. That is in part—I hope to show it—because it has capitulated and abandoned the right to its privileges. It has failed to raise matters that it should have done.

When I go past the Tower of London I often wonder for how many centuries the Beefeaters thought that they were part of the armed services before they realised that they were a tourist attraction. Let me consider what happened in this House in my lifetime alone. I leave aside the end of empire, because when I was born in 1925 one quarter of the earth's surface was governed from this Chamber and I am glad to see the empire go. That is where I would disagree with the right hon. Member for Pavilion.

I was not glad to see American forces based here in breach of the 1688 rule against standing armies. I was not in favour of the transfer of legislative power to Brussels. I was not in favour of the International Monetary Fund dictating the economic policies of successive Governments. I am not in favour, and never have been, of the new technology of television replacing the House, as it manifestly has done, as the central forum for national debate.

We are discussing whether the House is content—this has come out in some of the serious speeches; I leave aside the others that have been made—to be the Beefeater guard of parliamentary democracy? Are we really so poorly placed in our own estimation that we queue up at the Admission Order Office to try to get tickets for the

Gallery, and then say, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) said in a deeply cynical speech —if I believed one tenth of what he said, I would repeal the Representation of the People Act—that he has no confidence in the public, in the media or in the people's judgment. My hon. Friend thinks that all one has to do is to write a popular article in a Sunday newspaper and that people need not be influenced by us.

We have no merits other than that we have been elected here. This is the only job in Britain for which no other qualification is required. That is why it is an interesting Parliament. There is no diagnostic testing—to use the Labour party's phrase on the national curriculum.

Let us compare us with the media. I began life as a BBC producer. Producers have their own agenda. They ring up only those hon. Members who they think will boost their ratings. They are not producers in the way that Mr. Speaker is a producer of an order of speakers. They are casting directors. They look round at the Tory party for two wets, two dries, a Minister who was sacked and another who resigned. They look at the Labour party for the hard Left, the soft Left, the moderates, the old Left, the trade union group. The producers sit there and plan their programme. If there is trouble in the Labour party, they say, "What about Mr. Benn?" I have refused about a dozen invitations over the past week because I know what they are up to.

When we speak here, we speak with the authority of our electorate, chosen to speak by a Speaker, whom we have chosen. Mr. Speaker does not label us according to the BBC's political classification. He says, "The Member for Chesterfield", or "Mr. Benn" or "Mr. Amery." In this House we have a duty to articulate the anxieties of the people, and we have a duty to see that when we articulate them they are entitled to hear what we say.

Of course, we should not hand the job over to the BBC or ITN. The *Official Report* should take over the handling of television here. It should keep the archives so that some of the great speeches that may never be shown will still be there, just as the sound records are there. It is a tragedy that none of the speeches made here by Winston Churchill, who left the House long after the technology of broadcasting was established, were recorded. We should start a video archive now under the control of Mr. Speaker, under the direction of the Editor of *Hansard*, and then let the BBC broadcast the proceedings on the basis of proper balance.

The House should not have ceded its central role as an elected forum to an unelected forum created by producers and media people. It should not have done it. But it is not too late to recover it. I have not been here as long as some hon. Members, but I have been here nearly as long, and some great debates and turning points in history have come out of this place. The one difference between this place and "Question Time" or "This Week, Next Week" or "Last Week", or whatever they call the various programmes, is that decisions flow from this place.

We had the Marconi debate, the famous debate, which my mother now aged 91 heard, when Rosslyn Mitchell defeated the New Prayer Book in 1928. When I first visited here 51 years ago, Churchill was sitting where the right hon. Member for Pavilion is sitting. He was a Back Bencher, with his spectacles on the end of his nose, and he spoke on the Naval Estimates. I was 11 years old and I have never forgotten that.

Then there was the Norway debate. I heard Bevan's resignation speech, the debates on Suez and the Falklands and, although it was not popular politically with the Conservative party, the articulation of the anger and anxieties of miners, printers and nurses must be spoken of here. We have had some conflicts with Mr. Speaker, and rightly so, about whether the Moonies should take preference over the nation's medical services. If Parliament is to be a centre, it must allow people to bring their anger here. If there is an angry scene, people speak as though Parliament has failed. It is the day when they do not bother coming here, but take the bus to Brussels or picket Broadcasting house, that I will be frightened.

Mr. Gorst: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Benn: I shall not give way; I am coming to the end of my argument.

The reputation of the House of Commons depends on what we do, whether we are faithful to the electors, whether we present our arguments with honour and integrity and whether we stick to our views, even when they are unpopular.

Unpopularity is a strange phenomenon. Two years after I saw Churchill sitting on the Conservative Back Benches in 1937, he was First Lord of the Admiralty and a year after that he was Prime Minister. We must stick to our guns and say what we believe here, even though the media may marginalise a point of view at a certain time.

Given the drift of argument that we have heard, I assume that the House will reject the motion. It will do so for the strangest reason—a jealousy of the media. But it is in our power to make the microphones—a powerful medium is not only people or producers, but microphones and transmitters — and the instruments of modern technology available to the elected representatives of the British people. That is the question, and if we dodge it, let it go and wake up in the morning and say, "We wish that television had never been invented," the people who will suffer initially will be ourselves.

That will not matter as much as the deepening discontent of those who put us here that we should have abandoned a responsibility to be the forum to articulate their feelings, to reach decisions and to insist that what we say is at least available to those who sent us here so that they can make up their minds about whether to renew their mandate when the next election comes.

8.1 pm

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): To see or not to see, that is the question. My reply to that question can now be based on first-hand experience, although I say to the Father of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), that that is very limited experience.

My reply to the question before I entered the House was, like many others, based on fiction. I was a member of the general public and, like them, much of my comprehension of the House was based on rowdy radio snippets. Hence, when I became an elected Member, the first thing that I wanted to do was to give my constituents the opportunity, via television, to see at first hand and to have a true insight into the working of Parliament. I wanted them to be able to see, locally, their representative working on their behalf nationally. That seemed the most natural thing in the world to want to do. We are living in the 20th century; therefore, we must progress.

[Mrs. Maureen Hicks]

Having said that, hon. Members might think that this is a happy day for me. I am afraid that it is not. I wanted to bring people closer to their elected representatives. I wanted to get away from the myth that this is the best club in London. I regret that I have found that it is quite the reverse.

This is a sad day for me because, having assessed the reality of the matter, I feel duty-bound to deprive my constituents of that facility. After only eight months, I admit to doing a complete U-turn.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: The hon. Lady will please the Prime Minister.

Mrs. Hicks: No; it has nothing to do with the Prime Minister.

In opposing the televising of Parliament, I believe that I am acting in the best interests of the country. I want the Chamber to concentrate 100 per cent. on serious affairs of state. I do not want it to be sidetracked by publicity-seeking ventures inspired by the intrusion of cameras.

We have heard some excellent speeches. Unlike some hon. Members, I am not worried about the viewers, because I trust them to make their own judgment. I am not worried about the television companies, which have acted fairly and responsibly in the Upper House in what they have portrayed. I am not worried about the technical problems, because they can be overcome. I am worried about hon. Members, because the nature of the job tends to attract exhibitionists.

We must agree that hon. Members like the sound of their own voices. Earlier, the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) said that our constituents want to see us on television and to read about us in the newspapers, because that is the way in which they judge us. I believe that there is a danger of us becoming our own worst enemies. The deteriorating behaviour exhibited by a minority in the House in the past few months will serve to deprive the majority. Unless and until that small but vociferous minority is tamed, our constituents will be deprived of what should be a democratic right.

Mr. Cormack: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Hicks: I shall not give way; time is short.

There is a fear that lengthier speeches will be made by hon. Members who want to hog the limelight—as I am now—and that there will be an escalation in publicity-seeking and unparliamentary behaviour. The orchestrated stunts that we have seen over the past few months have undoubtedly increased the number of hon. Members who will take the sensible decision to oppose the motion.

It is interesting that many Conservative Members have been referred to as "old Tory buffers." However, it is the younger Conservative Members who have entered the House and seen matters for themselves who do not like what they have seen.

At the risk of being accused of being party political, my U-turn was confirmed by one incident. I was not an hon. Member many years ago so I did not witness the past antics that we have heard about in the debate. The incident to which I am referring was when we saw the pantomime effect of hon. Members coming into the Chamber clad in multi-coloured T-shirts in support of the African National Congress.

Whatever the T-shirts, or whatever the minority interest group involved, the effect on me would have been the same. It confirmed my suspicions that hon. Members cannot resist the temptation to perform. Such a gimmick will impress the Strangers Gallery, but imagine the effect on a wider audience. Do hon. Members who support the introduction of television believe that that would enhance the reputation of the House?

I squirm with embarrassment on such occasions at what visitors in the Strangers' Gallery must be thinking, and I pray that they neither judge us all nor assess the endless hours of work that we perform out of sight of the public glare on what they see during their brief visit to the House.

Hon. Members who have given the example of the House of Lords are naive. They say that it is a worthy advertisement for the effects of televising Parliament. That ignores the difference in the nature of the House of Lords — the relative peace and calm and the fact that Members in the other place are not subject to the ballot box. They do not have to sell themselves.

This is our workplace. If we turn the House into a peep-show, we are ruined. This is a serious Chamber for parliamentary debate. We cannot afford to waste time being unbusinesslike and hindering the process of legislation.

I do not want to be party to any decision that would encourage individuals, any more than they already are encouraged, to play to the audience. We are elected politicians, not showmen. If we want to be showmen, we should go and work in a theatre in the west end. If politicians want to stoop to some of the other things that we have seen lately in a bid for publicity—only a few hon. Members are lowering the standards of the House —if they wish to indulge in publicity stunts outside the House, that is their affair, but they should not be encouraged to do it inside the House, using the rest of us as a backcloth.

I have visions of general elections being started years in advance. There would be spectacles leading up to every single local election and by-election. It would be party political matters every day of the week. The general public are sick and tired of three weeks of a general election, so politics would be even more of a turn-off than it is now. We want people to want to know about politics that affects their lives; we do not want to put them off even more.

How much activity would be genuinely generated in the Chamber in future in the interests of the electorate who pay to put us here? How much of it would be in the interests of publicity-seeking Members in their bid to be seen or heard?

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Hicks: No.

I fear that those who suggest that television would have a reverse effect are even more naive. They say that it would silence such individuals, who would be shown in their true colours and would never be voted in again. We have only to look at how many chat-show appearances and newspaper articles have been produced as a result of unruly behaviour to realise how misguided such an approach is.

Whatever our views may be on subjects that are raised in the House, we have the overriding duty to our electors to set an example. Hon. Members are among the first to

lecture parents, teachers and community leaders about the need to set an example to the young. It is hypocritical for us to do otherwise. If a pupil who had been disciplined in the morning switched on the television to watch Prime Minister's Question Time in the afternoon and saw the wildcat behaviour and heard the abuse hurled at the Prime Minister, what lasting impression would that leave on that young person?

Translating that to a worldwide screen and satellite transmission, do we really want that image of the House of Commons that we love and respect to be projected across the world? I recall that when the subject was debated years ago, concern was expressed that the introduction of television cameras might tempt Lady Members to wear pretty hats. In 1988, that is the least of our worries.

I am proud to have been elected to the House, and so are the majority of hon. Members, but I am not always proud of the House. I urge hon. Members on both sides of the House who are genuinely committed to the business of the House, to which we have been elected, to join me in voting against what is considered by those who are misguided as a progressive move, but which in my opinion would be a totally regressive move that we should live to regret.

8.13 pm

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): I am delighted to follow a young Member of the House who has learnt very quickly the inadvisability of admitting the dreadful television cameras to this place. I shall be voting with the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks), perhaps for the first and last time in my long career, but tonight we shall make pleasant company together a little later.

One of the first considerations to arise on the televising of the proceedings of the House has to be the conduct of hon. Members. There is a fallacious belief abroad that the behaviour of hon. Members has somehow declined over the past few years. That is nonsense. For generations hon. Members have felt strongly about various issues in the House and have noisily pursued their passionate exchanges. The right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) mentioned the Irish question last century. Nothing could have been noisier and more lively. Haranguing and hectoring and hullabaloo have long been the means of enlivening debate. Most of us have done it. Never more have those conditions prevailed than during the Victorian era to which the Prime Minister has such a misinformed commitment.

But when cameras are introduced here, if they are introduced, hon. Members will have much stronger incentives to conduct themselves in a, shall I say, noticeable way. Constituents will be watching. "Will oor Wullie get on the telly the nicht and if he doesna, why not?" That will be the reaction of my constituents. I am speaking as a Scot, and my constituents have slightly different accents, but they know that I speak here often. Hon. Members will know, or very soon will learn, that the "special" performance in debate, in questions or points of order will be captured on camera, and those who never appear—and there will be a lot of them—are obviously not doing their job. The pressures to perform for the camera lens will be enormous. Lack of appearance here will mean loss of votes at the election. Do not let us fool ourselves—that is how our constituents will react.

It is all very well for the interesting and arresting and knowledgeable extroverts such as myself. I do not think that we will be overlooked or that our votes will drop, but what about all the others——

Mr. Tony Banks: Come on, Blackadder.

Mr. Faulds: My hon. Friend quotes not Shakespeare, but some local rubbish.

Mr. Banks: "Blackadder, you're my hero".

Mr. Faulds: That is the cultural standard of that little whippet.

What about all those earnest, worthy Members—most of them—who do not excel with the witty phrase or the crushing riposte? There are many in the House who look less than distinguished. My hon. Friends hope to appear in front of the camera. They had better spruce themselves up a bit. I am sometimes surprised by some of those eager to introduce television. Do they really think that their mediocre, dull contributions and their lacklustre performances and dreary personalities will become national entertainment?

There are some hon. Members—and we all know them—who are desperate for publicity, for a mention in the media. One of my hon. Friends, not a thousand miles away, got a little mention in *The Times* for reporting his wife for breach of privilege. Why? Because she tried to force him, by threatening to divorce him, to vote against the Bill of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton). The hon. Member concerned—I shall not embarrass him by recognising him—[HON. MEMBERS: "Name him".] I am too charitable and kind; he is such a ludicrous personality. He says in the report:

> "'I am perfectly serious,' he insists."

He will report his wife for breach of privilege. Why? Because he gets two little inches in *The Times*. Hon. Members as desperate for publicity as that misjudge the outcome of this, if they think that they will become the stars.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: After a long correspondence about my rude remarks about my hon. Friend in the *Yorkshire Post*, I apologise. How can I grovel to stop this insanity?

Mr. Faulds: I am glad that my hon. Friend identified himself. I was pressed by others to do it for him, and I am most grateful for his generosity.

Mr. Banks: It might be cheaper than divorce.

Mr. Faulds: That is his problem, not mine.

When the camera settles on a speaker, does the House really believe that some of our colleagues will not stealthily steal along the Bench to appear in the lens?

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Not behind my hon. Friend.

Mr. Faulds: I shall be speaking fairly often, and I certainly shall not allow that mug to sit behind me. The House may come to resemble—and I must warn the House of this—a perpetual game of musical chairs as hon. Members try to get on camera.

What of the security implications? We have had tear gas in the Chamber—some of us were here. We have had red paint and we have had what I must call horse manure thrown in here——

Mr. Cormack: And we have had you for 20 years.

Mr. Faulds: I have been an unmitigated benefit to this dreary place.

[Mr. Faulds]

I am simply explaining the dangers that will certainly arise in the future were we to be foolish enough to allow the intervention of the camera lens. Could there exist a greater temptation to the demonstrator or even to the normal nutter—we get some of those up there—than to intervene—*[Interruption.]* We get some of those down here too, but I had better not enlarge on that.

Mr. Cormack: It takes one to know one.

Mr. Faulds: I will ignore that. I did not hear it—I am deaf.

To go back to my argument, could there be a greater temptation to those people who want to make an external point on matters extraneous to the House than to intervene in the deliberations of the House by throwing something, or by hanging banners or even, like the lither lesbians, dropping in for a quick love-in in the Lords? If we think that that will not happen here, we shall be horribly shocked. For people who want to make a point, there will not be a better way of catching the following morning's papers or the late night radio and television treatment than to create a disturbance in the House.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): If I may interrupt my hon. Friend's well-informed plea, on behalf of anonymous mediocrity I should like to ask him whether it is a satisfactory philosophy to put forward that what is clearly progress in democratic terms, in letting people see what is going on among the people who represent them in free and open debate, should be militated against by the possibility that we might be held to ransom by the prospect of outrages which, as my hon. Friend has shown by naming such events, have taken place even when there have not been any cameras here? Is that a satisfactory or logical line of argument?

Mr. Faulds: There is a simple riposte to that. There is a greatly increased danger that such things will happen because television coverage will of itself increase that danger. I shall come to the gist of my hon. Friend's intervention in a moment. It is a point that I shall deal with.

I was talking about interventions and external appearances in the Chamber. We are assured that the cameras would avoid observing such sights and that they will stay locked on a bit of green leather and will not move. It would be somewhat difficult to ignore what would then ensue after such an intervention: attendants scurrying about, the altercations that could be heard all over the House, the bodily removals and the suspension of the Sitting. Will the viewers not think that something odd has happened, even if they have not seen the intervention? Of course they will know that there has been some disturbance. There is no way in which we could prevent its publication.

Even were the cameras to be looking skyward, those demonstrators—an extreme form of lobbyism—would get the publicity that they seek in the press coverage and in the radio treatment. There is no way in which we could stop that.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*—

Mr. Faulds: I yield with pleasure to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend is as kind as ever. Would it not be possible, if we had television cameras here, to exclude the Strangers Gallery? If there were access by television, there would not be any need for people to go in the Strangers Gallery. Surely that would answer my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Faulds: The hon. Gentleman has made an extremely silly point. To ask such a question of me, with my love of live audiences—the silly boy.

We all know how irresponsibly the radio boys treated our permission to let their microphones in. Their treatment and coverage of our proceedings did nothing but harm to the public perception of how the House functions and of how hon. Members conduct themselves. They wanted to present — they chose to present — passages of exchange which were damaging to Members and to the House — sometimes entertaining, or rowdy and full of heated exchanges. There was no serious attempt to present the hours of detailed and responsible debate.

The earlier excellence of the reports carried by "Today in Parliament" and "Yesterday in Parliament" was immediately subverted by the selection of recordings and the colourful and imaginative commentary, particularly of those who ran the successor to "Yesterday in Parliament" —a disgraceful change. They failed the House and, as supposedly responsible journalists, they failed themselves.

The treatment of the televising of the Lords—it has been quoted how well and responsibly that has been done —was carefully and subtly handled to con us here in the Commons into believing that the presentation of our proceedings would be as responsibly done. Are we that innocent? Do not let us believe a word of it. The television boys will not want serious handling, because the average viewer will not be all that interested. Let us face it, he will switch over or off, and nothing more disturbs the television authorities than falling viewing figures and falling ratings.

Those television interveners will want the "entertainment" aspects of what happens—the verbal punch-ups, the ruderies, the throwing of papers; I warn you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and my colleagues that that will become a visual way of making a point. If my colleagues do not think that that will happen, I will take a bet that it will, if the cameras come in.

If there were to be a continuous television broadcast, which viewers could switch on or turn off, I might consider its introduction, but that is not what we would get. There would be the intervention of the media men. We would have a selection of the livelier moments of our proceedings chosen by them.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who is not now in his place, who made a brilliant speech, fairly irrelevant to what we are discussing tonight, talked about letting the people in and letting them see what we are doing — by the kind grace of our television hosts. They will be the ones who choose the pictures and who choose the excerpts. We are not going to do it. The pictures that they would choose would be for entertainment: any incident or any performance which would raise the ratings—that is what their business is about. It would not be the House at work; it would be the House at play. That is what the people would get.

As public service broadcasting is cut back—

Mr. Salmond: Is there anything in the motion that we are debating which either precludes a continuous channel or precludes the House being in charge of the broadcasting system?

Mr. Faulds: Neither does anything in it promise such measures. I am not prepared to take the risk of that sort of experiment.

As public service broadcasting is cut and the commercial stations move in through more channels and satellite, the treatment would inevitably deteriorate and responsibility would decline because ratings would be the real determinant of what went out.

Why are we so silly as not to realise that? I have made the point that this is talked of as an experiment, but do not let us fool ourselves. As the Leader of the House warned, if it comes in, it will not go out. We shall be loaded with it for good. The argument will be, "Consider the cost of installation — the equipment, the staff, the facilities." Once it comes in, we will not vote for it to go out, because if we did so in those circumstances, the perception would be that we had been frightened off by the appalling picture that we had presented of ourselves to the public. We would not have the courage to do that. That is why we cannot do it.

Let us have the sense to keep our proceedings unencumbered by publicity seekers — *[Interruption.]* Some of us get publicity we merit, and we do not need the television cameras to get it for us.

Let us keep our proceedings unencumbered by those publicity seekers who want to get the cameras in in the hope that they will be noticed—an unlikely development — by efforts to catch the camera or, much more dangerous, by protesters from the Gallery. Let us concentrate on what we want to debate and on the traditional ways of doing it. Let us keep the trivialising television cameras out of this place. While we are about it, we might as well remove these baubles — these microphones—from the House which have done much damage to the public perception of what happens in this place.

I shall be voting, as hon. Members may have gathered, against the motion.

8.30 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I cannot think why the House of Commons is worried about being entertaining. We have just witnessed the most excellent scene from HMS Pinafore. A little earlier, we saw some of the werewolves on both Front Benches putting the frighteners on the children.

I seek the House's attention for two points. The first is that, as a matter of record, I want to refresh the memories of one or two hon. Members who came up to Manchester on a Sunday in December to record a programme for "World in Action". We knew perfectly well that the programme makers were going to film for more than two hours, and that the film would be cut down to fewer than 30 minutes. That was the understanding on which we went there, so for hon. Members to pretend otherwise is unfair——

Mr. Holt: For the record, I must tell my hon. Friend that that is not an accurate statement. We were told that they would make a decision on whether it would be a one-hour programme or a half-hour programme after it was recorded, and it was on that basis that I took part. I understood that there was to be a "World In Action" special that would last one hour. I ask my hon. Friend not to mislead the House.

Miss Nicholson: I am not misleading the House. I was told immediately after being invited that the programme would last for just under the normal half hour. I understand that other colleagues were told that, too.

The point I want to make has already been touched on briefly, and it is a serious one. At the beginning of the debate, several hon. Members built their case on the untrue assumption that our deliberations here are made available to everyone, and that everyone has free access to them through the radio and the newspapers. Of course that is not true. As my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) pointed out, some people cannot hear the radio. The number of those who cannot is far larger than the number that has been mentioned.

Eight to 10 million in the United Kingdom—1 in 5 of all our citizens—suffer from significantly impaired hearing. I must tell hon. Members who are older than me that three quarters of those who reach the age of 70 will be quite deaf by the time we get there. That is to say, there will be 5 million of us, because we have a rapidly aging population. In among those 8 million to 10 million people are 50,000 — they were mentioned earlier — who can communicate only by sign language, because they are profoundly deaf—meaning 100 per cent. or nearly 100 per cent. deaf — 2 million or 3 million people wear hearing aids. Many more would wear them if they did not feel inhibited by those excellent devices.

Television is the answer that will enable these people to become involved in the wider debate and to participate in our proceedings. They have no hope of hearing the radio. The appalling cacophony which has been described is useless to them, just as many normal programmes are.

Another group that has not been mentioned is the growing army of adult illiterates—people who are more than 16 years old and cannot read or write. There are now 5 million of them. Very few people read the quality press —or what is called the quality press—which describes our activities reasonably fairly every morning of the week. The tabloid headlines bear no relation to anything that happens here, but the 5 million people who cannot read have no hope even of grasping the headline in the *Daily Mirror*, which, in any case, will bear no relation to anything that any hon. Member has said.

Young adult illiterates, who form the majority of adult illiterates, are all television literate. Like most of the population, they gain almost all their news and views from the television. We are all so busy here—in Committee Rooms, and because the Whips keep us running up and down, and because our constituents' letters keep piling up —that we do not realise how most of the world uses television as its main method of communication. We are vastly underpowering our own impact in the debate in the United Kingdom and overseas if we cut ourselves off from the lifeblood of the nation's communication system.

As a completely new Member, I may say that I do not find this House dull. I cannot think why hon. Members keep calling themselves boring: they are all interesting— their speeches are perceptive, funny and fascinating— but what they seem to this House is not the point. Those speeches affect people's lives, because we make the decisions within whose framework everyone else operates in this country.

8.35 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): If there was ever a case for televising Parliament, it has been made by

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

today's debate. Although it has improved since the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) sat down at about 6 pm, it has not been a very good debate. If it had been on television, it would have been sharper and less prone to the manipulative fears of insiders posing as a little club against the world. It would have been less prone to manipulating the fear of television, as if it were a monster from outer space that was rotting the brains of our constituents — but not of ourselves. The debate would have been less prone to using arguments about the incredible damage that Granada Television seems to have inflicted on some fragile egos. Its programme was better done than today's debate.

Had the debate been televised, we should have had less of the sort of irrelevance given us by the right hon. Member for Chingford, who commented on the bad behaviour of many hon. Members — most of them, incidentally, rivals for the Tory leadership. The incidents to which he referred cannot be blamed on television—it was not there. I was not sure whether the right hon. Gentleman meant that the Press Gallery should be excluded so that such behaviour should not be reported to the world, or whether that if there were television hon. Members would behave in a deranged fashion. Perhaps all that springs from his experience of television, but it does not spring from mine.

I have heard no intellectual argument against television tonight. That statement was confirmed at some length, but with considerably more volume, by my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds). We have lost sight of the fundamental problem that we need to face. This is not a party political matter, and it is wrong to argue it in those terms. It concerns the essence of our job in Parliament. That job is no longer the sort of occupation that Bagehot would have described in the 1860s, when we all persuaded each other and, at the end of an articulate persuasive debate, we arrived at a consensus. Those days have gone. On the few occasions when that still happens, it will make good television, but for the most part we now have a system of government by party. We are elected as members of parties; we are here to put our case, to debate the decisions of Government and to argue the case for or against them. How futile it is if that debate does not reach the people on the medium on which they now rely for their views, news, opinions and information about what is going on in the world.

How much stronger Parliament could be if we had direct communication with the people, and if the people listened to us, instead of our being here in a closed chamber talking to ourselves in our self-important fashion. How much better it would be if we reached out to the people and heard an echo from them; how much more influential we would be. How much more the Government would listen to us. The Government do not listen to the House of Commons; they listen to opinion outside. If we communicate with that opinion, we are more effective and powerful.

In every poll that I have seen, public opinion has wanted television in the House. People want to know what is going on here. They may be gluttons for punishment, as some hon. Members have said; but MORI said that 57 per cent. wanted it and only 26 per cent. were against. A poll today for "The Time . . . The Place . . ." said that 62 per cent. were in favour of television. A poll for the *Sunday Express* said that almost two thirds of people were in favour of television. We are those people's representatives, discussing their issues, and we should be talking to them on the medium on which they rely for their views and information.

Every other major Parliament has television in some form. What makes us so unique that we must cosset ourselves away from the world in this closed, introspective fashion? Why are we afraid of reaching out and speaking to the people? Do we want to hide here in a little corner to which no one pays attention? That is ridiculous. If television has had no harmful consequences in other Parliaments — they have all kept it — why are we so timorous about a decision that should have been taken years ago?

The opponents of the motion have manipulated every degree of fear — they have all been conscripted — but those fears are contradictory. We are told that the proceedings of the House will be boring, but, on the other hand, that they will be hyped up as the result of television. We are told that people will watch to see what their Members are doing, but that nobody will be watching and that nobody will be interested. We are told that television will encourage exhibitionists, but that it will make dull television.

We are told that we cannot show all the proceedings and therefore we should not show any of them. We are told that the proceedings will be too awful for the public to see, yet we are told that they are too arcane for the public to understand. We are told that people are too stupid to appreciate what is going on—that is the ultimate insult to our constituents — yet we are told they will be too interested in what is going on for hon. Members to enjoy a quiet life in the obscurity of this club.

The reality is the opposite. There will be no substantial changes. We shall have wall-mounted cameras that are remote-controlled — people will not be tripping over cables—there will be no bright lighting and we shall not be in fear of frying. What comes over well in the Chamber as serious discussion of serious issues will also come over well on television.

There will be several levels of coverage. We shall have full-time coverage, start to finish, or "gavel to gavel", as the Americans say, of debates on major issues. That is all to the good. There will be no editing and there will be full coverage. There will be extracts on the news instead of the present pictures or cartoons together with some atrocious sound from the microphones. An official statement made to the House will be shown rather than a statement made to a press conference or to a television whippersnapper like Sir Robin Day. The public will see that statement being made to the House and being responded to by the House.

We shall be presented with an edited version of "Today in Parliament." What is wrong with that? Why do we not trust television? If we do not trust television, we are placing ourselves at the mercy of the most biased medium, the newspapers. Why should we rely on them and exclude the television medium that is far more impartial than the newspapers?

Mr. Ashton: My hon. Friend asks why we should not trust television. Has he forgotten the night, 15 years ago, when he was an interviewer on "Newsnight"? We did an interview on the green and he took the mickey out of all of us in the most appalling way. The whole thing was sent up. My hon. Friend remembers that night well. He made

us a figure of fun — so much so that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) made a strong complaint to the BBC.

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is quite right and I remember that night with considerable embarrassment. However, that would not have happened if we had had television in the Chamber. We would not have television staging alternative debates to distract attention from what we are doing here. The emphasis would be on reality in the Chamber. We can trust television, because it is the least biased medium.

If we have edited versions, there will be choice. People have complained about "Today in Parliament" — perhaps in some cases rightly so — but it is the only condensation that is available. When we get television, there will be condensed programmes on ITV and on BBC. We shall have choice and there will be competition between them to do a better job. I believe that that is a good way of approaching the matter.

I am prepared to trust journalist integrity, but those who are not should remember that television coverage will be supervised on a continuous basis by a Select Committee to which complaints could be made. Fear of television, fear of change, fear of ourselves—it is a heady brew.

The arguments that have been put forward against television today are mainly irrelevant. One such argument is bad behaviour. There is no better control of bad behaviour than constituents seeing their Member of Parliament on television. They will deal with that Member, and such behaviour will stop. We in the House know what attitude to take to exhibitionists. Let us give our constituents and the nation the ability to adopt a similar attitude to the kind of person who behaves badly. Why should the people be unable to make such a judgment?

Concern has been expressed about what might happen in the Strangers Gallery. If we had a deluge of pantomime fairies leaping on wires from the Gallery or a hail of bodies coming down, they would not be shown. Those are the rules. It is no use holding that argument against television.

The only intellectually honest way to approach the motion is not to manipulate fears, not to exercise our paranoia about television, our fear of the outside world or our desire to remain a nice little cosy club, but to have the experiment. We can then decide, on the basis of what we see — on the basis of the coverage and the editing — whether we like it or not. The motion asks only for a Select Committee to consider an experiment and to come back to report to the House. The House will then have to vote again and that will be followed by an experiment.

At the end of that period, if we are honest, we should decide on the basis of that experience. I promise my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) that if the televising of the House turns out to be as bad as he says it will be—it will not—I will vote with him against it.

Mr. Faulds: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Mitchell: No; I am coming to my conclusion.

We are now taking a decision that we will not have the chance to consider again. If we vote against the motion, we will have to wait another four years to discuss the matter. It is a crucial decision and television is a crucial means by which this House can reach out to the people. Hon. Members can decide how they will come over on television and make their judgment on that basis. Obviously the Prime Minister has made her decision—I think wrongly — and the right hon. Member for Chingford has made his. Indeed, on the basis of his speech tonight, his decision is probably right — he would not come over very well on television—and his performance tonight was not one of his most endearing.

Yet it is the House that will gain as a result of television. It is a question of our jobs and the future of this place. Is this House of Commons to become steadily a backwater, a closed debating society with perhaps 100 people, none of them from Grimsby because it is too far away, in the Strangers Gallery watching what is going on? On the other hand, is the Chamber to reach out to the community? Will it remain a world where fat, complacent insiders talk to each other in their own code and language about their own business and exclude the world, or will it be relevant and reach out to the world? Will the Chamber become strong because it has the backing and interest of the people because it is associated with them? That is the decision that we must take.

My conclusion is simple: we should look to the people.

8.46 pm

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): At one stage the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and I both worked in the television and radio media. I am afraid that I differ from him in my views. This debate, which has been going on for five hours, would not make good television in the eyes of the producers who were once our employers.

The basic factor that has been missed in the debate is whether the proceedings of the House will truly be enhanced by the presence of television cameras. I do not believe that this debate would make good television because, as touched upon by various hon. Members, it is the frothy, contentious and controversial bits that the producer would ideally wish to see on television. I suspect that the most controversial parts of the speech of the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) appear. No doubt the revelations made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford would also appear, and probably some of the higher-flown parts of the speech by the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds). If television is to be introduced, I fear that what we really need — a full broadcast, a full dedicated channel — would be of little interest to the television medium.

This Chamber is about conflicting arguments. Certainly all hon. Members present will have enjoyed today's debate, even after another hour and a quarter, but it is not the sort of thing that makes a good broadcast in the eyes of the media.

I ask the House why, given the power of the broadcasting authorities to transmit the debate and all our proceedings on radio, the very important debate which has been talked about at great length on the radio and television and in the press is not being broadcast — [HON. MEMBERS: "It is."] I find it interesting that in the various discussions that I have heard over the past couple of days, I have not heard any trailer for it. Last week, when the very important statement about the Inner London education authority and its future was made, that was not broadcast live to the people of London.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The debate is being broadcast, but it is interesting that the broadcasters have chosen this debate, not the important debates that we have had over the past six months. They are concerned only with discussing issues that concern them.

Mr. Tracey: My hon. Friend is correct. My experience over the years when I worked for the BBC, and since, is that editors look for dramatisation. Much has been written in the press by eminent broadcasters and journalists about the dramatic elements of what goes on in the Chamber. I am sure that the very long and detailed debates — I suspect that editors will very often think they are tedious debates because they are so detailed — would not be broadcast. As hon. Members have pointed out, that is the essential work of the Chamber and of the Standing and Select Committees. That part of the work of the House should be put across to the public if the editors were serious about broadcasting the work of the House to the nation.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): The hon. Gentleman would be able to take up these and other such reservations in the Select Committee established to consider our procedures. It is entirely within the ambit of the House to decide how the experiment will be run. It need not be given away to the television channels. A body of the House could decide on the editorial content. Would he not be reassured by a place on the Select Committee, where he could raise those reservations?

Mr. Tracey: I would be reassured if the hon. Gentleman could tell me that what would emerge would be a serious dedicated channel on the work of the House. At the moment the cost of a terrestrial channel and the availability of a spectrum for a dedicated television channel is not possible. We are talking about the present, not what might be possible in five years. I have put down an amendment to the motion, which accepts that in due course a dedicated channel showing the whole work of the House would be the only acceptable form of television, and I stand by that view. Perhaps in five or six years it will be a financial and technical possibility.

The desire of the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conway (Dr. Thomas) for a technological *Hansard* of the air may be deliverable, but I do not believe that we are at that point now. Hon. Members may know more about the costings of television, but I believe that it works out at about £1,000 a minute to deliver a television signal. At present the cost of delivering the work of the House to the nation on television is not practicable.

If hon. Members think that they could stay in the Chamber for five or six hours in comfort with the kind of lighting that is necessary to carry pictures to the outside world, they are running away with a myth, because it is not technically possible to have cameras in here without a considerable amount of uncomfortable lighting.

The debate has revealed a great deal of interest and variations across the Chamber. It has not been a party political debate, as one hon. Member said; it has been a helpful debate. We should reject the idea of televising Parliament, although it may be right to return to it in five or six years.

Mr. Speaker: For the convenience of the House, at 9.30 I shall call the hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) to begin a winding-up speech on behalf of those against the motion, and at 9.45 pm I shall call the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) to speak on behalf of those in favour. It would be helpful, as so many hon. Members wish to take part, if we could now have five-minute speeches.

8.56 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): When I voted against televising Parliament the last time we debated the matter, I did not expect to be in a majority. I thought that a few people would be conducting a rearguard action against the inevitability of television, but I was wrong. Since then I have not heard arguments that have convinced me. I am concerned not about the usual arguments one hears — for example, about extra light and heat; I accept that. We sometimes hear that television would change the nature of the House, but perhaps we ought to have some changes. There are fears about exhibitionists, comedians and hooligans, but I am not terribly worried about them.

I can see some powerful arguments in favour of the Labour party. The press is almost wholly in hostile hands, whereas the electronic media are more impartial. I also take the view that the more the public were to hear the strident, discordant, raucous tones of the Prime Minister and her gramophone record at Prime Minister's Question Time, the more the public would be repelled, so there are powerful arguments there.

My lack of enthusiasm comes from this paradox: if we vote for television, that is not what we would get. Some hon. Members think that if they vote for televising Parliament, all their speeches will be broadcast on television. That is completely wrong; it will not happen. A minuscule proportion of the proceedings would be broadcast, just tiny snippets, which is completely different.

If we were to have a channel dedicated to the televising of Parliament and the whole of the proceedings were to be televised, I would support that with enthusiasm, but that is not what we would get.

I wish to say a few words about the nature of Parliament and of television. What is Parliament? It is not just what happens on the Floor of the House. Often, what happens on the Floor is the least important. There is what happens in Standing Committees and Select Committees, the conversations that take place in the Corridors and in the Lobbies, and in the Tea Room and the Restaurant, what happens in Back-Bench committees and in party meetings. All this is extremely important — sometimes there is blood on the floor — but none of that would appear on television. Only one facet of what happens here would be shown. By excluding the rest, television would distort. That is the drawback of the television medium.

Mr. Allen: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Leighton: No; we have not got time.

The House should also consider how much television there would be. I discussed this with a television company last week. I was told that the most we would get would be a half-hour programme, not in prime time. Apart from that, we would have only little clips of 15 or 20 seconds on news programmes. If the programme were split with the other place, we would have a programme of 15 minutes at most. Our proceedings start at 2.30 pm and often go on until 2.30 am, so 12 hours of proceedings would have to be condensed into 15 minutes. We would have about one minute for each hour of our proceedings.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) sent us a helpful piece of paper in which he said that all the Select Committees and all the Standing Committees would be televised as well. If the 14 departmental Committees meet for two hours a week, that

makes 28 hours of proceedings. Hundreds of hours of parliamentary proceedings would have to be condensed into a few minutes.

The proposition before us is not that Parliament should be televised, but that television companies should have the right to dip in and pick out snippets. Do we trust the television companies to portray our affairs properly? I do not trust them. Their criteria are not our criteria. What use do the media make of their existing rights? Radio has the freedom to broadcast our affairs. Why does radio not have a dedicated continuous channel for parliamentary proceedings? It has the right and the power. We are told that it is doing it today. Why does it not do it every day when there are even more important debates? We have "Yesterday in Parliament". That is what it comes down to. I agree with the criticisms made of that programme. It has become a travesty.

Then we have the press. People talk about the struggle to obtain freedom of the press to come in here and report our affairs. What does it do with that freedom? The heavies used to report Parliament, but now they do not. We just have sketches in which they make it all a big joke. I am all in favour of being entertained, but the idea that the media are fighting to report this place is absolute nonsense. They have rights which they do not use. If the press does not use those rights and the radio does not use them, what would television do?

We are starting at the wrong end. We should start with radio and have a dedicated radio channel on which Parliament is reported continuously. Eventually, when the technology is available, we should have exactly the same with television—a continuous, dedicated channel under the control of Parliament. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) is absolutely right. The matter should not be left to ITV or even to the BBC. It should be under the control of Parliament, not of the television companies. If we pass this motion tonight, I can see what is in it for the television companies, but I cannot see what is in it for Parliament and the public. There is scarcely anything in it for us. The motion would not give us the televising of Parliament; it would simply give television companies the right to dip in and out for their entertainment.

9.3 pm

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Some strange and interesting alliances have been formed in this debate. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) goes into the Lobby arm-in-arm with the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), it will be quite a parliamentary occasion.

This has been a good debate, and I shall vote without hesitation for the motion moved so eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson). Tonight we are being asked to set up a Select Committee to decide and to report back to the House on how this should be done.

A great deal of irrelevance has been talked in this debate. People say that there will be snippets on various programmes. There may not be snippets on various programmes. The Select Committee may recommend that, for the experimental period at least, the only occasions to be televised should be televised in their entirety—the Budget speech, for example. If I had the privilege to serve on that Committee I believe that that is how I would argue.

It would also be a good thing to insist that during the experimental period the broadcasting authorities should broadcast some Select Committees and Standing Committees, so that people can see what goes on in Parliament. The hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) made a false analogy when he referred to conversations in the Tea Room and in the corridors; fascinating though they may be, they are outside the public domain, to use that rather unfortunate phrase.

Our constituents have a right to see us through the medium of the day, and television is the medium of the day. They have a right to see and hear what we do. It is true that radio has been a distorting medium in many ways. When one hears only the cacophony at Prime Minister's Question Time, one does not get the flavour of the House. However, when a debate is broadcast in its entirety, the flavour of Parliament is conveyed. I had an enormous number of letters — as did other hon. Members — after the Saturday morning Falklands debate, which showed Parliament at its best. My only regret is that it was not televised. During my time here there have been many moving and dramatic occasions—for example, the defeat of the Labour Government in 1979 and the narrow vote by which we entered the Common Market. The people have a right to hear and see those occasions.

We have debated whether people should be allowed to sit in the Strangers' Gallery, whether our proceedings should be printed and whether they should be broadcast. We have conceded that the public have the right to know and we have delivered into the hands of editors—most of whom do not print anything about Parliament—the power to say what Parliament is doing and what it is not doing. We are already the prisoners of television and radio producers and of editors who decide that there is no particular appeal in a parliamentary page. We now have the opportunity—I am delighted that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) mentioned this; I suspect that his source was the same as mine—to set up a unit based on *Hansard* and to make videos for schools about what is going on in the Chamber. We shall be failing fundamentally in our duty if we pass up that opportunity this evening.

We are unlikely to debate this matter again during this Parliament. What we must do tonight is to give a Select Committee — whose timetable would be extremely generous, as the Leader of the House was kind enough to suggest — the opportunity calmly, carefully and deliberately to decide how our proceedings will be televised, and nothing else. We do not have to say that there will be 15-second clips every night on the news or that Parliament will be trivialised. It will not and need not be trivialised. It lies in our hands. The argument advanced by some hon. Members who say that they do not trust us is the ultimate in abdication of responsibility. We should feel confident about what we do here.

Of course we have bad behaviour from time to time —sometimes arising from real passion and other times from imagined and simulated passion. However, if it is known that the eyes of the nation are upon us, there will be real restraint from outside the House as well as from inside. A properly conducted experiment could do nothing but good, and I hope that at the end of the experimental period we shall have what we ought to have—a daily report of Parliament. We are a long way from that now. All that we have to do tonight is to give the House an

[Mr. Patrick Cormack]

opportunity to decide how the experiment will be conducted. I hope that hon. Members will support that proposition.

9.9 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I am in a dilemma because, having listened to the debate, I am not sure how I shall vote. When I came into the House today I knew precisely how I would vote: if we did not get an assurance that there would be a continuous channel, I intended to vote against the motion. I have always believed that we ought to have television in the House because I think that the people have a right to see the House in operation. They should know what their Members of Parliament do. They should see them debating and they should be able to comment on what happens here.

However, for a long time my dilemma has been about the way that television might be manipulated. I had not been in the House for more than a couple of years when we had the Crossman debate on television. I voted for it then. I was tremendously enthusiastic. I had not been on television often. Over the years I have been on television quite a lot. My experience of having been invited to appear on television has led me to fear the manipulation that could happen if our proceedings were televised.

I should like to give hon. Members an example. Many years ago I was invited to appear on a programme. I was asked to go to Blackpool for a couple of hours and to be interviewed for half an hour. I went. When I saw the programme, I got about two seconds and it seemed that I was saying something totally different from what I had said in the interview. I was very angry, but there was nothing I could do about it.

I want the House to be televised and I want the people to be involved in real democratic practice, but I am worried about how the proceedings would appear. In today's debate not all the speeches have been scintillating or charismatic. Some hon. Members, whose speeches have been neither charismatic nor scintillating, have spoken common sense. If the proceedings were being televised, those speeches should be shown as well as the robust contributions, which have not necessarily been full of common sense. I want those speeches to be shown on television as well.

I want to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) on television. He said things with which I agreed completely. *[Interruption.]* It was a brilliant speech, as were some which put forward the other side of the argument. I should very much like to see on television the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Stokes)—the true Englishman! I think it would be marvellous for the people to see him on television. They would know that hon. Members really represented a cross-section of the population. I was once referred to as a dinosaur, but I am positively a forward-looking individual compared to the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge.

I want the House to be televised, but I want an assurance that we will have real television, with all hon. Members involved. I should like a continuous channel. People should be able to put on the television and to hear everyone in a debate. I should like also an additional channel covering Select Committees and Standing Committees. No doubt it would cost a lot of money, but I want all that to happen. I do not want an editor to decide that Heffer or Benn will be on but that an hon. Member who is unknown will not get on. I want to see everybody getting their fair share and becoming involved in debate.

What do I do in that dilemma? I agree in principle with the idea of a Select Committee, if that will lead to a continuous channel being set up, but if that does not happen—and my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) is convinced that it will not —I should prefer the House not to be televised. We should have real, true television in which everybody is involved. My dilemma is whether to abstain.

Mr. Allen: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Heffer: No, I will not give way. There may be some hon. Members, even at this stage of the debate, who have been sitting through it and who still want to make a contribution.

My dilemma is whether to abstain, to vote for the motion or against it. Even at this late hour I have not completely made up my mind. When I do, I will stick by my decision, but if there is no sign that we shall get a continuous channel of the type that I think is essential, I shall come out against the motion.

9.15 pm

Mr. David Davis (Boothferry): I shall be brief and will address my remarks to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), in view of his last comment.

I wanted to speak in the debate because I spent two and a half years in Canada, where the House of Commons is televised. That House is very similar to ours in its rules and procedures. The Canadian experiment is a much better example to study than the House of Lords, or indeed televising this House under broadcasting authorities, which would be under the sword of Damocles of a review after six months.

My experience in Canada has led me to believe that televising the House is a very bad idea. The reason for my belief is not anybody's fault: it is because of the system used. A full and continuous channel on cable television was available to the majority of the Canadian population. Unfortunately, most of them did not watch that channel. The main television channels took extracts from the continuous broadcasts and they were mostly from the question period, which we call Question Time. The reason for that was simple. A 60-second exchange fits well into a news programme. It is much better television than a long and boring debate. The extracts were full of conflict and they were exciting and good entertainment. It was good television.

After five years of televising the Canadian Parliament, concern was expressed by serious journalists and commentators that the Canadian public were being deceived about what their Members of Parliament did. The impression that could be obtained easily from watching such extracts was that Canadian Members of Parliament spent their time coming to the Chamber for 45-minute periods conducting pointless arguments without a constructive outcome, scoring points and then clearing off without further developments.

It is difficult to measure the respect in which an institution is held. It is easier to measure the respect or lack of respect in which members of an institution are held. After eight years, it was an interesting coincidence that

members of the Liberal and Progressive Conservative parties, the major political parties in Canada, selected their leaders—John Turner and Brian Mulroney—neither of whom was a Member of Parliament at that time. The party leaders were selected from those outside the House. That was entirely because the reputation of Parliament had fallen so low in those eight years. That development was affected by matters outside Parliament. It was caused not by mischievous journalists, but by the system as it stood.

There was also a change in the nature of Parliament, especially at Question Time. Because I must be brief, Mr. Speaker, I cannot quote from Members of Parliament who had previously been in favour of televising Parliament. Their thrust was that televising Parliament had led to corruption of the questioning process in several ways. It had become much less spontaneous and more organised, and there was much involvement by Government and Opposition Whips. Just as the stakes for a Member of Parliament who wants to be disruptive are increased by being on the 10 o'clock news, so the stakes for Government and Opposition are very much higher when they know that a fluffed question is to be on the 10 o'clock news.

So, not in six months, but over the course of the years, the Whips on either side took control of that procedure. The result was an undermining of the freedom and the importance of Back Benchers on both sides of the House. That, in my view, is one of the most corrosive outcomes of the televising of the Canadian Parliament.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Did my hon. Friend read while he was there the report of the Standing Committee of both Houses of the Canadian Parliament after eight years of television, which was a searing indictment of all the nonsenses that had occurred and showed complete confusion about the way forward?

Mr. Davis: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. That was very much the point that I was trying to summarise.

I am a new Member of Parliament and perhaps a naive one, but I have been pleasantly surprised by the extent to which the debate in the House is deliberative rather than emotive and rhetorical and is spontaneous, effective and free-ranging. It seems to me that, rather than resulting in an extension of democracy, the televising of the House would undermine all those valuable aspects of debate in the House.

9.21 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The Leader of the House said that this was a parliamentary occasion rather than a party political one. Apart, perhaps, from the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), most hon. Members have accepted that.

In that spirit, I start from the view that the Prime Minister has not always been wrong. I should like to draw to the attention of the House the first speech that she made, her maiden speech, as a Back Bencher addressing the House and commending to us the Public Bodies (Admission of the Press to Meetings) Bill. The right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) said then:

"The public has the right, in the first instance, to know what its elected representatives are doing."

She went on to quote from the Franks committee, which said:

"Publicity is the greatest and most effective check against any arbitrary action."—[*Official Report*, 5 February 1960; Vol. 616, c. 1350, 1351.]

I believe that she was right and that the measure which she commended to the House was right. Having served in local government, I believe that the relationship between the people and local government improved because there was that desire to open the doors, to give public service, to have open government. For that reason, I cannot understand the opposition to the motion.

If hon. Members, and particularly the right hon. Member for Chingford, believe that television, and even the very thought that it might be considered in a Select Committee, would have such an undesirable effect—if the right hon. Member for Chingford had been here I would have given way so that he could answer the question—why is it that, of the 24 members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 21 allow their Parliaments to be televised and every one of the European Economic Community countries, with the exception of Ireland and Great Britain, allows television in Parliament, and in no known case have any of those Parliaments asked television to withdraw?

We have heard a number of speeches—passionate speeches, humorous speeches, well-rehearsed speeches, sincere speeches—by right hon. and hon. Members, but are not the people entitled to a say, to access to what is going on in the House? My right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) quite rightly referred to the problems of the disabled. The truth is that, apart from many of them being unable to hear what is being said, there is no way that many can obtain access to any part of this building except Westminster Hall. How, then, are they able to follow our proceedings?

The truth is that the House has a responsibility to ensure that modern technology — for instance, the provision of satellites—means that the people who have elected us have some indication of what we are doing, or claim that we are doing, on their behalf. Are we to say—as the right hon. Member for Chingford is probably saying in an interview on television at this very moment—that there is a magic circle in this place? We can almost predict who will appear on "Any Questions?" or "Question Time", and in the winter gardens at Blackpool, being interviewed about what other people are saying on television at the various party conferences. They will find a way to communicate their views to the nation. But what right have they—in particular, what right has the former chairman of the Conservative party—to deny the rest of us the right to communicate with our constituents in the way that we seek?

When we last debated this issue, we were told that we really should not have the cameras in this Chamber because people would be bored out of their minds. Today, we are being encouraged to take the view that our behaviour is so bad that we cannot allow ourselves even to be seen by the public. I say to the right hon. Member for Chingford, in particular, that he really ought not to insult the intelligence of the British people. They are perfectly capable of making up their own minds on the real or alleged behaviour of hon. Members, bad or otherwise. They are also capable of taking on board the questions that are put, and the replies, or non-replies, that are given.

In my view, the British people who elected us should have the same opportunities as those in most Western

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

countries. I believe that the motion ought to be carried, because we ought to be telling those people that we have nothing to hide.

9.26 pm

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): In the few moments that remain before the winding-up speeches, it is perhaps worth while to emphasise one or two points that have come up. The most important, I believe, is that many questions that have been raised can be answered only after careful consideration by a Select Committee, followed by the experiment which I hope will flow from that consideration. I have to disagree with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House: we are voting this evening on the reference of the matter to a Select Committee for an experiment, and there is no commitment on offer to the House at present.

Technically, the television cameras, and the lighting that go with them, are no longer intrusive. The cameras will be smaller than in the House of Lords, and the lights will, if anything, be darker. The objections raised by various hon. Members on those grounds are therefore invalid. As for the action of television on our behaviour, we cannot really forecast it. I personally believe, however, that it is unlikely to make behaviour change much. The advent of radio did not have much effect in that regard; nor did the advent of newspapers. Both, however, were important steps forward in making the House more open to the rest of the country, and to the constituents who send us here.

I also believe that television will create more opportunities for Back Benchers to be seen and heard. Let me say to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) that, whatever the small nuggets may be, it is better to have small nuggets than no nuggets at all. I hope that that will weigh in the balance when he decides which Lobby to enter this evening.

Another point that has been made outside the House, but not, I think, in today's debate, concerns the effect of the prying eye of the television cameras on what the Whips are up to during our debates. Would it make the Whips more public in their actions? Would they be unable to do their whippery as well as they usually do? I fear that the cameras would have no deleterious effect on what the Whips will be doing. But again, let us experiment and see.

Will televising our proceedings have an effect on those attending our debates? If it drags people back into the Chamber, makes more people come and listen to what is going on in the Chamber, it must be beneficial to the House of Commons. In so far as what goes on in the Chamber is of interest to those outside, they should be able to see it.

In the last century, Parliament was stubborn and near-sighted in resisting press coverage of its affairs. When at last the press was allowed in, parliamentary democracy took a real leap forward. Political freedom was enhanced, government was improved and answerability increased. As one of our colleagues is reported to have said the other day:

"Parliament must work with the tools of the age, or it will sculpt no monuments for the future."

Let us embrace enthusiastically this evening an experiment after careful Select Committee discussion and conclusion. Given the chance for that experiment, we shall all be surprised by its beneficial effects.

9.30 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I have to declare an interest as a member of the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians. It is generally known to the House that I am a television producer and director. It is also generally known that, as a producer and director, I am wholly opposed to the televising of the House on two separate but equally valid grounds — technical and editorial.

Technically, there is no doubt that the presence of television in the Chamber will be intrusive. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) referred, in an excellent speech, to "World in Action" some weeks ago which debated the televising of Parliament.

Some hon. Members will recall the advertisement that was placed on the inside page of *The House Magazine* two weeks ago. "World in Action" was perhaps a little careless. Those who know anything about television and who studied the photograph will have seen the tripod camera in the bottom left-hand corner of the picture, mounted smack in front of the doorway blocking the exit for the Aye Lobby.

Mr. Tony Banks: It will not be done like that.

Mr. Gale: I am coming to that.

The television programme was highly edited — 30 minutes out of two hours of air time. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde referred to the 40 seconds that he was allowed to wind up the programme which used a second-hand set from a television series purporting to show the public what televising the Chamber would be like.

We all know that television studios, and this one in particular, have a fourth wall—that bit of the Chamber simply was not there so that it was easy to get the cameras in. It will not be like that, will it?

The BBC-ITV paper, which Opposition Members have been sent, says:

"Any experiment would use remote controlled cameras which could be mounted below the galleries. They would probably be seven and would be slightly smaller than the current generation of news cameras with which you are of course familiar. A modest increase in the existing lighting level in the Chamber may be necessary, particularly beneath the galleries."

Then there is the argument: the Lords Chamber is televised, so why cannot we do it here? As everybody knows, the Lords Chamber is a completely different shape and size. There is more room for equipment in there than in here. We are dealing with a different Chamber. The Lords Chamber is not overhung by Galleries on either side. Look at the shine, or lack of it, on the Back Benches. There is no light there. *[Interruption.]* There will be several cameras—one under the doorway and another six hanging under the Galleries, whirring and moving. To get light on the Back Benches, there will be lights under here and up there.

The effect on legislatures worldwide—I defy any hon. Member to gainsay this—has been stultifying. The effect of television on other chambers—my hon. Friend the Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis) made this point earlier—has been to lead to stale presentation and to speeches being read to camera. Debate based on an exchange of views has disappeared. Members in other legislatures go into their chambers and read set speeches to camera; they do not take part in debate. We must ask

whether that is what we want for this House. [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] It is a custom in this House that we are allowed to use notes.

The "Today" programme on Radio 4 spent much of last night scouring the world to find a parliamentarian who is used to a televised chamber and who is a supporter of it. It finally came up with a Dutch Member of Parliament — a doctor — who would support it. Some hon. Members will have heard him on the radio this morning. He began by saying that television cameras were not intrusive. By the end of the interview, two and a half minutes later, he conceded that television cameras were intrusive.

Last night in the Strangers Bar I was talking to a friend from an Opposition party — [HON. MEMBERS: "Name him."] I do not wish to ruin his career. He said, with great emotion and force, as did the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), "Would it not be wonderful if some of the great speeches made in the House were available in the archives on film?" Yes, it would. The trouble is that once the television cameras come into the Chamber those great off-the-cuff speeches will not be made.

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): Is not accountability always intrusive?

Mr. Gale: I leave my hon. Friend to make his own decision.

Earlier, the Father of the House said that he wished to preserve the Chamber for the future. As a television producer and director, as well as an hon. Member, so do I.

The cost of this exercise has not been mentioned. I shall deal briefly with the proposition that has been made by the BBC and ITV. They say:

"For the duration of the experiment the broadcasters would bear the main costs of coverage. If, at the end of an experiment the House were to decide on a permanent television installation, then there are a number of ways in which this might be accomplished and this would be a matter for discussion."

The cost of the exercise will once again fall on the poor benighted licence payer. The cost will be incurred for the benefit of 500,000 claimed viewers. That is not 500,000 at any one time for "Their Lordships' House", but 500,000 in total, which is a scarcely measurable audience.

Scarcely one hon. Member has received a letter from a constituent calling for the televising of the Chamber. There is no clamour for it, but let us assume that the public want the Chamber televised. What will they get? I do not believe that this has been a partisan debate. I am not concerned about the scaremongering that we have heard in the debate. I am certainly not afraid of television. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said that the public had a right

"to see and hear the elected representatives at work."

There has been much high-minded talk in the House recently about democracy and the public having a right to see. The public have a right to know, but they will not get that from television because they will see only televised highlights.

We should be honest with each other. The debate has not been about democracy but about journalism and journalists gaining access to the Chamber. Journalists do not want to show the Chamber at work; they want, as the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) said, to show the sexy bits. They are not interested in what we are doing.

I was appalled to hear the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) say that the House can control the media. Earlier today, I spoke to David Nicholas, the editor of ITN, and asked him whether, as a journalist, he would surrender his editorial control. David Nicholas is an honourable man and he said no.

Mr. Shore: The hon. Member knows perfectly well that I was not talking about editorial censorship; I was talking about the guidelines that the Select Committee would lay down for the performance of the broadcasting authorities in the House.

Mr. Gale: The right hon. Gentleman may be correcting his *Hansard* now, but he should read the report.

I do not want television in the Chamber, but still less do I want Government, state or parliamentary-controlled television.

Finally, there is the argument about the experiment. A letter from the movers of the motion says:

"What is proposed is an experiment. Nothing more."

My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) opening the debate said that he was interested only in enhancing the standard of the House. We are being offered not an experiment but a Trojan horse. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said earlier that tonight we are voting on whether to televise the House. He is right. If the answer tonight is yes, there will be no change tomorrow, there will probably be no change for the next couple of years. However, I do not want to come to the House in 10 years' time and say, "I told you so," because, in 10 years' time when the change has been wrought, it will be too late.

The right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) will seek to convince the House to let the cameras in. In the interests of democracy, I urge the House to turn on the microphones and to provide a radio channel dedicated to broadcasting the House.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I respect the expertise of the hon. Member in the technicalities of filming the House. However, I would put it to him in an unemotional and objective fashion that before I came to the House I had access to the recordings and the transmissions of proceedings in the Chamber which would still be accessible to me, whether on radio or on television. Thousands of people in Britain are deaf or profoundly deaf and do not have that access. Television would be their only access to the debates in the Chamber. Technicalities apart, accountability can come through sound or through vision.

Mr. Gale: I respect entirely the views of the hon. Gentleman, and I am profoundly grateful for his intervention. When he sought to intervene, I was about to say that of course there are those who are profoundly deaf. The royal school for deaf children is in my constituency, and I try to work closely with these kids and to consider their interest. There is no medium that can satisfy the needs of every person in the United Kingdom. Blind people cannot enjoy television as much as they might enjoy radio.

Instead of arguing about journalism and edited highlights, if we are really concerned about democracy, we

[Mr. Gale]

should turn on the microphones and dedicate a sound radio channel to broadcast unedited the proceedings of the House to the entire nation, from the time that the House sits until it rises. That way we will reach the people. As a producer, a director, a journalist and a Member of Parliament, I urge the House not to let the cameras in.

9.44 pm

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): I have long believed in the televising of the House of Commons. My belief has been strengthened in the last year, since I became the chairman of the all-party group trying to convince our fellow Members that this should happen.

As a result of the exhibition in Westminster Hall last year I learned that, because of technical innovation and remote-controlled cameras, there would not be television people inside the Chamber and that there would be far less of a problem with the lights than I had imagined. It is not enough to take my word for it or the words of those who came along to the exhibition. One of the jobs of the Select Committee which would eventually report back to the House would be to look into that in greater detail.

I support the motion, but it is as well for those who have only recently come into the discussion and those who have listened to the debate to be reminded of what the motion actually says. It states:

"That this House approves in principle the holding of an experiment"—

I shall come back to the point that has been made about experiments—

"in the public broadcasting of its proceedings by television"—

that means that all its proceedings must be looked at, not just those in this Chamber—

"and believes that a Select Committee should be appointed to consider the implementation of such an experiment and to make recommendations."

We would vote in principle that there would be a Select Committee and that a report would come back to the House. The vote tonight will not mean that televising then goes ahead because the Select Committee will report back to the House of Commons.

In my view, we will have television in the House one day, and it is better to begin with a controlled experiment under the supervision of a Select Committee and monitored by a Select Committee. I hope that that meets the point made by the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), who said that he thought that once there was a six-month experiment there would be no retreat from it. There would be a monitoring Select Committee of this House which would report to the House every Session on how the matter had been dealt with during the year.

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Rees: No, I would rather not give way now. Give me a minute.

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Rees: No, I should like to deal with the point which looms large in the minds of many right hon. and hon. Members — the question of a dedicated radio or television channel. As a result of cable television or satellite television, it may well be that that day will come. It may come sooner than we think. I advise the House that on the Select Committee that we set up there must be representatives who feel strongly about that. Part of the job of the Select Committee will be to look into the problems, the cost and what happened in Canada. Tonight we are not taking a decision for all time.

That leads me to the question of the Select Committee itself. There were discussions earlier about who would be on the Select Committee. I shall vote for the motion on the understanding that hon. Members serving on the Select Committee would not do so on the basis of the normal party allocations. It must be done on the basis of people who are for, against or doubtful about televising our proceedings, because it is they who must report back to the House of Commons.

There must be a regional interest on that Committee. I am not being offensive to my hon. Friends from Wales or Scotland. I use that term in the BBC or ITV sense, because undoubtedly there is concern — it has been expressed to me — that by televising Parliament we would hand matters over—these are not my words—to the southern metropolitan interests, who would forget the needs of the other regions, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

One of the revealing things to emerge from our debate has been the strong feeling against the media. That has come through again and again. The BBC and the IBA have done much good work in the way of educational and political programmes, and when I go home in the evening I watch the "Newsnight" programme—*[Interruption.]* It is a good programme and often more interesting than radio programmes — *[Interruption.]* I think that right hon. and hon. Members are missing the point. I have to look at BBC and ITN programmes because I cannot see a televised programme showing political discussion taking place in this Chamber.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside) *rose*——

Mr. Rees: I shall not give way.

This afternoon, there has been a certain animosity towards the television companies which I believe is detrimental to our proper relationship with them. We should use public broadcasting—I am not talking about reading the *Daily Express* or the *Daily Mail*—in the service of the House.

There are genuine fears, and there are splits between friends in political parties on this issue. The normal division between the parties does not apply here. Some hon. Members are concerned about changing the nature of this place, but it has always changed. Robust arguments took place here at the time of Suez and as far back as the days of the American war of independence. Those who want this place to be a namby-pamby Chamber in which there is no real political discussion forget its history.

Some say that Prime Minister's Question Time is now worse than before. It is true that it is worse than when I first entered the House, when there was cut and thrust between Harold Wilson and Harold Macmillan—not to mention Rab Butler—at the Dispatch Box. But that has nothing to do with radio. The deterioration of the past seven years—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This has been a good debate so far, and I ask the House to listen to the rest of it carefully.

Mr. Rees: The deterioration has had as much to do with a change in the House's constitution and the different personalities within it as with the way in which the House

is broadcast. The fact that Prime Minister's Question Time is no longer broadcast in full to the nation cannot be blamed on broadcasting.

There are fears about individual extroverts in the House, but we have always had extroverts. The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) said that bad behaviour appeals to the activists in both parties. We should not be concerned about the activists. It is the electorate that decides at the end of the day.

Mr. Tony Banks: My right hon. Friend — *[Interruption.]* I have sat right through the debate. My right hon. Friend mentioned the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) talking about people who behaved badly. The right hon. Gentleman, the ex-chairman of the Conservative party, spoke for 29 minutes and then cleared off, no doubt to do some television programmes; he will now come back to vote to exclude television. Is there not something irreconcilable about those actions?

Mr. Rees: What is for sure is that tonight, when the debate is over, it is to the BBC and ITN that we shall turn to find out what has gone on.

Mr. Tebbit: I am grateful to the right hon Gentleman for allowing me to intervene, because it gives me that opportunity to explain that I went to dinner, as most people in this place do, in the Members' Dining Room and I certainly did not go to the BBC or ITV. I believe that the right hon. Gentleman understands my argument very well. The important consideration is that it is the activists in political parties who control the nomination of candidates. That is what the row in his party concerning the selection is all about.

Mr. Rees: Television has changed our political lives. It has changed the way in which elections are carried out and what happens at party conferences. I ask the House to use television in the service of the House and to use it after proper consideration by a Select Committee.

I beg the House not to be afeared of change. We are not a cosy club living in the past. We are the House of Commons, the House of Pitt, Fox, Gladstone, Disraeli and other great men who were never afraid of change and who used the circumstances of an agricultural country changing into an industrial country to put forward political arguments.

Mr. Holt: This is a debate about television. How many of the men that the right hon. Gentleman has just quoted had to contend with television during their lifetime?

Mr. Tony Banks: That is a classic question.

Mr. Rees: I am aware of the problems of terrorism. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman asked me a question about terrorism. He must consider two things. First, the House does not change its way because of terrorists and, secondly, the House must put its mind to the problems that might arise from terrorism. However, terrorism has nothing to do with the presence of television cameras. The nature of terrorism——

Mr. Holt: Not terrorism—television.

Mr. Rees: The hon. Gentleman referred to television, not terrorism. If there had not been such shouting—I bet there would not be such shouting if the cameras were here—I might have heard. We have been asked whether the House would be as noisy if we had television cameras; and I am sure that if they were here the new entrants at the door would be listening in rapt attention. Television would quieten this House.

I beg the House to vote for a controlled experiment — it would be under the control of the House — to enable the Select Committee to report its findings to the House. We shall not be voting for a change that will last for all time. We shall be voting for this House to put its mind to change instead of talking about it. Let us stop talking—let us do something.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 318, Noes 264.

Division No. 172] **[9.50 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amos, Alan
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bevan, David Gilroy
Bidwell, Sydney
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brazier, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buck, Sir Antony
Buckley, George
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Patrick
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, J.
Cunningham, Dr John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alastair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Devlin, Tim
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunnachie, James
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evennett, David
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Fookes, Miss Janet
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Samuel
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Gorst, John
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce

Ground, Patrick
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hardy, Peter
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harris, David
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heffer, Eric S.
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, James
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Ingram, Adam
Irvine, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Leadbitter, Ted
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Tom
McCartney, Ian
McCrindle, Robert
McCusker, Harold
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
MacGregor, John
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Maples, John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, Michael *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J *(Aberavon)*
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Miss E. *(Devon W)*
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Paice, James
Parry, Robert
Pike, Peter
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Price, Sir David
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redmond, Martin
Redwood, John
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Richardson, Ms Jo
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Salmond, Alex
Scott, Nicholas
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sims, Roger
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Mont'ds E)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Speller, Tony
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steinberg, Gerald
Stevens, Lewis
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A. J.
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wood, Timothy
Worthington, Anthony
Wray, James
Yeo, Tim
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Anthony Nelson and
Mr. Austin Mitchell.

NOES

Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Ashton, Joe
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bigge-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clelland, David
Coleman, Donald
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Q. *(Stam'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hall'd)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Faulds, Andrew
Favell, Tony
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard

Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Illsley, Eric
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Timothy
Janner, Greville
Jessel, Toby
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Leighton, Ron
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Lord, Michael
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marek, Dr John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patchett, Terry
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Snape, Peter
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Woodcock, Mike
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tom Pendry and
Mr. Eric Forth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House approves in principle the holding of an experiment in the public broadcasting of its proceedings by television; and believes that a Select Committee should be appointed to consider the implementation of such an experiment and to make recommendations.

Mr. Forth: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You may be aware that during the course of the debate my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) raised the matter of a letter which had been written by representatives of certain parties in Parliament to the broadcasting authorities in which they offered to vote in favour of the motion in return for an undertaking for certain coverage by the television authorities. The letter was not denied; in fact, it was acknowledged by Opposition Members.

Do you consider, Mr. Speaker, that this may have influenced the vote that has just taken place? Further, do you consider that it may well influence the composition of any Select Committee which may be set up as a result of the vote that has just taken place? It is a serious matter. I would not expect you to rule on it now, but I should like you to give it serious consideration.

Mr. Speaker: I have no knowledge of what may or may not influence the votes of hon. Members. If the hon. Member is alleging a breach of privilege, he should write to me in the usual way.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am afraid that my point of order is not exciting after all the excitement about the House being televised. My point of order is about the business of the House on which we are about to embark, namely, three very important passenger transport orders.

May I draw the attention of the House to the fact that the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments has placed a report in the Vote Office as it has now reported on the orders. One concern of the Select Committee is the shortage of time. That means that there is no comment on the Order Paper to the effect that the fifth report from the Select Committee is available and should be taken in conjunction with the orders.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Member for having given that information to the House. I understand that the reports are available in the Vote Office.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This arises from the decision that has just been taken by the House. As the BBC in Northern Ireland has banned the broadcasting of "Today in Parliament" since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, may we have Northern Ireland representation on the proposed Select Committee?

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that that request will have been heard by those responsible.

West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authorities

10.17 pm

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): Mr. Speaker, I think it may be for the convenience of the House to take the three orders for West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside together.

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: I think that is not with the agreement of the House.

Mr. Mitchell: If it is not for the convenience of the House to take the three orders together, perhaps it would be for the convenience of the House to take the Greater Manchester and the West Yorkshire orders together. I trust that that is agreeable to the House.

Mr. Speaker: Is that agreeable to the House?

Hon. Members: Aye.

Mr. Speaker: So be it.

Mr. Mitchell: I beg to move,

That the draft Precept Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

As the House has just agreed, we are also considering the next motion:

That the draft Precept Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

I think that it may catch the mood of the House if I speak fairly briefly in opening the debate and then have the consent of the House to reply rather more fully to points raised in the debate.

The six English passenger transport authorities were established to take over the public transport activities of the former metropolitan counties. Under the Local Government Act 1985, those authorities were designated for automatic precept control for their first three years; 1988-89 will be the third and final year of the automatic control.

Under the precept control arrangements, the Secretary of State for Transport sets an upper limit on the amounts that the passenger transport authorities may charge local ratepayers. The legislation also provides for the Secretary of State to reach agreement with the authorities on their precept limits. I am happy to tell the House that three of the authorities—South Yorkshire, West Midlands and Tyne and Wear—have accepted the precept limits proposed by the Secretary of State, but we have not been able to agree with Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire or Merseyside passenger transport authorities. The two orders that were laid before the House on 29 January set upper limits for the precepts of Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire, and we will be debating a similar order for Merseyside later this evening.

These orders follow several months of discussion with the authorities on their expenditure levels and the appropriate precept limits. In the case of West Yorkshire, the expenditure was redetermined, following representations from the authority at a higher level than originally set. The figure is £61·1 million rather than £59 million that was originally proposed. The precept limit which we proposed reflected this expenditure limit. Greater Manchester, however, is somewhat different. The authority has not cancelled the precept limit proposed by the Secretary of State or put forward any arguments in favour of a different limit. It has simply said, without further explanation, that it does not accept the proposed limit.

The House may find a few figures illuminating. The maximum precepts set out in the two orders are 15·58p for Greater Manchester and 24·82p for West Yorkshire.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I may have misunderstood what the Minister said. Could he repeat the figures relating to what West Yorkshire has sought under the order and what it has received?

Mr. Mitchell: In the case of West Yorkshire, I have said that the expenditure level was redetermined, following representations from the authority, at a higher level than that originally set, at £60·1 million rather than £59 million. During the debate I will check that there has not been a typing error on my copy of the brief.

Mr. Hughes: I should be grateful if the Minister would do that.

Mr. Mitchell: I take it that the hon. Gentleman wants to have the figures checked. I will make sure that they are made clear. In the meantime, the House may find a few figures illuminating.

The maximum precepts set out in the two orders are 15·58p for Greater Manchester and 24·8p for West Yorkshire. As we shall be discussing later, the similar order for Merseyside proposes a precept limit of 27p. It is interesting to compare the maximum precepts proposed for these authorities and those for the other three passenger transport authorities that have agreed on maxima. For both Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire, the figures specified in the orders represent a slight increase on the precepts that were set last year, and for Merseyside a fall of less than 5 per cent. is proposed. South Yorkshire passenger transport authority, on the other hand, has agreed to a precept limit that is down 11 per cent. on last year, and Tyne and Wear's report is reduced by almost a third.

Although an increase was agreed for the West Midlands passenger transport authority, it is, at 10·74p, considerably lower than those proposed for the three authorities for which orders are now proposed. West Midlands also continues to have the lowest per capita expenditure on public transport of any of the metropolitan areas. It cannot be claimed, therefore, that we have discriminated against the authorities that have failed to agree precept limits with us.

I hope that that opening statement will be helpful to the House as an initial statement of the present position. I will intervene again, with the leave of the House to give further information.

It may be helpful to remind hon. Members that since precept control has been introduced we have seen the most tremendous change in the efficiency of undertakings operating in the precept-controlled areas. For example, in Greater Manchester, under the pressures of financial control, the bus company has improved efficiency by no less than 23·5 per cent. It is an astonishing indicator of the level of efficiency that operated prior to the advent of both

deregulation and precept control that there was so much fat within the organisation that it was capable of making reductions of that sort.

In my earlier comments I referred to certain figures, and the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), who leads for the Opposition in these matters, questioned whether I had the figures right. He was perfectly right so to do. It looks as though there was an error in the typing. I have to say that the original expenditure limit was £57 million and it has been redetermined at £59·1 million. I am sure that the House is grateful to the hon. Gentleman for having spotted that so early in the course of our deliberations.

10.26 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I must begin by commending the Minister of State for his remarks in correcting the figures. He was very kind to say that it was bright of me to spot the error. Perhaps I made an error of judgment. If I had remained quiet, West Yorkshire might have got its £61·2 million. However, it is always best to be accurate in these matters because I have no doubt that the figure is determined by what is in the order and not what is in the speeches.

The Minister of State, in introducing the orders, made great play of the fact that there had been agreement with three of the passenger transport authorities and that it has been necessary only to have precept orders on three. I do not find that any cause for satisfaction, because, when these matters have been discussed at Question Time and on other occasions, the Minister of State has been very fond of saying that there are great savings, that the 1985 Act has brought great benefit and that everything is going well.

The fact that the Secretary of State and the Minister of State have to impose precept orders shows they are imposing expenditure levels on the PTAs. If there are to be financial savings this year, it is not because the PTAs want them but because they have been imposed by the Government. It is the old story as far as West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester are concerned—we will come to Merseyside later. It is a question of "Whitehall rules, OK" yet again, and local accountability and decision making are dismissed out of hand.

The Minister of State pointed out that, under the West Yorkshire precept limitation order for 1988-89, the expenditure level will be £59·1 million. It is interesting to note that in 1986-87, the expenditure limit was £61·3 million. Admittedly, West Yorkshire's initial budget was for £69·8 million, but under some pressure and after some discussion it eventually raised an appeal on the ground that it would like the same expenditure limit as 1986-87. If it had got that, it would have meant in cash terms the same as 1986-87 but would have represented a 9·6 per cent. cut in real terms in the expenditure necessary to do the job.

The Minister of State will have to get his Department in some sort of order, because the West Yorkshire PTA wrote on 13 January appealing against the proposed maximum precept. On 29 January, Mr. Goldman of the Department of Transport wrote simply to say that the Secretary of State had concluded that a maximum precept of 24·82p should be confirmed. Councillor Simmons received a letter dated 1 February from the Minister of State saying that the points made in Councillor Simmons's letter of 14 January would be taken into account.

On the face of it, the letter was dated three days after the appeal had been turned down. It is not always easy to be fair, but I want to be fair to the Minister and accept that the letter was received on the 26th or 27th, and someone from the Department had to telephone West Yorkshire and say, "Please change the date on the letter. It was not sent on 1 February; that was a mistake. It was really sent on 26 January." But it looks as though all the letters were typed out, and all the decisions were made, in advance, and the poor civil servant who had to send the letters out simply got the scheduling wrong and put the wrong date on them. As they might say in the Merchant Navy, the Minister is not running a very tight ship. Perhaps he had better try to sort that out.

It is not enough to say, "We have reached agreement with most of the authorities, or with half of them." The Minister has given us no justification for altering the position relating to the requirements of West Yorkshire, even on the much-reduced figure. We must take into account the fact that West Yorkshire wanted to support extra tendered services during holidays and late periods. It wanted to improve the standards of local rail services, and to reduce the backlog of deferred maintenance on the property. Surely the Minister will accept that deferring maintenance, both on trunk roads and on buildings, is a false economy, and I hope that he will take that into account.

Undoubtedly, the system contains a great deal of instability, although the Minister refuses to recognise that. Already this year, West Yorkshire has had to find £1·5 million to replace deregistered commercial services with tendered services. That is likely to happen again next year, perhaps on a greater scale, but no money is available. If the services are deregistered, early-morning, evening and weekend services, which involve shift workers, will be affected. Services cannot be maintained with the present finances.

Much the same pattern applies to Greater Manchester, which initially applied for a redetermination of £89·5 million. The order allows for an expenditure limit of £80·6 million, £9·5 million below the appeal determination. But the draft budget was for £94·8 million. The 1985 Act does not produce the savings. Even if there is more efficiency, as I accept that there may be, the 1985 Act is not producing the savings that the Minister has mentioned, against the imposition of severe cash limits on authorities' expenditure.

There is no room for expansion in the system. There is instability in Greater Manchester, which is being notified of about 30 service changes a week, many of which involve service withdrawals by operators. That has to be made up. If the authority does not respond quickly to replace the services, the result is a reduction in the existing network and increased hardship for the users.

The same is true everywhere. In Greater Manchester, there will be considerable pressure on concessionary fare levels. The dilemma being faced by the authorities is whether to force up the level of concessionary fares to an unacceptable level, or chop services elsewhere. They will have to do one of the two. Frequency reductions may well mean a cut in section 20 grants to British Rail. Greater Manchester is already budgeting for a £2 million to £3 million cut in section 20 grants next year. That is bad for British Rail. We shall be back in the downward spiral that we know only too well of reduced frequency of services on the railways, higher fares and fewer passengers.

[Mr. Robert Hughes]

I can only conclude that the Government either do not understand what is happening or that they do understand what is happening but are refusing to face up to their responsibilities. They insist that the Transport Act 1985 is working, so they cannot give way in any shape or form because that would represent failure.

The Minister pointed out that this is the last year of automatic precept control. If my information is correct, discussions are going on about the future financing of the PTAs. Great alarm is being expressed at the proposition that in future the district authorities will be entitled to opt out of the PTA system. If he allows that to happen, he will destroy all the integrated transport services that have been built up over the years. Everyone agrees that there should be proper arrangements between road, rail and other forms of transport. Opting out will destroy such arrangements. I hope that the Government will not say, as they have said about the Inner London education authority, first, that they will allow opting out, and then that that will create chaos so the PTAs must go.

Is that the secret agenda? Is the Minister determined to break up the PTAs? If he believes in the PTAs and in integration, believes that they do a good job, and believes his own words about the betterment of efficiency, he should put our minds at rest as soon as possible.

We shall vote against the orders tonight, not because we want to stop the authorities having the money, but simply to demonstrate that we do not think that the Minister has played fair with them.

10.36 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): This has been an extremely bleak week for West Yorkshire. Last night we debated reductions in funding for West Yorkshire's police, fire service and civil defence. Tonight we are once again faced with the difficulties of a deteriorating public transport system for the people of West Yorkshire because of the Government's unwillingness to give the West Yorkshire PTA adequate funds to develop a satisfactory service.

The effects of the Government's decision were spelled out clearly by Councillor Michael Simmons, the chairman of the authority, in a report in the Bradford *Telegraph and Argus*. He said:

"There will be two major consequences. There will be a reduction in the services we support in areas which don't have profitable services, and because there will be a drastic reduction in the support we are giving generally, fewer drivers and maintenance men will be required".

Councillor Simmons said that about 200 jobs would be lost throughout West Yorkshire as a result of the decision. As a Member sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union, I urge the Government to reconsider their decision because unemployment in our region is considerably above the national average and there is no way we can countenance the loss of 200 jobs in any part of the local economy, least of all in passenger transport.

Mr. David Mitchell: I should like to help the hon. Gentleman if I can. Exactly how will 200 jobs be lost? I have not followed the logic of that.

Mr. Madden: That is the view expressed by Councillor Simmons in the report to which I referred. He has predicted that 200 jobs will be lost in the authority for which he is responsible; that is the view that he has expressed in letters to hon. Members and expressed in representations to the Government when he appealed against the Department of Transport's determination.

In the same report, he says:

"another casualty of the squeeze would be a hoped-for expansion of Access, West Yorkshire's pioneering service for the disabled."

The Government publicly proclaim their support for disabled people and their determination to improve services for them, yet the chairman of the authority is saying that there will be an adverse impact on services for disabled people.

In a letter to hon. Members dated 14 January, Councillor Simmonds refers to

"the halving of our planned expenditure for people with disabilities, both those for whom special Access Bus services have been introduced and those able with difficulty to use conventional services".

The article in the *Bradford Telegraph and Argus* continues:

"We feel very bitter about this. I can only think that the Minister does not realise how people depend on public transport in this area. As a result of his decision passengers and people who work for the authority will suffer."

The Government do not realise the extent to which my constituents, and those of almost every hon. Member who represents a west Yorkshire constituency, depend on public transport. In my constituency, as many as 70 per cent. of my constituents do not have a car. They depend directly on public transport for getting to work, if they are fortunate enough to have a job, and for all other purposes. Under this Government they have experienced a steady deterioration in bus services and in passenger transport services generally. For a number of years, the Government have refused to give the authority adequate funds to enable it to improve services.

The document that the West Yorkshire passenger transport authority published in early January — the appeal against maximum precept — sets out clearly the impact that this decision will have on the authority. I do not have time to go through all the matters involved, but I should like to refer to some aspects that cause general concern.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) referred to concessionary fares. In that regard, the document says:

"The small reductions in this expenditure heading are a consequence of the reduction in tendered services leading to loss of travel by elderly and disabled persons."

It is clear that there are pressures on concessionary fares and there is a danger that many elderly and disabled people will experience a deterioration in the services available to them.

The document refers to passenger facilities:

"In order to meet the budget proposed the planned programme of maintenance and refurbishment of bus stations has had to be curtailed. Typical work to be deferred includes:

Bradford Interchange:	Renewal of plant room roofing
	Renewal of escalator chain wheels
	Upgrading of air conditioning and refurbishment of filters (MetroChange House)
	Refurbishment of MetroChange House toilets
	Remedial work to blockwork walls
	Energy conservation (1st year of 3 year programme)
Huddersfield:	Renewal of floor covering, phase 1

All Bus Stations: Improvement of Information Displays
Further improvements to access and facilities for disabled people

Although there is no question of endangering public safety, the Authority and Executive are very concerned that financial constraints are forcing them deliberately to allow the fabric of their assets to deteriorate because of insufficient maintenance, leading to increased costs when the work is eventually done."

Year after year, services for people living in west Yorkshire have been considerably worse than those for people living in other areas. The people of West Yorkshire have been penalised year after year. As they were penalised in yesterday's debate on the police, fire services and civil defence, so they have been penalised with regard to transport services.

The document continues:

"If West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority were to receive the same average EL per capita as all other PTAs an Expenditure Level of £65·0 million with a precept of 28·92p would result.

"As the Authority has demonstrated in each previous application for redetermination, West Yorkshire ratepayers are penalised by the fact that the GRE assessments do not accurately reflect spending needs in West Yorkshire, largely because of its far lower density of population at ward level than other PTAs."

That is the reality of the situation. My constituents and other ratepayers throughout West Yorkshire are deeply disturbed at the deterioration in services that they see across the board. They recognise that the party that is responsible is the Government, who have consistently refused to provide proper funds to enable West Yorkshire, which faces considerable problems, to have a range of passenger transport services which are adequate for the 1980s. They recognise that the restraints and difficulties that the passenger transport authority has faced over a number of years are the direct responsibility of the Government, who do not really care about the people of West Yorkshire, their transport services or the facilities available to them.

10.45 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I should like to reiterate some of the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) and to say how bitterly disappointed I am at the limit that the Minister has set. Regular bus users have seen a regular deterioration in their service in Halifax due to deregulation and the grant that is made available. We are experiencing all kinds of problems.

The Government's refusal to increase West Yorkshire's passenger transport expenditure limit to the amount required even to maintain this deteriorating service is bad news for my constituents, who rely heavily on public transport. They fear, with some justification, that the shortfall could lead to a loss of subsidised evening, early morning and Sunday services and to fewer routes.

There is no doubt that that is a worry, because it will lead to more measures to make things even more unreliable for the users and for people who will inevitably become even more isolated. I am talking about groups such as the elderly and women, who are locked into the surrounding villages, who rely on public transport and who have no other means of communication.

I do not want to repeat too many of the arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West, but there is a real fear among my constituents in Halifax that the concessionary fares system is threatened. I ask the Minister to take that fear seriously.

I should like to talk briefly about rail services.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South) *rose*——

Mrs. Mahon: I wanted to be brief.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I am most grateful. I do not come from the hon. Lady's area. I gather that she represents Halifax and that the hon. Gentleman who preceded her is from Bradford. I wonder whether, from her knowledge of the area, she can explain why the two cities that they have described need rate subsidy when, for example, a fairly large city such as the one that I am privileged to represent —Nottingham—a conurbation of about 600,000, makes a trading surplus of about £1 million which allows it to replace its fleet in a proper organised way and to pay a dividend back to the city of Nottingham rather than ask for a contribution from the ratepayers? What is the difference between the two cities that the hon. Members have described and the one that I am privileged to represent?

Mrs. Mahon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention but, actually, I do not represent a city. His knowledge of geography is a little flawed. We have particular problems and if the hon. Gentleman knew anything about the area, I am sure that he would know what I am talking about.

I should like to talk briefly about rail services. A significant number of my constituents in Halifax use the two stations, Halifax and Sowerby Bridge, for commuting to work in the neighbouring cities of Bradford, Leeds and Manchester—some of the biggest conurbations.

Under the policies of the now abolished West Yorkshire county council, and its successor, the authority we are now discussing — both Labour-controlled — services in west Yorkshire have been improved and usage has massively increased. However, Government expenditure cuts have already meant two-car trains replacing three-car trains, giving rise to appalling overcrowding. I am sure that that would be a major political issue if it happened in the south-east. The inadequate expenditure limits being proposed will make matters even worse, and future proposals to develop rail services — including a possible new train service from Bradford and Halifax to Brighouse, Huddersfield and Sheffield — might be abandoned. We needed the £5 million suggested by Councillor Simmons — to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West referred—to make that new service a reality.

We are already suffering from the Government's disastrous deregulation laws. Staff morale is low. Wages have been cut, and staff have to work arduous shifts that are dangerous in a public transport system. Everyone should be concerned about that—not least the Minister, his staff and all Conservative Members — in view of what happened at King's Cross.

I implore the House to oppose these limits. They are wholly inadequate for the purpose of giving my constituents in Halifax, and all the people of West Yorkshire, the decent public transport service we need.

10.52 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I speak as chairman of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. Immediately before the debate commenced, I raised a point of order to draw to the House's attention the extract from the fifth report of the Joint Committee, which is now in the Vote Office. I had to do that because the Government's timetable did not allow our Committee full and proper time to consider the instruments. That is an outrage. The Joint Committee was established specifically to consider not the merits of the instruments, but whether the powers granted to the Minister are being abused, whether the instruments are ambiguous or badly drafted, and so on.

In the report, we say:

"the Committee accepts that there were good reasons for the Department's acting promptly".

That is because, if the Department had not produced the order now, it might well have had to produce a draft interim order to help the passenger transport authorities to meet their budgets. But this shows defective organisation on the part of the Department and its civil servants in not planning earlier, so as to allow the Committee enough time in which to consider the instrument. If we want to report an instrument, we are obliged by the House to ask the Department to present evidence to the Committee, perhaps in the form of a written memorandum. The Department would be upset if we reported the instrument without providing it with that opportunity.

We meet weekly, and ours is not a glamorous Committee. It is one of the small, back-room Committees established to protect the public good against abuses by Ministers. The Committee was established by the House for that purpose because of public concern. So as I said, we must approach the Department. That gives the Department a week in which to produce a memorandum. If it is unsatisfactory, we may then ask a flock of civil servants—they appear in groups of six or seven in order to succour each other — to give evidence before the Committee. That takes another week to organise. So, even if the Committee works regularly through many instruments each week the process will take a fortnight, which is not long. However, because the Committee did not have time to deal with the instruments, it could not report quickly enough.

When all is said and done, when hon. Members debate an instrument, it is not a bad thing to give notification on the Order Paper that the Committee has examined the instrument. They can then go to the Vote Office and get the report and the instrument. They will learn what the Committee has said and, if they wish, they can use such findings in the debate.

The Committee reported the order in gentle terms. In paragraph 4, the Committee states:

"While the Committee accepts that there were good reasons for the Department's acting promptly, it regrets that quite such a tight parliamentary timetable was necessary, particularly in respect of the Committee's own work."

We make that point courteously, but the Minister should be aware that every time the Government try to bounce the Committee into producing shoddy work, in haste, they will get a tirade from me. The Statutory Instruments Joint Committee should be entitled to do the job for which it was established by the House. The Committee has a Conservative majority, and they agreed that the report should be made to the House.

I wish to consider the merits of the order, and my considerations have absolutely nothing to do with the Committee. The West Yorkshire passenger transport authority wanted a maximum rate precept of 26·5 per cent. and that would have given it the same expenditure level as 1986-87. However, as a result of the provision in the order, that authority is limited to a maximum rate precept of 24·82 per cent. The authority has also pointed out that the proportion of expenditure level met from grant will go down from 12·5 per cent. to 8 per cent. However, in other passenger transport authority areas, the proportion of expenditure funded from grant has slightly increased, on average, from 36 to 37 per cent. Naturally, West Yorkshire PTA feels that it has been badly done by.

The expenditure limit is inadequate for the needs of the authority. The authority is hard-pressed to maintain existing services. Given the amount granted in the order, the authority cannot envisage continuing to provide subsidised services at the same level in holiday periods and to introduce new late-night services to help to reduce the risk of road accidents as a result of social drinking. If the Government are concerned to reduce the injury and death toll associated with drinking and driving, I believe that they should be encouraging passenger transport authorities to provide subsidised social services. If such services are cut, it is inevitable that drinking and driving will increase and there will be more innocent victims of road accidents. That should weigh heavily on the Minister's conscience.

The authority has said that it will have to halve its planned expenditure for people with disabilities—those for whom special access bus services have been introduced and those able, with difficulty, to use conventional services. Such people do not own private cars. Indeed, they may consider that public transport is easier to use in comparison with a private car.

The authority may also have to reduce support for the highly successful Metro train network, and that will jeopardise the potential benefit of investment in new train services and stations provided by the authority and British Rail. It is interesting to note that, at the same time as the Minister is producing this order, he is trying to squeeze every local authority that contributes to the Settle-Carlisle railway. Indeed, the West Yorkshire passenger transport authority makes only a nominal contribution.

The Minister is saying that local authorities must contribute more and that the West Yorkshire passenger transport authority is a contributor, yet he is cutting the amount of money that they can spend. I think he is trying to make local authorities scapegoats for an announcement on a closure that he has in mind for the Settle-Carlisle line. If he wants to deny it, I hope he will bear it in mind when he sums up. But he cannot expect local authorities to increase their contribution to keep the Settle-Carlisle line open and at the same time cut the amount of money that they are able to spend on services.

The West Yorkshire passenger transport authority contributes only a modest sum to that fine railway. It will face the enforced postponement of essential maintenance and improvements to bus stations, which will reduce passenger amenity. Although the authorities say it will not endanger safety, it will lead to a higher cost of refurbishment in the future. It is only putting off the

inevitable. With the almost total elimination of contingency reserves, the continued high level of change in bus services will mean considerable risks.

For example, in the event of unforeseen occurrences, such as bankruptcies of private bus operators or large fare increases, the increased cost of attendant services, concessionary fares and public information will not be able to be met. As my hon. Friends the Members for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) and for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) have mentioned, people are fearful that the effect of the order will be cuts in concessionary fares.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West said, maintenance work will be deferred on the Bradford interchange, which is an example, much lauded by all sides, of a bus and rail network coming together. There will be deferment of the renewal of plant-room roofing and the renewal of escalated chain wheels, so perhaps more signs will be out of use, which will cause difficulties for disabled and elderly people in particular. The upgrading of air-conditioning, the refurbishment of filters and of toilets in MetroChange house will be deferred as a result of the order. The energy conservation programme—this year would have been the first year of the three-year programme—will have to be delayed. That is absurd when the Government are advertising energy conservation programmes and supposedly encouraging them.

It boils down to J. K. Galbraith's famous aphorism of public squalor and private affluence. The Government are not prepared to provide the money for decent facilities, a decent railway network and adequate bus services with facilities for the disabled and the elderly, yet the Chancellor is almost certainly preparing tax concessions for the well off. They will be able to get around in their motor cars, while those without cars who depend upon public transport will see the orders as a blow against them and against West Yorkshire in particular.

11.3 pm

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): Although I disagree fundamentally with many of the Opposition's comments, I start with a tribute to the achievements of the West Yorkshire PTA and the imagination which has been shown by the authority and its chairman, Councillor Simmons. During the past year or two the authority has moved ahead with its proposals to open a new station at Silsden and Steeton. It has already opened a station at Frizinghall and has imaginative plans to reintroduce trolley buses in the West Yorkshire conurbation. The authority is to be commended on those proposals, which will make a valuable contribution to the future of public transport in the area.

Despite all the prognostications we have heard, public transport is flourishing in our part of the world. We were told that the end of the world would come after bus deregulation, but, with a considerably reduced subsidy, the bus network is just as good as it was before. New services have come into existence.

Mrs. Mahon: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would be interested to hear about the Yelloways bus company in my constituency. The people stand back when the bus arrives because it breaks down regularly. There have been numerous letters in the local newspapers about that private bus company which has come into existence since deregulation. It is a nightmare.

Mr. David Mitchell: What did the hon. Lady say was wrong with the bus?

Mrs. Mahon: There are so many things wrong with that bus company that people now stand back and wait for the regular bus. The private bus breaks down on the moors. It has even been set on fire. There have been so many complaints that it has become a legend in its short life.

Mr. Waller: I cannot speak for the hon. Lady's area, but I have spent some time this evening in the company of the traffic commissioner for West Yorkshire. I do not wish to involve him in political controversy, but I am sure that he would take the view that there has been no deterioration in safety and reliability.

New services have come into operation in my constituency and are welcomed by people for whom public transport was not available in the past. Cross-subsidy was a wasteful form of assistance for public transport. When people can see where the support is coming from and relate it to particular services, there is a much more efficient form of support for public transport.

It is easy to suggest that, unless more money is available, concessionary fares and support for the disabled will go. It is a question of priorities. There is no need for support to be withdrawn from concessionary fares or from help for the disabled, if the passenger transport authority were to run services in a more businesslike way, as has happened in Greater London. We were told that, if fares were set at an economic level in Greater London, people would desert public transport. Quite the reverse has occurred. People have used the underground in enormous numbers. The same situation would arise in west Yorkshire.

Mr. Cryer: I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument with interest. Is he arguing that fares should be increased? Is that what he means when he uses the word "businesslike"? Is he saying that the cheap fares policy in London of "Fares Fair", having been replaced by a higher fares policy, is his solution to the transport problem? Is he now advocating higher fares for the people of Keighley? In a letter, the chairman stated clearly that, with the present precept order, services, including new stations, for example at Airedale hospital, cannot be provided. Does he disagree with the chairman?

Mr. Waller: There has not been a great increase in fares in Greater London. The Greater London council forecast that there would be a great increase in fares, that services would be reduced and that stations would close. In the long term, we would not see that in West Yorkshire. It is nonsense to have a standard fixed fare for all rail services. Many of the people who use the services in Wharfdale and Airedale would be prepared to pay an economic fare, if it meant that their services did not disappear and if it led to the end of overcrowding. Until the passenger transport authority is prepared to run its affairs in a more businesslike way, there will be no guarantee that the rail services in West Yorkshire will be maintained.

Mr. Cryer: Does the hon. Gentleman want rail fares on the Ilkley-to-Bradford service and the Ilkley-to-Leeds service to be increased and the massive subsidy to be removed? Does he believe that the maximum fares that the market will bear should be imposed on those services?

Mr. Waller: Public support for those services will be needed for the foreseeable future. However, West

[Mr. Waller]

Yorkshire has held fares for periods of two or three years at a particular level, for no other reason than pure dogmatism, and it did not lead either to greater reliability or to greater security of service. If the PTA had paid more attention to the public support that exists for those services, it would have set fares at an economic level. I accept that in some cases fares would have been higher, but in the long term those services would have been secured for the public.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister not to provide more money for West Yorkshire but to stand firm and say that if the West Yorkshire PTA is prepared to run its services in a way that is appropriate for the people of West Yorkshire, by providing them with services at fares that they are prepared to pay, that will ensure the best security. If Michael Simmons and his colleagues are prepared to run the services on businesslike lines, there is a very great future for the rail, bus and trolley bus services in West Yorkshire. Without such a policy, the outlook is bleak.

11.12 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): I am intrigued by the reference of the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) to the Conservative party's brave new world of increased fares. He does not understand how fares are applied in west Yorkshire or in any of the metropolitan passenger transport authority areas.

If the operators were to increase fares, there would be no financial benefit for the PTA; the money would remain with the operators. If the PTA should decide to increase fares, that money would go straight into the operators' pockets. The hon. Gentleman's contribution was based on complete ignorance of the new system of financing passenger transport in his area and on his strong determination to push up fares for the public in Keighley and throughout the whole of west Yorkshire.

I invite the Minister to comment on the hon. Gentleman's peroration. Does he accept that fare increases would be a legitimate way to fund the PTAs? I am sure the Minister agrees with me that that is not a practical option. I hope that he will also say whether he endorses the hon. Gentleman's view that fares should be increased in the west Yorkshire area, and in Keighley in particular.

Mr. Cryer: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is typical of the Tories to come here in their dinner suits and frilly shirts, having been wining and dining, no doubt at someone else's expense, and argue for increased fares for ordinary people?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. I honestly thought that the hon. Member for Keighley was one of the new breed of minibus drivers, wearing the new uniform for the new high-fares, high-society bus service on offer in the Keighley area. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) made one of his more profound interventions. He probably does not realise that we are not yet discussing Merseyside.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): We will be.

Mr. Lloyd: We will be; and I look forward to hearing the hon. Gentleman's contribution then. If he could defer his remarks for the time being, we shall be discussing Merseyside seriously later.

This is a serious debate about the real financing problems of the authorities. West Yorkshire has been covered by my hon. Friends the Members for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). Let me put it on record from the Front Bench that we feel that West Yorkshire has been cheated. It would be wrong to say that West Yorkshire has been picked out specially because the three authorities are all suffering in the same way. However, West Yorkshire has specific problems and there are specific reasons for complaining about the financial settlement, given the very small amount of public money going to West Yorkshire.

That is a matter of some regret. The settlement will have an impact on the services that my hon. Friends have mentioned and on fares—especially concessionary fares. We should bear in mind that the Secretary of State promised that concessionary fares would be safe under the new round of financing of the PTAs. That has simply not happened. Services to the disabled, too, will either have to be truncated or will not go ahead to the degree to which they should.

As my hon. Friends have covered West Yorkshire, I shall put on record a few facts about Greater Manchester. Greater Manchester finds itself strapped. It is no good the Minister saying that things can carry on as they have over the past year in Greater Manchester, or indeed in West Yorkshire, because they cannot. There is simply not scope for that, given that about £10 million has been lost from a budget of £90 million. The subsidy that can be provided to the rail services will be affected, as will concessionary fares and fares for special services, especially those for the disabled. Whether in West Yorkshire or in Greater Manchester, those who will bear the brunt of this disinvestment in public services will be the elderly, those who have to rely on public transport, young people, schoolchildren and the disabled.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) referred to the Government's long-term plans. It is a matter of considerable concern to Opposition Members that the Government are basically hostile to public transport. The Minister for Public Transport himself is on record as having complained bitterly about the competition provided by Greater Manchester Buses — the local authority-owned transport operative. Effectively, the Minister has said that he does not like competition when it comes from the public sector. Competition is fine when it is from Yelloways, which cannot provide an adequate service; but it is not fine when it comes from the public sector.

As with the Health Service and education, at least part of the underfunding is a attempt to belittle the public services provided for those of our people who rely on them. We believe that the systematic dismantling of those services is being undertaken with a view to making out the case for the breaking up of existing structures.

We are very concerned about the financing of the PTAs in years to come. In particular, we are concerned about the breaking up of the PTAs and the invitation that is apparently to go out to the district authorities and the metropolitan areas to consider opting out. It would help if the Minister gave a firm commitment here and now that the Government do not intend to enforce that, that they do not intend to continue to underfund the PTAs, and that they do not intend that the public transport network should be broken up in West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester. Even if he puts that on record, my hon.

Friends and I are unlikely to believe it, because the orders we are considering tonight mean precisely that — the dismantling of good public transport.

11.19 pm

Mr. David Mitchell: The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) made great play of the dating of a letter. So that the matter may be clear, may I point out that the letter was sent on 1 February, but I had approved it on 26 January and there was a slight delay in dispatch. If the hon. Gentleman knows the volume of post that goes through a Department, he will appreciate that he is not on to a fair point.

The hon. Gentleman prophesied doom and gloom, as did other hon. Members. Perhaps he will be a little shame-faced when I remind him of the prophecies of doom and gloom that have been made about bus deregulation ever since the Government proposed it and how extraordinarily different from the prophecies the facts have turned out to be, with substantial benefits in many parts of the country.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether we intended to break up the passenger transport authorities by engineering that districts would opt out. Section 42 of the Local Government Act 1985 gives the Secretary of State power to provide for a metropolitan district to secede wholly or partially from its PTA. So far none has wanted to do so. No change is proposed in the legislation. The proposed new arrangements for local government finance will not affect the powers one way or the other. If a metropolitan district wishes to opt out, as some may do, the possibility is already there. It will not arise as a result of the order or of any plans which the Government have up their sleeve.

The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) drew attention to an assertion by Councillor Simmons that 200 jobs would be lost. I cannot understand the logic of what the hon. Member said, because the PTA would not be in a position itself to lose 200 jobs. If he is referring to a particular bus company operating in the area, I can only say that the staffing levels of different bus companies may change as their fortunes fluctuate. One bus company may contract and another may grow, but I have no reason to believe that there will be a general scaling down in the level of jobs in the bus industry.

Mr. Madden: Councillor Simmons said in his statement that, as the PTA was withdrawing support from services and was being compelled to reduce expenditure, there was a danger that 200 jobs of drivers and maintenance staff were in jeopardy. Does the Minister believe that Councillor Simmons is right or wrong in that assertion? It has to be one or the other.

Mr. Mitchell: He will probably be proved wrong, as he has been proved wrong on a number of occasions in the past. After all, it was prophesied that bus deregulation would produce massive reductions in the bus network. In fact, there has been a 6 per cent. increase in the network in West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester. We were told that there would be substantial cuts in essential rural services, that passes for the elderly would be abandoned and that there would be an increasing burden on ratepayers, but none of those prophecies has proved to be true.

Therefore, the hon. Gentleman cannot rely on Opposition spokesmen in the PTA areas in various parts of the country any more than he can rely on the track record of his hon. Friends who served on the Committee on the then Transport Bill in 1985 to give a reasonable account of what might happen. It has not worked out in the way that has been prophesied.

Last year the West Yorkshire PTA cried wolf that the roof would fall in. It has not. Between 1986 and 1987, and from 1987 to 1988, bus miles fell slightly from 61·93 million to 61·8 million—a fractional change.

Even train mileage rose in the same period, from 2·46 million to 2·53 million. There was thus an increase in overall mileage, taking bus and train mileages together, which was certainly against the prophecy that there would be a decline.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Is it not the case, however, that West Yorkshire has been using its reserves to keep up the mileage?

Mr. Mitchell: I shall be happy to deal with reserves, which seem sometimes to be more than we expect. It is possible that that trend will continue.

Mr. Hughes: Not for ever.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman says that that trend will not continue for ever. Perhaps it will not, but one is surprised at it, to the extent that some reserves appear for both PTAs and PTEs.

Mr. Waller: Despite the fact that bus mileage has not increased, and perhaps has slightly reduced, does my hon. Friend accept that, as a result of deregulation, it is certain that bus services conform much more closely with those demanded by the public, compared to those which existed previously?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the results of deregulation——

Mr. Cryer: He is not right.

Mr. Mitchell: That my hon. Friend is right is an indication that he is much more in touch with what is going on than the hon. Gentleman, who is jeering at him.

My hon. Friend is right because one of the results of bus deregulation has been that far closer attention has been paid to what the customers want, and the services have been tailored much more closely to what the public want than happened in the days of regulation, when services were run whether or not they were used.

The hon. Member for Bradford, West has argued that spending per head in West Yorkshire is constrained below that of other PTAs. The per capita expenditure in West Yorkshire, at £28·80, is above that of the west midlands, at £24·60, and not far below that of Greater Manchester. Although I understand the point he is making, he should not put too much weight on it.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) regretted that the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments had been rushed. I understand that criticism, but there was no intention to do that. The orders relating to Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire were laid on 29 January for consideration when the Committee sat on 2 or 9 February. The Merseyside order was laid later than that because of a delay by the PTA. In a like manner to the first two, it was laid in time for sittings of the Committee, and we are grateful that the Committee was able to consider it earlier today. It was not the responsibility of Government. I think that the hon.

[Mr. Mitchell]

Gentleman, on reflection, would not wish to leave his attack on officials as he originally set it. They have no opportunity of replying.

The hon. Gentleman feared that cuts in services would ensue. We were promised this before by the Opposition, but, as I have said, the size of the overall network increased by an average of 6 per cent.

I think that the hon. Member for Bradford, South was mischief-making when he asked my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) whether he was advocating increased fares on British Rail as a way forward, because the hon. Gentleman is well aware that British Rail succeeded in reducing the amount of subsidy which it requires to operate broadly the same network by 27 per cent. over the three years from 1984 to 1987 and a further 23 per cent. reduction is planned over the next three years.

There is no reason to assume that British Rail can make those reductions in the amount of subsidy it requires only in areas outside where section 20 applies. The hon. Gentleman knows that it is perfectly open to the PTE to negotiate over the value of the section 20s and to expect the same sort of improvements in productivity, efficiency and subsidy reduction to be secured in the PTE areas as has been achieved in other parts of the British Rail network.

The hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) claims that the lower precept will lead to unreliable services. I am sorry that she is not in her place at the moment, but I can say that reliability is a matter not of subsidy but of the efficiency of the operator. She fears that concessionary fares will be cut, but Ministers are satisfied that the PTE will have sufficient funds not to have to cut concessionary fares. These fears were expressed last year, but during the subsequent period West Yorkshire used the discretion which the Government gave to extend, not reduce, the categories to whom concessions apply.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley praised some of the aspects of the work of the West Yorkshire PTA and I am not suggesting that everything that Councillor Simmons and his friends do is wrong. That would be very unfair, and I accept that, as my hon. Friend says, there are good things and bad things. But we believe that the level of support provided in this order will be sufficient to provide the level of services that is appropriate in the area.

The hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) asked me whether I was advocating fare increases. That is a decision for the PTA and the PTE. They must consider the situation and make responsible decisions.

Mr. Cryer: Can the Minister confirm that the difficulty is that the precept is being cut for West Yorkshire, yet he is expecting it to make a bigger contribution to rail services? I mention particularly his attitude about the Settle-Carlisle railway.

Mr. Mitchell: I do not think that the Settle-Carlisle route is a matter that we should be debating tonight. If there were some contribution to be made by the West Yorkshire PTA or PTE, or by other councils, towards the repair of the Ribblehead viaduct, the sort of sums that would be required from councils collectively as a contribution to the costs would be so marginal to the budgets that we are talking about, that it is ridiculous for the hon. Gentleman to suggest that there is any correlation between them and the level of funding provided by the orders.

The hon. Member for Stretford said that the Government are against public transport. That is absolute nonsense. He knows perfectly well that on British Rail we have authorised large expenditure on modernisation of the rail network. I have myself approved more than £1,000 million in expenditure on capital investment in British Rail. To call that, or what has been done for the bus services, with the benefits of deregulation, the innovation that has been unleashed and the minibuses that are providing services all over the country, an attack on public transport is, as the hon. Gentleman knows, absolute nonsense.

I commend the orders to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 312, Noes 187.

Division No. 173] **[11.34 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan	Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Alexander, Richard	Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael	Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Allason, Rupert	Colvin, Michael
Amos, Alan	Conway, Derek
Arbuthnot, James	Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*	Cope, John
Ashby, David	Cran, James
Aspinwall, Jack	Currie, Mrs Edwina
Atkins, Robert	Curry, David
Atkinson, David	Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*	Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Day, Stephen
Baldry, Tony	Devlin, Tim
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*	Dickens, Geoffrey
Batiste, Spencer	Dorrell, Stephen
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony	Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Bellingham, Henry	Dover, Den
Bendall, Vivian	Dunn, Bob
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*	Durant, Tony
Benyon, W.	Emery, Sir Peter
Bevan, David Gilroy	Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Biggs-Davison, Sir John	Evennett, David
Blackburn, Dr John G.	Fairbairn, Nicholas
Body, Sir Richard	Fallon, Michael
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas	Farr, Sir John
Boscawen, Hon Robert	Favell, Tony
Boswell, Tim	Fenner, Dame Peggy
Bottomley, Peter	Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia	Fookes, Miss Janet
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*	Forman, Nigel
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*	Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Bowis, John	Forth, Eric
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes	Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Brandon-Bravo, Martin	Franks, Cecil
Brazier, Julian	Freeman, Roger
Bright, Graham	French, Douglas
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon	Fry, Peter
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*	Gale, Roger
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick	Garel-Jones, Tristan
Budgen, Nicholas	Gill, Christopher
Burns, Simon	Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Burt, Alistair	Glyn, Dr Alan
Butcher, John	Goodhart, Sir Philip
Butler, Chris	Goodlad, Alastair
Butterfill, John	Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Carrington, Matthew	Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Carttiss, Michael	Gorst, John
Cash, William	Gow, Ian
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda	Gower, Sir Raymond
Channon, Rt Hon Paul	Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Chapman, Sydney	Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Chope, Christopher	Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*	Gregory, Conal

Griffiths, Sir Eldon (Bury St E')
Griffiths, Peter (Portsmouth N)
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. (Epsom)
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. (B'ham H'll Gr')
Hargreaves, Ken (Hyndburn)
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen (Wolv' NE)
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas (Gr'th'm)
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, G. (Cannock & B'wd)
Howell, Rt Hon David (G'dford)
Howell, Ralph (North Norfolk)
Hughes, Robert G. (Harrow W)
Hunt, David (Wirral W)
Hunt, John (Ravensbourne)
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Timothy
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym (Cardiff N)
Jones, Robert B (Herts W)
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger (B'ham N'thfield)
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg (Derby North)
Knight, Dame Jill (Edgbaston)
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John (Pendle)
Leigh, Edward (Gainsbor'gh)
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim (Broxtowe)
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter (Fareham)
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew (E Berkshire)
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, P. (New Forest)
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John (Hendon S)
Martin, David (Portsmouth S)
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Mayer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew (Gedling)
Mitchell, David (Hants NW)
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M (N'hampton S)
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Morrison, Hon P (Chester)
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David (Taunton)
Nicholson, Miss E. (Devon W)
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, John (Oxford W)
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry (Wirral S)
Porter, David (Waveney)
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William (Corby)
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn (Conwy)
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David (Dover)
Shaw, Sir Giles (Pudsey)
Shaw, Sir Michael (Scarb')
Shelton, William (Streatham)
Shephard, Mrs G. (Norfolk SW)
Shepherd, Colin (Hereford)
Shepherd, Richard (Aldridge)
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley (Warwick)
Smith, Tim (Beaconsfield)
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim (Dorset W)
Spicer, Michael (S Worcs)
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan (Eastwood)
Stewart, Andrew (Sherwood)
Stewart, Ian (Hertfordshire N)
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian (Esher)
Taylor, John M (Solihull)
Taylor, Teddy (S'end E)
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. (Calder Valley)
Thompson, Patrick (Norwich N)
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John (Bridlington)
Townsend, Cyril D. (B'heath)
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill (T'side North)
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. (Bexhill)
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wiltshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George (Acton)
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kenneth Carlisle and
Mr. Alan Howarth.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony (Newham NW)
Barnes, Harry (Derbyshire NE)
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. F. (D'nt'n & R'dish)
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon (D'mline E)
Brown, Nicholas (Newcastle E)
Brown, Ron (Edinburgh Leith)
Bruce, Malcolm (Gordon)
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies (Fife NE)
Campbell, Ron (Blyth Valley)
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clark, Dr David (S Shields)
Clarke, Tom (Monklands W)
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank (Stockton N)
Cook, Robin (Livingston)
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, J.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alastair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil (Llanelli)
Davies, Ron (Caerphilly)
Davis, Terry (B'ham Hodge H'l)
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, James
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Ewing, Harry (Falkirk E)
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank (Birkenhead)
Fields, Terry (L'pool B G'n)
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Samuel
Garrett, John (Norwich South)
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie (Tottenham)
Griffiths, Nigel (Edinburgh S)
Griffiths, Win (Bridgend)
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hinchliffe, David
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George (Knowsley N)
Hughes, John (Coventry NE)
Hughes, Robert (Aberdeen N)
Hughes, Sean (Knowsley S)
Hughes, Simon (Southwark)
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
John, Brynmor
Jones, Martyn (Clwyd S W)
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony (Stretford)
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John

McAvoy, Tom
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKay, Allen (Penistone)
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David (Shettleston)
Marshall, Jim (Leicester S)
Martin, Michael (Springburn)
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill (Sheffield Heeley)
Michie, Mrs Ray (Arg'l & Bute)
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Ray (Ogmore)
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Reid, John
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan (Bootle)
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie (Dundee W)
Ross, William (Londonderry E)
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew (Oxford E)
Smith, C. (Isl'ton & F'bury)
Snape, Peter
Steinberg, Gerald
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Matthew (Truro)
Turner, Dennis
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth (Gower)
Warsing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael (Doncaster N)
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W. (Carm'then)
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Anthony
Young, David (Bolton SE)

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Precept Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft Precept Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.—*[Mr. David Mitchell.]*

Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority

11.47 pm

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): I beg to move,

That the draft Precept Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 4th February, be approved.

As in the case of the other two passenger transport authorities which we have just discussed, Merseyside did not accept the precept limit which was proposed to it by the Secretary of State. Like the other two authorities, it was notified of its proposed limit on 18 December and asked to give its response by 15 January. Although the authority told us by the due deadline that it would be appealing against its precept limit, it did not submit its detailed representations until 22 January. Members of the authority made oral representations to me on 25 January and the authority subsequently submitted further written information.

I am explaining all this as I am aware that the order for the Merseyside passenger transport authority was laid before the House on 4 February, a very short time before this debate. However, I felt it right to give the fullest consideration to the issues which Merseyside had put before us. Some of these were extremely complicated, and the process has inevitably taken some time.

We did in fact, after full consideration, decide to propose a higher precept limit to the authority than that which had been put to it on 18 December. We proposed an increase from 26·5p to 27p. As soon as we heard on 4 February that this increase was not acceptable to the authority, we tabled the order.

As I explained earlier, the maximum precepts were proposed only after several months of discussion on expenditure levels with the authorities. We originally proposed a limit of 26·5p. The new proposed precept limit of 27p will allow Merseyside to spend more than we originally envisaged.

In appealing against its proposed precept limit, the authority made a number of requests, some of which were addressed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. I can briefly summarise them as follows. The authority asked for an increased expenditure allowance for passenger transport over and above what it claimed it could afford with the proposed precept limit of 26·5p. The authority did not specify that this should be achieved through an increase in the precept. It asked instead that the Government should grant certain exclusions from the calculation of its total expenditure for block grant purposes, and thus reduce its grant penalties. It also asked for an extension of the powers to capitalise Mersey tunnel debt until 31 March 1989—the end of the financial year. Both those measures would have meant that extra funds would have been available to the authority.

I turn to the representations that the Merseyside passenger transport authority made—that part of its expenditure in relation to its bus company, ferries and tunnels responsibilities be excluded from total expenditure for the purposes of assessing its block grant entitlement. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the

Environment has considered its representations carefully and fairly and on their merits. He has, however, decided not to grant those exclusions.

I come now to the request by the authority that the power to capitalise Mersey tunnel debt charges should be extended until 31 March 1989 instead of 30 September 1988. For the past few years, the authority has been allowed to capitalise the accumulated interest charges on the debt still remaining from the construction of the tunnels. In other words, instead of paying the charges out of income, the authority has borrowed money to meet them and thus increased the debt still further. This was clearly something that could not be allowed to continue.

My right hon. Friend therefore decided that the power to capitalise the tunnel debt charges should be extended only for the first six months of the next financial year, and that in the next six months debt charges should be met in the normal way. I should point out that, even taking into account these charges, we have been able to propose a precept that reduces the burden on Merseyside ratepayers.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): I appreciate the logic of that argument, but why can certain gifts be given to those who run the Humber bridge, yet we cannot have a realistic view of the debts of the Mersey tunnels?

Mr. Mitchell: We are still awaiting firm proposals as to how the authority proposes to deal with the problem. At present, my right hon. Friend sees no need to change his decision on this matter.

The third element of the authority's case is that there was justification for an increased expenditure allowance generally.

Mr. Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter), I am sure that the Minister is aware of the importance of the Mersey tunnel crossing to the economy of Merseyside and the somewhat artificial barrier that it creates between Wirral and the other side of the river. In common with many of his right hon. and hon. Friends, he must be aware of the importance of the regeneration of the city of Liverpool, yet the imposition of these charges for the Mersey tunnel on the ratepayers of Merseyside can only add further to the problems of Liverpool. I urge him to talk to his right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport and ask them to look carefully at estuarial crossing policy throughout the country to see whether it can be reflected in the Government's intention to do something positive about the inner-city problems of Liverpool.

Mr. Mitchell: I assure my hon. Friend that we fully recognise the importance of the Mersey tunnel. I understand the implications of what he is saying. However, he has raised a number of points that are outwith the debate, about which I shall write to him.

The Merseyside passenger transport authority submitted an application for special financial assistance, but it did not contain any firm proposals for tackling the problem of accumulated debt. The authority did not specify what assistance it had in mind.

I return to the third element of the authority's case—that there was justification for an increased expenditure allowance generally. Since that cannot be achieved by changes in the block grant arrangement or by extended capitalisation, the only alternative is an increase in precept. After considering extremely carefully all the factors which had been put to us by the authority, we concluded that an increase in precept was justified to enable the authority to spend slightly above the expenditure level as originally redetermined. Although the authority rejected the increased figure of 27p which we proposed, that is the figure which we now seek to impose by order. I believe that it is entirely reasonable. It is still below last year's level of 28·48p, but enough to meet all reasonable needs. For that reason, I commend the order to the House.

11.55 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): The Minister has already been savaged by his hon. Friends on the important issue of the Mersey tunnel. I am a little surprised — */Interruption./* Well, the Minister and his hon. Friends on the Front Bench do not think that they have been savaged so I invite those hon. Gentlemen to make sure that they do the job properly in a moment or two.

For Merseyside the issue is serious. The tunnels and the ferry service are both important in transport terms but they are also important — this is where I was a little confused by the Minister's comments—in the context of the order. The drain on finances posed by the ferries—about £3 million a year, which must be provided by the PTA and by the tunnel when the Secretary of State's refusal to extend the power to borrow takes effect in September this year—will have a serious impact on the ability of the PTA to fund everything else that it wants to do. Therefore, the tunnels and the ferries are both involved in the order.

I am a little surprised that the Minister should have been surprised when the PTA in Merseyside rejected the increase of a halfpenny in the precept. In theory, a halfpenny rate would yield £900,000 to the Merseyside PTA. However, of that £900,000, the Government immediately take back £400,000. Therefore, the government had on offer only £500,000. That may be a large sum to individuals, but to the PTA which has an operating budget of £68 million it was grossly inadequate to compensate for the rate of inflation that it had experienced. That is why it was totally unacceptable to the PTA and why the PTA has rejected it.

Merseyside is already to lose about £4 million in block grant back to central Government, which means that there is an effective reduction of about £7 million in the moneys available to the PTA. That will have a dire impact on the ability of the PTA to fund its programmes.

Like two authorities that we discussed in the previous debate, Merseyside has very little flexibility in its decision-making. It has about £10 million in loan charges. That is a committed cost. In fact, it had to incur some of those costs when the Government forced it to set up the present arrangements for passenger transport on Merseyside. Therefore, it is having to pay loan charges on Government-induced debt. It has £6 million-worth of funding for pension schemes. Again, that is committed financing. It has also committed about £50 million to British Rail on the Mersey Rail scheme under the section 20 grant system.

Because of its statutory nature, the notice required to abrogate that agreement will be about 12 months. All that money is committed—certainly in the short run, in this next financial year. That means that the soft money—

[Mr. Tony Lloyd]

the margin for manoeuvre—comes down once again to concessionary travel and the authority's ability to subsidise services.

The hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) looks amazed by that assertion, but the truth is that the hard decisions must be made in the area of this £25 million.

Mr. Porter: Economic fares.

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman does not understand how the fare system operates. It is now under the control of the operators of non-tendered—for services. If they increase fares, the money will go directly into the profits of the operators. If the hon. Member for Wirral, South and his hon. Friends are advocating increased fares on Merseyside, the Minister—and the public on Merseyside — should take note. The policy of Conservative Members representing Merseyside constituencies is one of dearer fares for the travelling public of Liverpool.

Mr. Porter: Bus fares should be economic.

Mr. Lloyd: The services that are not out to tender are already, by definition, economic. They are the ones on which operators are making a profit.

The Conservative Government told us that it was economically fair for local authorities to provide only the subsidies and for operators to put in bids to tender for those services, thereby arriving at the most economically efficient way of funding the subsidised services. The Minister will be interested to learn that he no longer enjoys the confidence of his Back Benchers in these matters. He never had ours; we know what happens.

We know that services get worse. The quality of bus services on Merseyside will get worse, and those, such as schoolchildren, young people and the elderly, who depend on the services, will find that the price of transport will increase—not only because the hon. Member for Wirral, South wants them to, but because the discretionary fare system will be dismantled. If it is not, the alternative will be a weakening of the services that are put out to tender. The infrastructure of the whole transport system on Merseyside will be weakened. That will not affect the more prosperous areas on the Wirral, but it will affect areas in inner Liverpool, such as Ellesmere Port—it is not too far from the seat of the hon. Member for Wirral, South —in which people depend on public transport.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): As the hon. Member who represents the eastern edge of Merseyside, where we have no ferry tunnel and are utterly reliant on bus services, and where the hospitals and factories are a long way from the housing estates, I ask my hon. Friend whether he agrees that, unless we have an adequate bus service, many people will not be able to visit relatives in hospital or go anywhere else. Without a service that people can afford, they will stagnate in their homes and be left considerably disadvantaged.

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend is right. His point about the affordability of services is all-important. The issue is not the market price, but an affordable public transport system for those who need it.

The hon. Member for Wirral, South was prepared to make the case for his vested interest in the ferry service and the tunnel. Is he prepared to justify that in terms of public money, too? We shall, because we recognise the value of public investment in transport and of the crossings over and under the Mersey. Those are important for the regeneration of Merseyside, to which we are committed. We shall not hear that the Minister is, I fear. We shall be interested to hear what promises he makes about these things. We are committed to a decent transport system in St. Helens, in inner Liverpool and in areas in which people depend on the bus and rail services.

I want to press the Minister about the tunnel. The tunnel's annual debt to the PTA is about £10 million. It may be arguable that that should be funded from revenue rather than from capital.

It would also be logical to accept that the present generation on Merseyside has a tunnel that would pay for itself if it were not for the accumulated debt of previous years. That debt is not the capital cost involved, but the accumulated loss that the Government allowed to build up. It is necessary to recognise the importance of that debt.

The Government are prepared to accept that there is a case to be made for writing off the debt on the Humber bridge—some £190 million, which represents two thirds of the total cost. Surely the Government would be prepared to do the same for the Mersey tunnels, which have an outstanding debt of £115 million. That sum would be less of a drain on the public purse than £190 million. I am sure that the hon. Member for Wirral, South does not mind spending public money for his constituents. If the debt was written off, the tunnels would be able to operate on a break-even, or perhaps a profit, basis. That would significantly affect the ability of the PTA to fund all its other services—concessionary fares and other subsidised services.

Mr. Porter: Am I to understand that it is now official Labour policy to write off the debt of the Mersey tunnels? If that is the case, it is extremely strange, because I suggested that to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) before the election and he would not accept it.

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman must take up the specific argument about what was or was not said in conversations with my hon. Friend in which I took no part.

If the Humber bridge debt can be written off, we believe that the same can be done for the Mersey tunnels.

Mr. Porter: The listening party.

Mr. Lloyd: That is correct. I wonder what the hon. Gentleman will say about the listening capacity of the Minister—

Mr. Porter: He is a fine man.

Mr. Lloyd: I am sure he is, but is he a listening man? Will he accept the logic of that argument on behalf of Merseyside?

The finances of the PTA must allow it to provide decent transport for the public and especially for the people of Merseyside. We must ensure that we avoid the most vulnerable groups suffering as a result of an increase in concessionary fares and a reduction in the transport needs of the disabled. That will happen if the order goes through and that is why my hon. Friends from Merseyside will no doubt be listening carefully to what Conservative Members say to the Minister.

12.7 am

Mr. Terry Fields (Liverpool, Broadgreen): I do not wish to detain the House for too long, but I believe that it is important that we put on record our total opposition to the Government's stand on the Merseyside passenger transport authority.

The Government's transport policies have already taken their toll in places such as Merseyside. The deprivation of transport facilities has meant that older people have been unable to leave their houses to travel to friends. Sickness has resulted from redundancies in the Merseyside PTA. The untimely death of Ken Peaney, a Transport and General Workers Union official, whose work involved deregulation and job losses, is a sad loss to the Labour movement on Merseyside.

Tonight's debate is about the maximum precept level as it applies to Merseyside. Today a group of school-children from my constituency went round the House and they discussed the standard of debate in the Chamber. I had to point out to them that, given their monetarist views, the Government are not prepared to listen to the cogent argument. Indeed, they have not listened to the Merseyside PTA, which outlined the on-going problems of the area and on which the Government have, in so many ways, turned their back.

The decisions that have been taken in respect of Merseyside passenger transport authority, irrespective of the debate going on, are grotesquely unfair to the ratepayers of Merseyside, the unemployed, the poor and the needy and will mean that Merseysiders will pay almost double for the services they receive in the future.

The timetable of discussion and consultation referred to by the Secretary of State included the settlement on 4 February of the requests from Merseyside. Included in the letter to the Merseyside authority, indicating a precept level of 27p rather than 26·5p, was a statement that capitalisation on the Mersey tunnels would not be extended further than indicated.

The Secretary of State further stated that no total expenditure exclusion would be granted, which meant no reduction in grant penalties. The notification offered the local authority the opportunity to spend a further £500,000, but such expenditure would result in grant penalties of £400,000 and require ratepayers to pay a further £900,000 to achieve the extra halfpenny precept.

In expressing the views of the authority, I have to say clearly on behalf of Merseysiders that we express considerable concern that the Secretary of State has failed to accept the arguments put forward in the authority's appeal against its proposed determination of the precept for 1988-89 and has decided not to grant the request made for exclusions from grant penalties and extension of capitalisation powers. The authority records that its appeal was designed to obtain an increase in spending capacity on the basis that this could and should have been achievable without any increase in precept. The authority feels unable to agree the increase in the precept proposed by the Secretary of State.

Reference has been made on several occasions to the Humber bridge authority and the Mersey tunnel authority. Massive assistance has been given to the Humber bridge authority. We are not getting into the game of playing one authority off against another; all we are asking for on Merseyside is a fair crack of the whip. The authority finds it ironic that, immediately following its specific and detailed request for Government assistance, it is expected for the first time to require ratepayers to pay £4 million towards the financing of the tunnels because of the capitalisation decision. The authority is concerned that in order to achieve this the ratepayers of Merseyside will be required to find a further £3·6 million because of grant penalties imposed by the Government as a direct consequence of the action.

Additionally, in relation to the cost of the establishment of the bus company, under compulsion of legislation and Government direction, the authority is committed to spend £5 million in 1988-89 which is not recognised for grant purposes and which therefore results in the imposition of grant penalties of £4·5 million. The statutory requirement to operate a ferry service presently costs £2·5 million per annum without grant recognition and with the imposition of further grant penalties.

Young people today think that, on matters affecting working class areas of Liverpool, the Government have a closed mind. The cogent argument put forward by the city of Liverpool has not been responded to, even at this late stage. The Merseyside passenger transport authority, in the final paragraph of a letter to Merseyside hon. Members says:

> "The Authority emphasises that it continues to wish to work with Government. The Authority wants to reduce the precept and this is still possible if it is treated fairly by Government. Good transport effectively run is essential to Merseyside and its hopes for urban regeneration."

I have no such illusions about the response we will get from the Government. The decisions taken on Merseyside, as in south Yorkshire and Manchester, were taken with no level of discussion. No argument will influence the Government in their pursuit of monetarist policies, to privatise the services further and cut back on the service needed urgently and desperately in places such as Merseyside. I have no illusions, and I hope that the people of Liverpool will wake up to what the Government are doing in all areas of public service that are currently under attack.

12.14 am

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Earlier this evening we discussed orders affecting west Yorkshire and Manchester. The House has now turned its attention to Merseyside, an area which will be particularly badly hit if this order is agreed. For once, I find myself in agreement with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) and I endorse his comments. Merseyside Members will be united in saying to the Minister that there are special circumstances in Merseyside which ought to be taken into account before the order is agreed.

I spent last Friday morning with officials of the passenger transport authority. They have been abominably treated in a cavalier manner. At noon last Thursday, a letter outlining the Minister's decision was faxed to Liverpool by the Department of Transport. It was sent to "the passenger transport association". The Department could not even get the name right. The letter was sent to the residuary body. The Department could not even get the address right. The letter sought a reply by 4 pm that day, four hours later.

The substance of the letter was that the Government would allow a precept of 27p in the pound, rather than 26·5p in the pound, a variation of 0·5p. With inadequate funds to meet its commitments, the PTA will be forced to

[Mr. David Alton]

make swingeing cuts in services and fares will rise yet again, bus fares having risen by 15 per cent. and rail fares by 40 per cent. last year alone on subsidised services. Last July, the Secretary of State announced that there would be an expenditure level of £58·5 million for the PTA in 1988-89. The authority, without any provision for growth because it had not put forward a budget based on growth, said that it required £71 million and it was subsequently able to try to reduce that to £67·1 million. The Government responded in this order by allowing for only £64·1 million.

The consequence of that shortfall for the greater Liverpool area, where car ownership is lower than anywhere else in England, is appalling. It places at risk the concessionary travel scheme in an area where one in four is over retirement age and the fastest growing group is the over-80s. This will not do. The PTA will simply not have the funds to run the concessionary fares scheme. The hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) shakes his head in disbelief, yet, in its letter to the Minister of 22 January, the PTA states:

"Reductions of this magnitude of severity would cause serious damage to the bus network and bring into question the ability of the Authority to preserve its Concessionary Travel Scheme."

It is not just a question of the concessionary travel scheme. According to the PTA, Sunday services, daytime subsidised services and early morning industrial services will all be at risk. Two thirds of the PTA's commitments to British Rail are committed in advance. The PTA says that the only savings which can be made on rail services are by closing down entire lines. The hon. Member for Wirral, South and I are both concerned, therefore, about the future of the Wirral line. This is especially foolish at a time when the Mersey rail network has been growing successfully and has been attracting more passengers.

If the consequences are dire for passengers, the consequences for ratepayers of this grotesquely unfair settlement are even more serious. Merseyside ratepayers will suffer more than anywhere in Britain because of the way in which the block grant works and because of the way that it affects them. For the first time, local ratepayers will have to find the cost of the Birkenhead and Wallasey tunnels. That will be £4 million for the last half of this fiscal year, but we can double that because the Government, by imposing a £3·6 million penalty, will claw back into central Government coffers almost as much again.

In the full financial year 1989-90, the cost of running the tunnels will be £8 million, which will earn the Government an additional £7 million in penalties—£15 million in total. All that assumes a 10p increase in the toll cost of cars going through the tunnels and a 60p increase to £1·80 for heavy goods vehicles. If that is the Government's idea of reviving the economy and making it easier for commerce to prosper, they will have to do better than that.

The Government are to give nothing towards the tunnels. They have promised no aid. They have forced the entire burden on to the ratepayers. The Government then take advantage by imposing grant penalties of £7·5 million a year. Every single rate bill next year in greater Liverpool, whether domestic, commercial or industrial, will be 4·2p in the pound higher than it need be, and in future years it will be 8p more in the pound, just to pay for the tunnels.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) has pointed out to me that the bill for Southport ratepayers alone will be £500,000 a year more.

Mr. Bermingham: Is it not a little ironic and unfair that if a road is constructed from Brighton to Bournemouth it will be absolutely free to ratepayers but that if a tunnel is constructed across the Mersey it will be a burden on Merseyside ratepayers?

Mr. Alton: It is very unfair. The Government's solution will probably be to impose tolls on new roads that are constructed between Bournemouth and Eastbourne as well as ensuring the continuance of tolls on the Mersey tunnel.

Last summer the Department of Transport said:

"Ministers will expect ratepayers in Merseyside to meet a fair proportion of the costs of the tunnels from which they benefit."

But in nobody's terms can this be regarded as fair. Comparison has already been made with the Humberside area. The Humber bridge cost £280 million, £190 million of which was written off in December. That will save ratepayers in that part of the country £20 million a year. We are not asking for Government handouts; we are asking for equitable, fair and similar treatment.

The Minister has already assured the House that he will look further at this question. I hope that when he takes all these arguments into account he will recognise that the Mersey tunnels ought to be a bridge, not a barrier, to the development of commerce on Merseyside and that they ought to be an integral part of the national road network.

The ferries on Merseyside are also a special case. The passenger transport authority cannot choose whether to operate them; it is bound by law to operate them, yet it receives no grant-related expenditure assessment in respect of the ferries. They are being operated at a deficit of between £2·5 million and £3 million a year. With penalties, that deficit can be doubled. In 1988 it will cost about £5 million to operate the ferries. The ratepayers must find £5 million for the privilege of operating the ferries, half of which is a fine that has been imposed by Whitehall.

Mr. Barry Porter: Has not the historical reason for ferries as a means of commuter transport now gone? As a quid pro quo, ought not my hon. Friend the Minister to consider how to continue to operate the ferries in return for sympathetic treatment of the tunnels?

Mr. Alton: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The ferries should be seen in the context of the revival of the whole river front. I hope that the inner-city partnership will look on the Mersey ferries as a possible tourist attraction on Merseyside. The river is coming alive again. It would be tragic if the ferries had to close. Therefore, I hope that the Government will consider the hon. Gentleman's suggestion.

Another special factor that should be taken into account is that, when the PTS was established, 2,000 employees were shed by the local PTA, yet the Department of Transport recognises only half of those employees for grant purposes. They cost our local PTA far more than any other PTA that we have been considering—a total of about £6 million extra in pension costs, and half that sum attracts penalties.

As for Liverpool airport, in a letter of 22 January from the PTA to the Department of Transport it was estimated that the authority may have to find £2·5 million this year to subsidise the airport, because of the penalties involved. I hope that the Minister will say something about the effects on the airport and its future.

The final special factor on which I should like the Minister to say a word or two is the original cost of establishing the PTA on Merseyside—about £8 million. That money had to be borrowed, and it is now costing the PTA £1·2 million in loan repayments each year.

Before 1985, none of those factors existed as a direct burden on Merseyside ratepayers. They are a direct consequence of the Transport Act 1985. In all, the Government should disregard about £10 million of expenditure for penalty purposes. If they did that, it would reduce the precept burden on ratepayers by about 5·5p in the pound.

The views that I have advanced are supported by all political parties in the conurbation. Tonight's order must be seen as part of a pattern, yet there are special circumstances on Merseyside. Nationally, expenditure this year on roads will increase by about 13·2 per cent. In contrast, investment in public transport will decline. More resources will be expected to be found from increased fares. Fares on railways will increase by about 6 per cent. and on coaches and buses by about 7 per cent.

Since the Transport Act 1985, the passenger has become a second-class citizen and public transport has had Cinderella status. The Government have made Beeching's Act look like a blunt knife. For the 60 per cent. who rely on public transport, the Government's policies have been a disaster. Orders such as these make public transport in some parts of the country an endangered species; in other parts of the country, it is already extinct, thanks to the 1985 Act. It is for those reasons that the Liberals and their friends will resist the orders.

12.28 am

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): A sound case had been advanced tonight. On one matter—the Mersey tunnel — there is consensus across the Benches and between the parties, of which the Minister would do well to take note. There is a rainbow coalition, which would do justice to my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), in operation tonight. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) and the hon. Members for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) and for Crosby (Mr. Thornton) are all in agreement on that point. It is clear that we are not making cheap party political points; we are making a serious point about a matter of great concern to the people of Merseyside.

The Minister should explain to the House—people on Merseyside are anxious to know about this—how he can argue that the £7 million that the PTA believes it needs to operate services effectively will not cut into concessionary services. Merseyside PTA is clear that the victims of the order will be those who use early-morning, late-night and weekend bus services. Let us examine each of those in turn.

A change in early-morning bus services must have an impact on the economy. By and large, people use early-morning buses as a means of travelling to work. If we genuinely seek a revival of the Merseyside economy—we might disagree about how it should take place, but it is to be hoped that we all agree that it should happen—how do the Government suppose that people who have no transport will make their journey to work early in the morning?

The view on the Government Benches seems to be that the only people who would use late-night services are those whom we would rather not talk about in the Chamber, but often people have genuine reasons for using transport late at night. Hospital workers and many others often need public transport late at night. It is an inevitable consequence of the order that late-night services will be hit.

Weekend journeys will also suffer. That will affect people who want to keep in contact with their families and who want to make hospital visits. Merseyside PTA has voiced genuine fears about those services, as have the people of Merseyside. We want the Minister to try to allay those fears. The order is a concoction which does not square with reality or with the views of the passenger transport authority.

The tunnel, the ferries and other aspects have already been well aired and I will not detain the House by going over those arguments. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) pointed out, the net effect of the order will be that the very people that public transport should serve — those with few resources, the disabled and the elderly—will suffer. It is outrageous that even this Government should contemplate measures which would have that effect. It is yet another example of the Government disregarding totally the needs of the people on Merseyside and imposing dogmatic principles.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill touched on one worrying aspect — the fact that about 50 per cent. of the people on Merseyside do not have access to motor cars. Those 50 per cent., who are probably among the most vulnerable and poorest sections of the community, are likely to be hit hardest by the effects of the order. It is a despicable order. I hope that the debate will achieve a change of heart. Hon. Members who represent Merseyside agree on certain parts of the order. Therefore, I hope that the Minister will give further thought to it, because it has caused great concern on Merseyside.

12.32 am

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Unlike the other two passenger transport authorities which have already been debated tonight, Merseyside PTA has special considerations in its budgeting, because it is the only authority which is responsible for a major arterial tunnel and for an airport—indeed, it is the only airport which is run by a passenger transport authority—and it is the only authority which has had to manage a ferry service regulated by statute. There are major differences between Merseyside and the other authorities that we have been debating.

The people of Merseyside are always willing to pay for services, whether through the rates, fares or other charges, but they object to paying money which has been hard earned or hard come by. On Merseyside, 25 per cent. of the people subsist on social security benefits, but they object to money being paid out as penalties for grants on services that are never made.

The Mersey tunnel has never been grant-aided, yet tunnel income is expected to cover amounts that the Government decree when they determine grant penalty. The Minister passes off quickly the question of capitalisation, but that has been required of the Mersey

[Mr. Robert N. Wareing]

tunnel joint committee in the past and of the existing local PTA set up by the Government in the recent past. Why cannot capitalisation powers be extended at least until the end of this financial year?

It has been remarked that there is unity on this matter between Merseyside Members, irrespective of party. I am glad that the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) is present, because he is among those hon. Members who have pressed for the abolition of tunnel tolls. He will notice that, in stark contrast to the way in which the Government have treated the Humber bridge, and indeed the Channel tunnel, there has been no attempt to take away this burden from the Merseyside economy. The Mersey tunnel is as essential to the economy of Merseyside and the north-west of England as the Channel tunnel will be to the south-east or the London area. Consideration should be given to the all-party pressure to end this imposition on the people and economy of Merseyside.

The Mersey ferries have never been grant-aided, yet they cost more than £2·5 million a year to maintain. Despite the fact that there are no grants in relation to them, there is no protection from block grant penalties, which will be no less than £2·4 million for the financial year 1988-89.

The Mersey ferries have to continue operating because the authority is bound by statute to provide the service. The company is also bound as to how the ferry is run, including manning levels. The Department of Transport is the responsible Department for determining safety and safety measures on the ferries. The ferries still have a vital part to play, although they might perhaps decrease as a major form of transport. The ferries are one of the facets being used by the Merseyside tourist board to attract and generate income to the Merseyside economy. They are an income-generating facility for the people of Merseyside as well as for those who can enjoy the many benefits of Merseyside. We have much to be proud of, despite the impoverishment of many of our areas, largely due to the Government's economic policies.

Reference to manning levels should remind us that, as a result of the Transport Act 1985, there have been 2,000 staff cuts in the passenger transport undertaking because of deregulation. The local passenger transport authority, in its endeavours to cushion its staff against the rigours of unemployment, has introduced an early retirement scheme. The pension costs of that scheme are £2 million during 1987-88 and next year they will be £2·4 million. All this has been borne on the Merseyside PTE budget; none has come from the superannuation fund.

It has already been mentioned that the MPTE has loan charges of £1·2 million for each of the next 10 years. The reason for that, again, has been the need for working capital by Merseyside Transport Ltd., which was set up only because the Government dictated, through the Transport Act 1985, that it should be set up. Yet, despite that, the local passenger transport authority is faced with a block grant penalty for 1988-89 of £1·1 million. It is utterly ludicrous that any authority in this country should be penalised for expenditure which it does not itself wish to generate, but is forced to generate as a result of Government legislation.

The PTA has said that it needs an increase in expenditure of £4 million, not in order to be rash with taxpayers' money but to temper the scale of reductions in services in an area where we should be expanding services.

This is the Government who talk about an inner-cities policy. This is the Government who pretend that they are going to regenerate the inner cities. This is the Government who, by their policies, forced a 10 per cent. increase in fares as recently as last December.

All the people of Merseyside of all parties must be asking themselves what went wrong after the abolition of the Merseyside county council with its "fares fair" policy. It is rather interesting that the application that has now come from the Merseyside passenger transport authority has the support of representatives of all the political parties on the authority—Conservative, Liberal, Labour and other.

It has to be remembered that we are talking about an area in which 50 per cent. of the population do not own cars. In parts of my constituency, which is an outer suburb of Liverpool, and in parts also of the inner city, 75 per cent. of the people do not have the use of a car. I believe that any Minister of the Crown should look at the social background to the policies that he is introducing and should be willing to give some assistance to areas in real social need.

It would be highly regrettable if, despite all the assurance given by the Minister in the Committee on the Transport Bill — and we were both there — the concessionary fares policy were jeopardised. What we are seeing is precisely the sort of policy that the members of that Committee warned about and feared; and that policy will come about unless there is some concession by the Government to the social needs of people such as those of Merseyside.

It is asking for the moon from this Government, but I hope that the Minister will look at this matter again. If Conservative Members want to see any change in attitude on Merseyside to their Government, they had better start to whip them into line and consider the situation of people such as those whom Opposition Members represent.

12.45 am

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Some years ago I had the privilege of serving on a local authority in south Yorkshire. We began to understand that social mobility had a meaning. My colleagues and I realised that, if we reduced transport costs for the man in the street, we increased social mobility and in turn reduced social dependency.

I now have the privilege of serving the constituency of St. Helens, which is on the edge of Merseyside. We do not have a bridge, a tunnel or a ferry, but we have problems. For example, we are an area of high unemployment and our people have to move because of the way in which the town is laid out. Because we do not have cars in the numbers that people in other areas have them, we need public transport. We have the bus routes but we do not have the buses because the local PTE does not have the facilities to provide them. Thus, we have the passengers but not the buses.

As I look across the border, which runs beside my constituency, I think it tragic that Cheshire county does not have a tunnel or an airport or the problems of Merseyside because it does not have to fund those items. Yet the Minister expects us to fund everything because of

the geographical problems of Merseyside, which is divided by the Mersey. The boundaries are not of our making and we did not construct them. They were established in 1972 following Layfield and the local government legislation which followed.

That gave us Merseyside, with its river across which people must travel. There must be ferries and tunnels, and because we are on the western seaboard, it is important that we have an airport to enable us to compete. All those services cost money and we are expected to impose a levy comparable with areas such as Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Cheshire.

The people of St. Helens are expected to pay the price of being part of Merseyside. I do not criticise Merseyside, but this state of affairs is not fair. *[Interruption.]* The Minister should listen to me rather than talk to the Under-Secretary. One day, the south will learn that it fails at its peril to listen to the north. We in the north are fed up with being the whipping boys of the Government's transport policy. We want our fair share.

It must be nice to live in a shire county where transport is easy and pleasant. When the sick and elderly in my constituency want to visit the hospital on a Sunday afternoon and find there are no buses, what can they do? The trouble is that it is easy to ignore places such as my constituency. We are not a shire county and we do not have the advantages of not being a poverty area.

When we do our arithmetic, let us remember the geographical problems that areas such as St. Helens have. As I say, we have a river which people must cross, and our airport is not the most popular in the world because it is not near a massive industrial conurbation, with all the advantages that Manchester, Birmingham and London have. It has to be paid for.

Perhaps the Minister one day should ask himself a simple question: why should the people who live in St. Helens, on the edge of Cheshire, be disadvantaged because there is a boundary in the way? People living in Cheshire do not have to pay so much to obtain certain rights. When my constituents want to visit their relatives in hospital on a Sunday afternoon, ought they not to have a bus service, and ought not that service to be subsidised? Is that unreasonable?

12.50 am

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): I think it right to emphasise that there is a cross-party view about the specific difficulties of the totally unreal county — or geographical unit — of Merseyside, which have been expressed by the hon. Member for St. Helens, North, West, South or wherever he comes from——

Mr. Bermingham: South.

Mr. Porter: —by the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham).

It is important to realise and to re-emphasise that public transport on Merseyside involves specific difficulties. They are not general difficulties applying to other transport areas, and I make no apologies for stressing the difficulties of that second tunnel. It is ironic that, when the second tunnel was built, we had almost paid for the first; there is no way in which we can now pay for the second, unless we have entirely unrealistic tolls, whose effect would be that no one would use the tunnel. We would then be unable to pay, and the Government would have to do something about it. They have done something about the Humber. It is about time that they faced up to the fact that it would be cheaper to do something about this problem now than to do it in the future.

I suggest — this would not be terribly popular on Merseyside — that the Government should at least enter into discussion with the authority about the commuter business that the ferries are having to carry. In my view, it is entirely unnecessary. To see Beatles and people playing guitars travelling back and forth is very jolly on the films, but there is room for argument and negotiation.

I also take the point about Liverpool airport. Of course the north-west requires an airport, but surely there is room for negotiation with Manchester, and with the north-west in general, about what sort of facilities we have. At present, we have a tunnel, the ferries, and the airport, all of which are a general imposition on the ratepayers of Merseyside.

I understand the Government's general point of view, but I am no special pleader for Merseyside, and never have been. Many of our troubles are our own fault, but those relating to tonight's order are not, and they present particular and grievous problems.

As a loyal supporter—as always—I shall vote for the order tonight. However, I ask for a recognition in the winding-up speech of problems which are unique, and which deserve special recognition.

12.54 am

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): This has been a fascinating little debate. I had never realised that there was so much in common between my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields), the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) and the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter). On many issues, there has been almost complete agreement, right across the spectrum.

Some might argue that this was special pleading on behalf of Merseyside. If it was special pleading, I agree that it was justified for Merseyside has many problems. The hon. Member for Wirral, South has said that he had made no special pleading; it just so happens that Merseyside has unique problems. I do not wish to destroy this nice little coalition. It has all been very friendly, at 12.54 in the morning.

However, I must tell the hon. Gentleman that the other passenger transport areas in the country, where rural land and conurbations are mixed up, have particular problems. Conservative Members are prepared to join a coalition for their own areas but are not prepared to recognise our points about the need for integration and for special problems to be dealt with across the board.

The Minister has never given any justification for maximum precept orders of this kind. Why does he think that he knows better than the people on the ground? It is clear that the Members of Parliament for Merseyside accept, if not every line of Merseyside's submission, at least a sufficiently large part of it for its claims to be justified.

It has been calculated that the average ratepayer on Merseyside will save 5p a week as a result of the drop in the precept from 28·5p last year to 27p this year. For that extra 5p a week, we could have alleviated some of the problems that we face. I do not know why the Minister is so rigid in his belief that he and Whitehall know best.

[Mr. Robert Hughes]

There has been a strong plea for the tolls for the Mersey tunnel to come off. The trouble with the Government is that they do not know what they want to do. There is no consistency. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have referred to the Humber bridge. I do not think that the Government felt particularly generous towards the Humber; it was simply that the Humber faced a real financial crisis and unless something was done, the local authorities would have gone bankrupt. Therefore, the Government acted. Such an ad hoc solution does create resentment and lead to charges of inconsistency which, in many cases, are justified.

It is perfectly reasonable for the hon. Member for Wirral, South to ask where the Labour party stands on toll estuarial crossings, whether on tunnels or bridges. No doubt, if he had not done so, the Minister would have. I have made it perfectly clear in all my discussions with the motoring organisations, the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association, that I would be perfectly happy to see tolls disappear tomorrow. The only snag, which I would have made clear, is that I do not want the cost of that to fall on the Department of Transport budget.

There are those who say that they want more and better roads and rail and bus services. If the choice is doing away with the tolls today with the cost falling on the Department of Transport budget, or spending more money on roads, rail or bus services, I know what my choice would be. I would rather have the money to spend on new and improved services. As somebody once said, one cannot spend the same pound twice. However, there is another way of dealing with the matter, as the Select Committee on Transport suggested in the previous Parliament. I cannot remember the detail, but it entailed partly a write-off by the Secretary of State on the Treasury budget and partly the phasing out of the local authority share over a period of years.

The Minister must have some policy on all the toll crossings, and he must try to deal with people fairly. To some extent, he is hoist by his own petard with the Dartford-Thurrock crossing, which will be a toll bridge. He faces problems with leaks concerning the massive expansion of toll facilities on motorways and elsewhere. He will have to resolve that problem quickly.

The Minister rightly pointed out in the earlier debate that section 42 of the Transport Act 1985 permits district authorities to opt out of the PTA system. People are worried that the Department or the Ministry—either inadvertently, because they are not explaining themselves properly, or because they do not understand properly—is encouraging people to opt out. Will the Minister say that he is neutral on this matter and that he is not encouraging people to opt out? I would prefer him to go further and say that he is not neutral, but that he is positively encouraging district authorities to remain in the PTAs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will stick to Merseyside.

Mr. Hughes: That view has been expressed on Merseyside, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Minister has not explained why he is insisting on maximum levels, and I hope that he will do so now.

1.1 am

Mr. David Mitchell: The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), as a good Scot, said, "You cannot spend the same pound twice." Throughout the debate it has been clear that his hon. Friends were planning to do exactly that.

Mr. George Howarth: We do not want to spend the same pound twice. The problem is that, with this grant regime, the Government are taking it away twice.

Mr. Mitchell: Perhaps I should not have given way.

The hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) said that tunnels are important for inner-city renewal. I agree, but we are not planning to fill them in. To listen to the hon. Gentleman, anyone would think that we were planning to take the Mersey tunnels away.

The hon. Gentleman said that the burden of meeting debt charges was causing serious problems. We have taken into account six months of interest charges. Many observers might say that if the Mersey authority had faced up to the problem over the years it would not be so serious now. The sooner that the authority addresses its mind to the problem, the sooner we shall obtain results.—*[Interruption.]* It is all very well for the hon. Member for St Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) to get excited; I shall return to his contribution in a moment or two.

It is worth noting that the authority's accumulated debt has risen from £39·3 million in 1974 to £90·9 million in 1980. It is paying interest charges on that amount. It has failed to keep pace with toll charges over that period and it took only popular decisions to avoid facing financial reality, but now the chickens have come home to roost.

The hon. Member for Stretford referred to the debt as being only interest payments. Anyone who runs a business on the assumption that one does not have to pay interest on the money that one has borrowed is living in cloud-cuckoo-land.

The hon. Member for Stretford said that the Labour party is committed to a decent public transport system. So are we. The difference is that the Labour party is committed to it whatever the burden on ratepayers. We are seeking to obtain better value for money for ratepayers and to maintain a decent system of public transport.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) said that no level of argument would influence the Government. He cannot have listened to the opening speech—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friends are right. The hon. Gentleman certainly is not here to listen to the closing speech. The fact is that he did not listen to the opening speech. If he had, he would have known that I had demonstrated that the July expenditure limit was set at £58·5 million, that it was redetermined at £64·1 million, and further redetermined at £64·6 million. It is a total contradiction for the hon. Gentleman to say that we are not listening. We have listened and, as a result, we have acted, giving the increases which are set out in the order.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) referred to reduced funds having particularly severe consequences in an area of low car ownership, but that is simply another way of describing an area which is good bus-operating territory. If there is low car ownership, by its very nature that is an area which is good bus-operating territory.

The hon. Gentleman went on to say that the only way to secure economies on the rail network is to close a whole

line. That is spinning a line which is complete nonsense. The fact is that British Rail has managed to reduce its operating subsidy in the rest of the country by 27 per cent. between 1983-84 and 1986-87. There is no reason why it should not reduce its operating costs in the PTE areas as well. To suggest that the only ways in which those costs can be reduced is by closing a line is scaremongering.

Mr. Alton: Does the Minister accept that those points have been made by the PTA, which can hardly be accused of scaremongering because that is the body that is to suffer the effects of the penalties and is to be penalised by the 91p in the pound penalty which must be met? Two thirds of the commitments to British Rail have been guaranteed by contract, which the PTA has no choice but to maintain. Therefore, the only way in which it will be able to do anything, if it has to make reductions, is by entire line closures. It is not scaremongering.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. He cannot say that there is a contract which cannot be renegotiated and that it can close a line, which is obviously in breach of the contract. In any case, while the hon. Gentleman is bringing out these various morsels with which to entertain the House, he has failed to mention the fact that the PTA was planning to carry £5 million of reserves through to next year—*[Interruption.]* Yes, £5 million. My hon. Friends may well echo that sum. The precept limit assumes that only £3 million of that is drawn down. In addition to the PTA's reserves, the PTE has over £1 million of reserves. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will bear that factor in mind.

The hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth), who raised the problem of how people travel to work in the early morning, said that many face real problems in doing so. However, if significant numbers are travelling, as he claims, there may well be sufficient to warrant operating a bus. However, if there are not sufficient for that, it may well be that that a taxibus is appropriate.

The PTE might wish to consider a flexible approach to its tendering documents to encourage people to come forward with smaller vehicles. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) is muttering about taxibuses, but I advise him that when small numbers are to be carried, which do not make operating even a minibus viable, it makes sense to operate a taxibus. Moreover, the tender documentation should be drawn up in such a way as to encourage operators of small vehicles to come forward, because that is a more economic way to move small numbers of people. That is much more sensible late at night or in the early morning than sending round a double-decker bus with only six people in it.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) claimed that concessionary fares were at risk, as Opposition Members claim every time we lay an order with precept control before the House. Every time they have told us that concessionary fares will be seriously damaged or abandoned, and every time they have been proved wrong. I am sure the hon. Gentleman who is about to intervene will say the same thing.

Mr. George Howarth: My hon. Friends and I are not saying that; the PTA says that concessionary fares are at risk.

Mr. Mitchell: We are running late, and I do not want to detain the House except to say that the hon. Gentleman's alibi is the same as that used by Opposition Members last year and the year before, and it is as untrue now as it was on those occasions.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North raised the issue of the Humber bridge. When we have realistic proposals for the Mersey tunnels, we shall certainly give them careful consideration. The hon. Gentleman also asked me why we impose a precept. We do so because we have found from experience that that is an effective way of ensuring more economic operation of services, while maintaining the necessary levels of adequate services in an area.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 221, Noes 47.

Division No. 174] **[1.11 am**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Timothy
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael

Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Miss E. *(Devon W)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Alton, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Bermingham, Gerald
Blunkett, David
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Foster, Derek
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McAvoy, Tom
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Morley, Elliott
Mowlam, Marjorie
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
Pike, Peter
Reid, John
Rooker, Jeff
Skinner, Dennis
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Wareing, Robert N.
Wilson, Brian

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ronnie Fearn and
Mr. James Wallace.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Precept Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 4th February, be approved.

EUROPEAN LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That Mrs. Ann Clwyd be discharged from the Select Committee on European Legislation and Mr. Alan Meale be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

Telephone Talkabout Service

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Alan Howarth.*]

1.21 am

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I ought first to explain what Talkabout is. It is a telephone chat line on which adults can telephone a number and up to nine adults can come together for friendly conversation. There is another number which teenagers can telephone and be put together in a single conversation with up to nine teenagers.

I want to draw the attention of the House to the 1986 annual report of Oftel — the Office of Telecommunications—and in particular to the director general's statement in paragraph 1.32 where concern is expressed in regard to the Talkabout chat line. He said:

"British Telecom responded to the initial complaints about this service by taking measures to bring the cost of the service more clearly to people's attention and by stepping up monitoring arrangements designed to limit abuse of the system. I am waiting to assess customers' reaction to the service in the light of these measures. However I remain concerned about the service and, in particular, about the justification for promoting a special service to people who will not pay the bill — often the teenage children of the bill payer—and which the person who pays the bill would not wish to be provided."

British Telecom has created a monster which, like a time bomb, is ticking away in thousands of homes of unsuspecting parents. Very few parents today can be certain beyond reasonable doubt that they will not be blasted by the shock waves of an astronomical phone bill.

It is not good enough for British Telecom to refer to parental control. Talkabout is addictive and parents are not at home all the time. Parental control moves into action, but only when what has happened comes to their knowledge on receipt of a telephone bill which in some cases may exceed £1,000. I have even heard of a phone bill of more than £2,000 for a quarter as against the average of about £40, and these parents are very shocked indeed.

This British Telecom monster has other even more sinister and dangerous claws. Evil adults who prey on innocent children are cunning and devious. Despite so-called monitoring of the Talkabout chat lines, children are now being lured into meetings with potential perverts. I fear for their safety and, in some cases, their lives. There was an incident at the weekend involving three young girls who were lured into a meeting. It so happened that the youngster did not turn up and the children found themselves in a car with a youth and an adult. They were taken to a fair and a house by the man for about 20 hours and their parents were distraught.

I have fought for child protection for many years and never imagined that I would be having to appeal for common sense from the board of British Telecom. The recorded message service is becoming a bit of a rip-off. It is still offensive and, in some cases, is a front for the sale of pornographic videos, despite a code of practice and an independent panel.

I should like to tell the tale of two of my constituents. They are a respectable family, but their lad, aged 16, had played truant since Christmas. He had been spending all day on the Talkabout service, to which he had become addicted. To cover up his misdemeanours, he destroyed the telephone bills and reminders when they came through the post. His parents are good, hard-working people who like to pay their way. Their normal bill was £35 to £45 a quarter.

The parents phoned British Telecom to ask why they had not received a bill. They were told that they had been sent bills, to which they replied that they had not received them and that something must have happened to them. When they asked how much the bill was, the young girl at British Telecom told them that they had better brace themselves because it was very high, more than £1,000 for the quarter.

As British Telecom has introduced a service which the bill payers, the parents, do not want and do not wish their children to use, it should help to pay the bill and alleviate the dreadful worry of my constituents. They hate to get into debt, and they do not have the money to meet such a bill. They are absolutely shocked.

What is the solution to this problem? I appeal to British Telecom to do one of two things — to suspend the service immediately, which is unlikely, or to seek the bill payer's written consent with a fill-in slip on the bill so that parents can sign whether they want their children to be connected to this system. Alternatively, it should start to target industry more vigorously.

I can see great market value for British Telecom in industry. It has Network 9, the audio conference division. Directors, busy engineers and salesmen have to travel to hotels all over the country and their hotel and travel costs are a great expense for their companies. Those expenses could be cut if they met on the telephone, as some, although not enough, already do. I am pleased to publicise this service because it would make British industry more competitive and would take only a small slice of the hotel and travel trade. It would be a good area in which British Telecom could obtain growth, rather than at the expense of children with all the dangers involved.

British Telecom is a first-class company; it is the Rolls-Royce of British industry. It is a world leader in telecommunications and I wish that I had bought shares in it. However, I hope that it will be unnecessary to amend its licence and that the directors will respond to my call to stop, limit or control this nonsense.

In the meantime, I urge the Department of Trade and Industry to hold urgent talks with Oftel in the hope that we can defuse the situation if British Telecom feels that it is unable to respond to public opinion. I hope that it will listen to this call. The public are very worried about the turn of events. I hope that my small contribution this evening will in some way encourage British Telecom to play the game and seek a different angle to its marketing of what could prove to be a very lucrative system.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Does the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) have the permission of the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) and the Minister to speak in this debate?

Mr. Dickens *indicated assent.*

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. John Butcher) *indicated assent.*

1.30 am

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) and the Minister for allowing me to speak in this

[Mr. Terry Lewis]

debate. I did not intend to do so; my brief was merely to listen to what the hon. Gentleman had to say and, more importantly, to what the Minister had to say on this important subject.

You will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that a few weeks ago I raised the same issue under the Ten-minute Bill procedure. Events have moved rapidly since then. The cases to which the hon. Gentleman has referred are but two among many that have come to light since that time.

Talkabout is causing problems both for ordinary householders and for small business men. The research that I have carried out during the last three weeks has been costly. During the last few days, I have heard of adults using the teenage Talkabout line. Seven or eight people were using that line, but only three were talking. The others must have been listening. I listened in, purely in order to bring the results of my research to the attention of the House. The others — possibly the perverts to whom the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth referred — were waiting like jackals for the telephone number to slip out so that they could phone the teenagers.

Only today, I heard that Oftel has brought pressure to bear to ensure that subscribers have contracts for this service. I very much doubt whether that will be effective. Young people are very ingenious. They manage to get round many of the constraints that their parents place upon them. Parents have taken the telephone to work, but their children have obtained instruments and locked into the system. Other teenagers have ingeniously tapped out codes to get into the system. If youngsters are that ingenious, I suspect that they are ingenious enough to get round paper work.

Much more could be said about the Talkabout service and many more arguments could be advanced. Many of us — including, I hope, the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth — are committed to continuing the campaign against Talkabout and the other services that British Telecom is obliged to offer. The Department of Trade and Industry bears a very grave responsibility. Those who care deeply about the problems that are brought to their notice will press on with the campaign to have the telephone service cleaned up.

1.34 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. John Butcher): First, may I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) on securing an Adjournment debate on a topical subject that has recently received a great deal of attention. It is entirely consistent with his continuing campaign to defend the interests of young people and children, and the whole House respects his efforts in that regard.

The hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) has also taken a strong interest in the issue. I am sure that the Director General of Oftel and the directors of BT — by direct invitation from my hon. Friend — will examine carefully the record of the debate and they may wish to make the information and arguments part of their consideration of the problem.

It may help the House if I say something about the background to the Talkabout service. It was launched in 1983 in Bristol. Following a trial run there, the service has been extended to other parts of the country. Talkabout is a service charged at premium rates. In the case of Talkabout, that means that calls are charged at between 11p and 41p for three minutes, depending on the time of day, rather than at the normal rates. Talkabout offers the opportunity to link up to 10 people for casual conversations. It is therefore to be distinguished from such facilities as conference calling, which companies and others may use for a group conversation. I know that the hon. Member for Worsley has already made that distinction, and I understand that some companies are concerned about their employees' running up bills on their behalf for calls that they have not been able to monitor clearly.

Two distinct Talkabout services are offered — a teenage Talkabout for the under-18s and an equivalent adult service. These have separate numbers, and are often separately advertised, although clearly it is difficult, if not impossible, to ensure that under-18s do not use adult Talkabout and vice versa. Talkabout differs from many of the other premium services offered over BT's network, in that it is a "live" interactive service rather than a recorded message. Moreover, it is directly marketed to teenagers, who — as has been observed twice this evening — quite often do not pay the bills.

Both these aspects have caused problems and a lot of criticism. In particular, I know that there have been charges that the service has been used for blind dating, that the language used on the service has been obscene or racist, and that some parents, including single parents, have been faced with huge bills. The Director General of Oftel referred publicly to some of the complaints in January. I quote from the letter that he sent to my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry last month:

> "The main basis for complaint was that teenage children were running up big bills without the knowledge of their parents — one such bill was for over £600 for a quarter, compared to a normal bill for the person concerned of £50. Complaints also mentioned the use of obscene language by participants, girls giving addresses and making blind dates, and even drug trafficking."

As a result of the concerns expressed in the first half of 1986, which I and the director general shared, we took these complaints up with BT. BT then agreed to step up the monitoring of the teenage service so that there would be one monitor for each pair of group conversations. These monitors had instructions to stop the giving out of names and addresses, making dates, and the use of obscene language. BT also agreed to play a tape setting out the cost of a call before each caller was connected to the service; and to cut each caller off after 10 minutes. For a time the complaints abated and it was hoped that these precautions might prove sufficient to stop major abuses of the service.

However, following an upsurge in complaints again late last year, Professor Carsberg reported:

> "I arranged for Oftel staff to make a series of calls to Teenage Talkabout earlier this year and report to me on their findings. They found a significant incidence of foul language and successful attempts at dating which the monitoring did not prevent."

The director general concluded his letter by saying that he is taking this issue very seriously and is pursuing his investigation with vigour.

I wish to stress at the outset that we share the director general's concern over the continuing problems with the Talkabout service. I can support many of the comments of my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Worsley. The

subject of this debate is "Oftel's role in regulating BT's Talkabout service". That is an apt title. It is indeed for the director general and his staff to consider the complaints and initiate action upon them if BT is falling short of the mark. As I have said, Professor Carsberg is taking these representations very seriously indeed. But before taking up the points my hon. Friend has raised and the action the director general has in hand, it may be helpful if I explain briefly the regulatory and legal framework.

British Telecom operates Talkabout under its main public telecommunications operator licence. This was issued by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry using his powers under the Telecommunications Act 1984. BT's licence sets out detailed conditions under which BT must operate. These conditions relate, for example, to the provision of call boxes, directory inquiries and 999 calls, as well as laying down more wide-ranging conditions on universal service and business practices. This licence was laid before the House in June 1984.

Now that the licence has been issued, policing it becomes the responsibility of the Director General of Telecommunications. Only he, not Ministers, can initiate changes to that licence, including changes governing the way the Talkabout service is operated. Such changes could be made either by agreeing the changes with BT or by referring the matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The MMC will make its judgment on the issue on the basis of the duties set out in section 3 of the Telecommunications Act 1984. These include the duty to promote the interests of the consumers. Broadly speaking, if the MMC concludes that any of the matters specified in the reference to it may be expected to operate against the public interest, the director general may then make such modifications to the licence as he considers necessary to tackle them.

What the BT licence does not cover is the content of the services provided, or the messages BT carries. This is because section 43 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 deals with that. This section makes the improper use of public telecommunications systems a criminal offence. It is an offence to send grossly offensive, indecent, obscene or menacing messages over the public network. There are, therefore, legal powers in place to govern the content of messages. Where a prosecution is brought under section 43, the judgment rests with the courts.

That, however, does not deal with the charge of whether BT should be running a service of this kind if it is likely to give rise to abuse. What about the problem of large bills sprung on an unknowing parent? Did the Government liberalise telecommunications and privatise BT so that such services should start up? Should not BT be concentrating on improving the quality of its everyday services, especially public call boxes?

The liberalisation of telecommunications has provided new business opportunities for a wide range of companies, both large and small. It has also provided a competitive climate to stimulate BT's performance, and led to a rapid growth of valuable services such as electronic data interchange, which has revolutionised the preparation of, for example, trade documents. To take an example close to Talkabout, there are now several conference call services for business, including that run by BT. These enable a business with branches or clients all over the country to get them together without the need for time-consuming and expensive travel, and play a major role in increasing business efficiency.

These examples of the benefits that new technology brings, set against the problems my hon. Friend has drawn attention to, emphasise that technology itself is neither a good nor a bad thing. It can, however, be used for good or bad ends. The use to which technology is put is the important factor.

It can be used, for example, to further the interests of the consumer. In other instances one can think of, it might hold them back. This is one of the reasons that Ministers decided to establish the office of Director General of Telecommunications in 1984. The director general has amongst his statutory duties a duty to promote the interests of consumers and users of telecommunications, to monitor developments and to provide advice to Ministers. The director general is in a position to acquire knowledge in depth about telecommunications and to respond quickly and flexibly to developments. We therefore place great weight on his advice.

My hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth and the hon. Member for Worsley have raised some specific cases where young people have been put at risk as a result of using Talkabout. I am aware of some of the cases that have been mentioned, and obviously I share the concern expressed tonight. I know that Oftel has been investigating some alleged incidents and that the director general would welcome any further details that hon. Members can provide him with.

A report of one particular incident was drawn to the attention of my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry earlier this year. This suggested that three girls had put themselves at risk as a result of a contact through the Talkabout service. My right hon. and noble Friend wrote to Professor Bryan Carsberg straight away expressing his concern about this incident and, more generally, about the marketing and operation of the teenage Talkabout service. He asked Professor Carsberg for his urgent advice on this issue and more considered advice by the end of this month.

In his interim reply, the director general has made clear his own concern over possible abuses of the Talkabout service, which he was already discussing actively with BT. As a result, BT had already introduced some safeguards in 1986, as I have mentioned. But my hon. Friend's comments, and indeed those of concerned parents, suggest that BT has not done enough.

Professor Carsberg has said in his reply to my right hon. and noble Friend that he considers the present controls to be inadequate. He has told me how concerned he is about the service and the unfortunate consequences it is having for many telephone subscribers. Over the past few weeks, as the sort of problems to which my hon. Friend has drawn attention began to receive more widespread publicity, the director general has received some very worrying evidence about the way the service is being used and the damage that it is causing.

As I have said, the director general has suggested to BT on a number of occasions that it make changes to the service to eliminate the problems. Some, but not all, of the changes have been made. The director general has told me that he will if necessary seek to make an amendment to the conditions in BT's licence to require BT to make changes.

Such changes might, for example, include an obligation on BT to ensure that Talkabout could only be accessed when the person responsible for paying the bill had specifically agreed to the phone being used in this way. I heard clearly my hon. Friend's comment on that point.

[Mr. John Butcher]

Another step might be to insist that Talkabout service charges are identified separately on the bill. This would warn unwary parents of the extent of the use of their phone for this purpose.

Should the service be banned altogether? That is a judgment for the director general to consider. However, the director general does have a duty, given him by this House, to promote the interests of all telephone users. He has, I know, been told that the Talkabout service has a particular value to lonely and isolated people and that it can have a very great benefit to disabled people.

Before the director general can properly take a decision to propose changes that would abolish or restrict this service, he needs to seek evidence about the effect on users as a whole. Were he not to do this, his decision could be open to challenge on the grounds that it was arbitrary. However, I am assured that in considering the views of users the director general intends to give particular weight to those of parents and those who pay the telephone bills.

Oftel has already commissioned an opinion survey in order to obtain these views. My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that the survey is going on at present. The results will be available in about a week's time. Professor Carsberg has confirmed that he expects to take a decision on further action very quickly once he has the results. He will also, of course, be giving his considered views to my right hon. and noble Friend as well in the next few weeks.

It is difficult for me to say more at this stage. Clearly the problems are recognised and are being actively looked at. I sympathise a great deal with my hon. Friend's concerns. I am sure that Professor Carsberg will study the report of this debate carefully. I expect BT will too. No one is taking this issue lightly. I believe that the director general will shortly have a solution to a good many, if not all, of the concerns that my hon. Friend has expressed.

I thank my hon. Friend again for obtaining this Adjournment debate and for the opportunity for the House to express its views on this issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at ten minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 10 February 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Company Liquidations

1. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many companies went into liquidation during 1987; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Francis Maude): The number of company insolvencies in Great Britain in 1987 was 11,645 —about 22 per cent. less than in 1986.

Mr. Brown: Is the Minister aware that some companies deliberately go bust in order to renege on their commitments to staff, customers and creditors in general? For example, does he know that Glendevon Carpets in my constituency did that not so long ago and that many people suffered? Indeed, the company went out of business and resurrected itself elsewhere under a different name. The people behind that move got off scot free—I do not mean that as a pun, because the matter is too serious. Do the Government have any ideas or proposals that may deal with that problem?

Mr. Maude: The phenomenon to which the hon. Gentleman referred is well understand and, regrettably, does happen. It was addressed in the Insolvency Act 1985, which gives courts the right to disqualify directors if they are found to have been guilty of misconduct such as that.

About 64 directors have been disqualified in the past few months since the new regime came into force, and about 120 further applications are being made by my Department to the High Court for further disqualifications. I hope the hon. Gentleman is satisfied that it is a problem which we take seriously and have already addressed.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not so much liquidations as new business start-ups that are the important figures? Does he agree that new business start-ups under the Government have been——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about liquidations.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I have a question about that.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, later.

Financial Services Act

2. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on progress in implementing the Financial Services Act.

Mr. Maude: Three self-regulating organisations have now been recognised under the Financial Services Act 1986. In addition, eight professional bodies have obtained interim recognition under schedule 15 to the Act. Two other self-regulating organisations, one professional body, seven investment exchanges — including one overseas exchange — and two clearing houses have applied for recognition, but have yet to be recognised. I intend that the central provisions of the Act will be implemented in April.

Mr. Smith: Is my hon. Friend aware that he has made excellent progress in implementing the provisions of the Act? Given the complex and comprehensive nature of the provisions, it is remarkable that there has not been more slippage. However, will he comment on two matters that will be important after A day in April? First, when will the compensation scheme be introduced; and, secondly, how will we ensure that there are not too many investment businesses that have only provisional authorisation after A day?

Mr. Maude: It has always been intended that the compensation fund should come into operation three months after section 3 of the Act is implemented in April, and that remains our intention. I fear that there will inevitably be a number of investment businesses that are interim-authorised immediately after A day, particularly at the smaller end of the range. We understand that about 10,000 to 12,000 firms will be applying to the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Association for authorisation. It is simply a physical impossibility for all those to receive full vetting treatment before A day. However, I know that FIMBRA has that problem in mind and will seek to keep to a minimum the number of interim authorisations.

Mr. McCrindle: The Minister will be aware of allegations of excessive legalism on the part of the Securities and Investment Board and some of the SROs. He will also be aware of the suggestion that the cost of registration, particularly for small firms, is quite excessive. Has he given any consideration to those allegations, and what is the response that he would like to communicate, perhaps through this question and answer session?

Mr. Maude: We are aware of the concerns expressed. It is important that we should have a full and adequate system of investor protection, but it is equally important, in the interests of investors, that that system of regulation should not be so burdensome on business that choice for consumers of investment services is reduced. This is why we have built into the Act the competition scrutiny carried out by the Director General of Fair Trading.

In addition, my right hon. and noble Friend has asked the Securities and Investments Board to report to us on a quarterly basis after the Act comes into full force in April on the effect of the Act and the rule books on businesses themselves. I stress that it is a practitioner—led system of regulation. All the self-regulatory organisations and the SIB are dominated by practitioners. It is up to the practitioners to ensure that their voices and concerns are heard in the process of regulation.

Mr. Blair: Is the Minister aware that, although the provisions of the Financial Services Act are necessary, they will impose a great administrative burden on many small firms and individuals, as well as on the organisations dealing with the applications? I understand that many

thousands of firms may be in that position. Will he tell us what will be the position of the firms that are unable to register with the self-regulatory organisations or the SIB, simply because of the incapacity of those organisations to process the applications sufficiently quickly?

Mr. Maude: My message to those firms is clear. If they submit their applications by P day, which is 27 February, even if the organisations cannot fully process the applications by A day, the firms will obtain the benefit of interim authorisation. The message to those companies is clear: to submit their application swiftly and, in any event, before 27 February.

It is right that we should try to ensure that the burden falling on small businesses is as limited as possible. FIMBRA comprises 85 per cent. of small firms, which have a clearly heard voice in the councils of FIMBRA. In the recent elections a number of small firm representatives were elected to the ruling council of FIMBRA, which is a healthy sign.

Telecommunications

3. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the level of output in the telecommunication industry in *(a)* 1986 and *(b)* 1980; and what was the level of exports in the industry over the same period.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John Butcher): Manufacturers' sales of equipment increased from £953 million in 1980 to £1,750 million in 1986. Exports were 10 per cent. of sales in 1980 and 12·5 per cent. of sales in 1986. There are no comparable statistics for the services sector.

Mr. Thompson: I thank my hon. Friend for that encouraging reply, which shows the kind of improvement in the telecommunications industry and its performance that we all want to see. Some time ago my hon. Friend was quoted as saying that it was easier to export telecommunications equipment to Detroit than to Dusseldorf. Does he still say that today?

Mr. Butcher: Regrettably, yes. Non-tariff barriers are still operated in Europe. Some of the post, telegraph and telecommunications organisations in Europe still operate monopoly purchasing practices. It is our view that the European market will have to move towards a more liberal environment. In a number of efforts pursued by my Department, and in bilateral meetings which I have undertaken with other European colleagues, we must do our best to deliver that open market as soon as possible, because our own industry is now well poised to take advantage of it.

Mr. Darling: When considering the level of output and exports of the telecommunications industry, has the Minister discussed with British Telecom, which is a major component of the matter, the sale of magnetic tapes containing telephone directory and other information, possibly to people abroad, including fanatical religious organisations? Has he had any discussions with BT in view of the widespread concern about such possible sales?

Mr. Butcher: That has not figured on the agenda of any discussions that I have had with counterparts elsewhere. I have noted carefully the hon. Gentleman's comments and, on the face of it, I share his concern. I shall examine his comments carefully and, if necessary, write appropriately to BT.

Mr. Michael Marshall: Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to be a little less modest about his efforts in opening up the European telecommunications services market? Is it not the case that his Department has made some headway in getting other PTTs to agree that Mercury, for example, should have access to markets? Will he bring us up to date on where he sees that telecommunications development going?

Mr. Butcher: Most countries in the European Community are looking closely, and some with considerable envy, at the British experience. In bilateral discussions I have found that Spain, France and the Netherlands are now ready to consider applications from Mercury for access and interconnection to such markets. I am encouraged by progress so far. It is encouraging to see that our European colleagues are interested in the sort of competition that has benefited the United Kingdom to such a great extent.

Ballpoint Pens

4. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what specific steps he has taken to ensure that ballpoint pen manufacturers comply with the recommendations of his Department's investigation into the asphyxiation of children due to the inhalation of pen tops.

Mr. Butcher: The industry was made aware of the outcome of my Department's investigations in September 1986. In a follow-up exercise in April last year several manufacturers reported that they were working on new designs. Members of the Writing Instruments Association are also working in parallel with other European manufacturers in drawing up parameters that should be taken into account in the designs of safer pen tops. In the meantime, manufacturers and importers have been reminded of their responsibilities under the general safety requirement of the Consumer Protection Act 1987.

Mr. Janner: Does the Minister mean that manufacturers who put out unsafe pens, as Bic has been doing for so long, are liable to be prosecuted? Is he aware that in recent years 11 children have died through swallowing pen tops? Until we get some real action from the industry, will he arrange for Bic pens with separate tops not to be available in any Government Department? Will he also talk to the Secretary of State for Education and Science and make sure that they are no longer available in or supplied to schools?

Mr. Butcher: I congratulate the hon. and learned Gentleman on the effectiveness of his campaign and the manner in which he has pursued it. Obviously it has risen from a case involving one of his constituents, which greatly impressed my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs.

I have written to a colleague at the Department of Education and Science asking him urgently to review its practice. I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman will be encouraged to know that, following his meeting with my hon. Friend, we have contacted the British Standards Institute to set up a committee urgently to develop a pen top standard. Furthermore, he will be familiar with the work of Mr. Mathias, in Newcastle, on outline standards

for pen top safety. We have also brought that work to the attention of BSI. There is much encouraging response from the industry. Rather than taking immediate and draconian measures, I hope that through other means we will achieve the effect that the hon. and learned Gentleman would wish.

Metals Industry

5. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the output of the metals industry in 1987 and in 1986.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Robert Atkins): The index of production for the metals industry was 110·5 in 1986 and 119 in the first 11 months of 1987, based on 1980 equalling 100.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my hon. Friend agree that, after 20 years of going downhill in the manufacturing industry, at long last we have turned the corner? Much of the reason has been the productivity and the work of unions and employers. Would it not be a tragedy if Austin Rover, Land Rover and other companies were foolishly to follow the Ford people and try to export jobs instead of goods? Is it not time that people realised that we all—management and workers—must keep the process going so that unemployment will drop, as it is already dropping in the midlands?

Mr. Atkins: With his usual skill, my hon. Friend has paraphrased the Government's policy on a variety of matters, although his question went a little wider than the answer.

Mr. Crowther: In view of the significant increase in demand for British-made steel in the past 12 months or so, is the Minister having discussions with the chairman of the British Steel Corporation to ensure that, whether or not it is privatised, BSC will retain an adequate steel-making capacity to meet any further demand that may arise from, for example, a further increase in the motor manufacturing operations in Britain or from any other source?

Mr. Atkins: We are more than satisfied, as I think most people in this country are, with the management success of the present chairman and board of the British Steel Corporation, and we intend that as a result of that success——

Mr. Skinner: The workers; they are the wealth creators.

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman is right: I certainly include the workers.

As a result of that success, we are content to abide by the chairman's commercial advice about the future, as he sees it, of the corporation. That will require meeting the sorts of demands to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Gould: Has it occurred to the Minister that these welcome improvements have taken place in the one part of British manufacturing industry that is substantially under public ownership, and in which, accordingly, the requisite investment has been made? Can he now give a guarantee that a similar improvement will be made and sustained under private ownership? If he cannot, what is the point of privatisation, other than to hand over to the Government's friends in the City a return on investment which is rightfully that of the taxpayer?

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman will hear more examples of good news in various other industries during today's Question Time. Steel is not the only one. The hon. Gentleman forgets the criticism that was rightly levelled at the British Steel Corporation for losing up to £3 million a day in the years preceding the changes that have recently been made. He should recognise that British Steel is a success story derived from having built on and understood the changes in European and world markets. I hope that he and his hon. Friends will not continue to attack the British Steel Corporation for the changes that it has achieved.

Dollar Export Prices

6. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the increase in dollar export prices in the United Kingdom and in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries in the latest year for which figures are available.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Alan Clark): In the year to June 1987 United Kingdom dollar export prices increased by 6 per cent., compared with an increase of almost 11 per cent. for the industrial countries of the OECD taken together.

Mr. Martlew: Does the Minister agree that the rise he has described has been a major disincentive to British industry and has reduced our competitiveness? Does he agree also that, because of these policies, British industry is becoming less competitive under this Government than it was in previous times? Is that not a major reason for the crisis in the balance of payments, which showed a record deficit in 1987?

Mr. Clark: If the hon. Gentleman has a research assistant, I suggest that he sacks him, because the facts are precisely the opposite. In fact, our exports to the United States rose by 7 per cent. in sterling terms—and by 19 per cent. in dollar terms. That was achieved against an appreciation of the currency of 14 per cent.

Mr. Gould: Will the Minister confirm that every one of the commonly used indices of competitiveness shows a loss of competitiveness of British industry under this Government? Will he accordingly refrain from repeating the false claims made by the Prime Minister on this front, and will he advise his ministerial colleagues to do likewise? What is the point of producing Government statistics and then systematically misrepresenting them?

Mr. Clark: With the greatest respect, Mr. Speaker, I think that you were extremely tolerant to allow the hon. Gentleman's question, which had nothing to do with exchange rates. However, I am quite prepared to tell the hon. Gentleman that I do not subscribe to the view that British exports are best served by a steadily depreciating currency. He should know that the two countries with the largest trade surpluses are those with the hardest and fastest appreciating currencies. The country with the largest deficit is the one whose currency has depreciated by one third in the past 18 months.

Upholstered Furniture

7. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received about new regulations on the fire safety of upholstered furniture.

Mr. Butcher: The proposals for new upholstered furniture regulations announced to the House on 11

January have been generally well received. A number of firms and other bodies have raised matters of commercial concern and technical detail, which we shall deal with in the drafting of the regulations.

An encouraging response was also received from the EC Commission, supporting our proposed action as a consumer safety measure, whilst expressing understandable concern about the need to avoid as far as possible the setting up of any barriers to trade within Europe.

Mr. Canavan: I welcome the new regulations, but will the Minister bear in mind that an estimated 300 lives are lost every year because of the presence of killer foam and other combustible materials in household furniture? Is the Minister entirely satisfied that the proposed timetable for introducing the new regulations is adequate, in view of the likelihood that another 300 lives will be lost between now and February 1989 and a further 300 before February 1990, when the new regulations are due to come into effect?

Mr. Butcher: I am broadly satisfied that the measures announced last month will satisfy nearly all the concerns of the House. I have a great deal of sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's argument, but he will understand that it is occasionally excruciatingly difficult to balance the paramount needs of consumer safety with a practical way of achieving them. The time frame of 1 March next year for foam and 1 March the year after for the covers is achievable. When we publish the draft regulations at the end of the month, as we agreed to do, we hope, and I think that we can fairly confidently expect, that the industry and the consumer associations will broadly welcome them.

Mr. Conway: My hon. Friend's proposals to improve the quality of foam in furniture will be widely welcomed, but will he assure the House, first, that the quality of imports will be monitored to ensure that they meet the specifications, and, secondly, that his Department has not lost sight of the need to remind consumers of home safety, because even the higher quality foam will still be combustible and the new regulations will not solve the problem of fires in the home without individual control and responsibility?

Mr. Butcher: I am delighted to tell my hon. Friend, and other hon. Members who have been concerned about this matter, that the regulations will bite on imports. The trading standards officers will be invited to take action on goods from wherever they come. The performance of modified foam, which could be acceptable under the test, will be continually monitored, but, having introduced the most rigorous set of regulations anywhere in the world, we should give the draft regulations a chance for the time being.

Mr. Ashby: Does my hon. Friend appreciate that, at a time when sales should be at their highest, but are at their lowest, the industry requires certainty in respect of the regulations? Will my hon. Friend consider how to clarify the regulations so that retailers are clear about the quality of goods being sold, because at the moment nobody is certain about the regulations?

Mr. Butcher: My hon. Friend is right. We must publish the draft regulations quickly. Ignition source 5 of BS 5852 is the test that we are minded to use on foam and we shall come to a view quickly on the direct match testing or the code of practice testing for covers.

Compact Discs

8. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has on unit sales of compact discs in *(a)* 1987 and *(b)* 1986; and what value the sales represent.

Mr. Maude: In the first nine months of 1987 the British Phonographic Industry Ltd. reported sales to retailers of 11 million compact discs—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. What goes on in the Gallery is not a matter for us.

Mr. Maude: In the first nine months of last year the British Phonographic Industry Ltd reported sales to retailers of 11 million compact discs valued at £73 million. In 1986, 8·5 million compact discs were sold, valued at £56 million.

Mr. Coombs: Does my hon. Friend agree that those are remarkable figures, and will he join me in congratulating the work force and management of the EMI CD plant in Swindon on taking a major share of that increased growth? Does he also recognise the genuine concern within the record industry about the practice of rental and copying of CDs and the advent of digital audio tape, both of which could damage this rapidly increasing contributor to British exports?

Mr. Maude: I willingly join my hon. Friend in congratulating those of his constituents who have contributed to that excellent record of growth in the industry. In regard to copying, I hope that those in the industry will be reassured by the rental right that the Government have introduced by tabling an amendment to the Bill in another place. That will go a long way to meet current concerns.

Mr. Greg Knight: Will my hon. Friend resist the entreaties of those who produce compact discs and who seek a ban or other form of restriction on the import or sale of digital audio tape machines? Does he agree that such an action, if attempted, could only be described as Luddite?

Mr. Maude: We are not persuaded that measures are desirable to prevent the importation of DAT recorders or to require them to be fitted with spoilers to prevent home taping. I take my hon. Friend's point, but a lively debate is developing on this topic.

Paper Industry

9. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the level of output in the paper industry in 1987 and, in 1986.

Mr. Atkins: The index of production for the paper industry was 102.6 in 1986, and 109·1 for the first three quarters of 1987, based on 1980 equals 100.

Mr. Moss: Does my hon. Friend agree that that represents excellent news for British industry, and in particular for the paper industry in which employment has gone up by some 11,000 in the past 18 months? Does he also agree that the prospects for the paper industry are excellent, bearing in mind the unified market in 1992?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend gives the lie to the remarks made by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould)

earlier by confirming yet again that in the paper industry, as in many others, we have a great success to show to the world.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Minister accept that the strong performance of the paper industry is most welcome, but will he acknowledge that there is concern within the industry about the implication of energy charges in the context of the privatisation of electricity? Will he persuade the Secretary of State for Energy to recognise the importance of keeping energy charges down to ensure that that industry will recover? Will he also make representations to ensure that when electricity is privatised, firms such as Thomas Tait in my constituency, which has made great investments to produce the right quality of paper, have the opportunity to tender for the substantial contracts?

Mr. Atkins: As the hon. Gentleman well knows, the matter of energy cost is a matter for the Secretary of State for Energy. He must pursue that with him.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: May I advise my hon. Friend, that leading members of the paper and board industry——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is Question Time.

Mr. Winterton: Is my hon. Friend aware that leading members of the paper and board industry are strongly opposed to the proposed removal of the Patents Office from London to south Wales, not least because that will create huge additional costs for the smaller sector of the industry and clearly could adversely affect the bid of this country to get the Trade Mark Office located in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am interested in this matter, but I find it difficult to relate it to the paper industry.

Mr. Winterton: I related my question directly to the paper industry. I have received direct representations from the paper industry, which is concerned about the proposed transfer of the Patents Office to South Wales.

Mr. Speaker: Good enough.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy will no doubt have heard my hon. Friend's question.

Enterprise Initiative

10. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what the response has been to the launch of the new enterprise initiative.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Trade and Industry (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The response has been excellent. We have received more than 30,000 inquiries on the DTI freephone number, and 100,000 enterprise initiative booklets have now been distributed.

My right hon. and noble Friend and I have also received many messages of strong support from industry for the policies announced in the White Paper.

Mr. Devlin: I welcome my right hon. Friend's initiative on behalf of the many thousands of firms on Teesside that will directly benefit from the thousands of small projects set up each month, and the doubling of research and assistance to small businesses. Does he intend to maintain the presence of the DTI in its present form on Teesside? If, as has been announced, the regional development office will disappear from Billingham, will he give an undertaking to redeploy the staff elsewhere in the region?

Mr. Clarke: The change in the nature of the services offered by our Department will obviously involve some changes in the deployment of the staff. I assure my hon. Friend that we certainly will retain a regional office in Billingham. We shall open a new satellite office in Middlesbrough. It is possible that we shall require additional personnel in the region as a whole, so long as the response is strong enough. There will, however, be some changes, because the staff previously employed in the routine checking of automatic regional development grants at Billingham will no longer be required in the same numbers. We shall look at the possibilities of redeploying them elsewhere in the region as far as possible.

Ms. Armstrong: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman take the opportunity to reassure those firms seeking to locate or expand in the north that the new grants and other measures which he has announced will enable them to get quickly through the bureaucracy—this reflects one of their main fears about the loss of RDG—and that the overall amount of money going into the north next year will be not less, but more?

Mr. Clarke: We believe that the new package of grants and support that we are able to give industry in the north-east will enable us to attract new investment to the region with the same success, if not more, as we have achieved in recent years. We plan to spend more money on DTI grants and services in the regions than we planned when the last White Paper was produced. Obviously, the eventual outturn of expenditure will depend on the response of firms in the regions and those who wish to go there.

Mr. Grylls: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many people will warmly welcome the consultancy advice offered to small and growing businesses, thereby increasing their professionalism and heightening their success rate, while reducing their failure rate? Is he satisfied that the fees offered to the consultants for which the Department will look will be adequate to ensure that there is an adequate supply of consultants to deal with those firms that would like to take advantage of the services?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his first remark. The level of response from small firms throughout the country shows that we have identified a genuine need and that we can provide a valuable service. The representations that I have received on consultants fees vary, depending on the type of consultants about which one is talking. At the moment we are particularly recruiting the business advisers who will carry out the initial company audit and decide what form of consultancy is required by the company. We find that the level of fees that we are offering is getting the right sort of people to apply. The fees for the eventual consultancy will be in line with those that we have recently been using satisfactorily for our existing consultancy services.

Mr. Salmond: How many of the messages of support have come from business consultancies which undoubtedly will be the prime beneficiaries of the enterprise initiative? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman believe that what is good for business consultancies is necessarily good for business?

Mr. Clarke: The messages of support have come from representative organisations of business and chambers of commerce, both north and south of the border, and from large numbers of business men, who accept the need to make our businesses ever more competitive in ways other than just price competitiveness, at which British industry is getting very good. There will be an increase in the amount of consultancy provided, but we are determined to ensure through our contractors that it is good quality consultancy that achieves the job of raising the management performance of the companies that will benefit from it.

Mr. Holt: Referring to Teesside, will my right hon. and learned Friend reflect on the fact that, however great the Government's grants, the swingeing increase in rates by Cleveland county council by an additional 30p this year, bringing it up to 282p at county level, will negate much of the Government's good action in their initiatives? Will my right hon. and learned Friend speak to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and draw attention to this terrible impost on business in that area?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. It has been a feature in recent years that those local authorities that complain most about the difficulties of attracting new business in their areas go on to impose the highest possible rates and deter new investments. Fortunately, the Government have a proposal to introduce a national non-domestic rate across the country, which will rescue business from those local vagaries and be especially beneficial to industries in the north, in the type of constituency represented by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Blair: Is it not the case that the welcome given by industry — certainly north of the border — has been qualified? Industry says that it welcomes the White Paper only if it will not mean a decrease in the overall level of resources. Is it not the case that the business development initiative, which is one of the main items on which the Government hang their hat when saying that they are maintaining resources, applies nationally? Will the Minister tell the House how much of the money will find its way to the hard-pressed regions of the north, Scotland and Wales, rather than to the regions that are already well off?

Mr. Clarke: The initiative does, indeed, apply nationally, but, as the hon. Gentleman knows, we are giving a higher rate of grant to companies that apply under the enterprise initiative in the assisted areas, which include large parts of Scotland and Wales. We are determined to plan and work on the basis that we shall achieve the same level of expenditure, at least in the regions, as we have achieved in the past. Our success depends on the take-up in the areas in question. That is why we are promoting the new initiative so heavily to business men in Scotland, Wales, the assisted areas and the urban programme areas. We wish to ensure that the level of take-up is achieved, benefits produced and the level of expenditure maintained.

Mr. Jack: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of the keen interest that is being shown by the Labour leader of Lancashire county council in the excellent enterprise package? To assist her in her further understanding of these exciting measures, will the Minister tell me when the DTI satellite office is due to open in

Mr. Clarke: The new realism is affecting quite a lot of councils, although, to be fair, some of the councils in the north-west have always been fairly pragmatic and have worked with the Government in helping to promote new enteprise in their areas. I am sorry that I cannot give my hon. Friend the exact date for the opening of the new office. I rather thought that it had already opened, but if it has not, no doubt it will open in the next few weeks.

Balance of Payments

11. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his latest estimate of the deficit on the balance of payments in 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: The deficit was £2·7 billion in 1987. This is less than that forecast in the Financial Statement and Budget Report for the year.

Ms. Mowlam: Will the Minister explain how we will pay our way in the world after oil, in view of the huge deficit which now exists and which is clearly soaring?

Mr. Clark: How we pay our way. The hon. Lady may remember that all our overseas assets were sold during the war to pay the United States for armaments and raw materials. Those assets, if used now to pay our deficits each year at the present rate, would last until the 22nd century.

Mr. Madel: If people want to improve the balance of payments in car and truck manufacture, should they not seek to persuade the trade unions at Ford to end the strike at once and start to renegotiate wages and conditions? Does that not apply particularly to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould)?

Mr. Clark: One of the most praiseworthy features of our export performance has been the great improvement in industrial relations over the past two or three years. Therefore, I very much regret the dispute at Ford and hope that it will be settled very soon.

Mr. James Lamond: Does the Minister realise that the deficit will continue to grow as long as he presides over agreements such as that reached on the import of acrylic yarn from Turkey? Was he surprised that, when he answered my question last time and lost his temper, he received a great deal of angry correspondence from the manufacturing employers in the industry, who feel that he is prepared to sit and let the industry go to rack and ruin before he accepts that the agreement is damaging?

Mr. Clark: I did not lose my temper with the hon. Gentleman. Indeed, I have great sympathy with the case that he argues. As I have told him, both at the Dispatch Box and in correspondence—at some length, I hope he will admit — the evidence that I needed to take a different position in the negotiations began to come forward only halfway through those negotiations. If this evidence is to be accepted in Brussels, it must satisfy and conform to very strict criteria. Anecdotal evidence simply about reductions in the work force is not sufficient. The evidence must relate to falling output and falling orders and to a clearly defined set of statistics about which the industry is well aware. I had a meeting yesterday with representatives of the industry and made all that plain to them. I accept that the situation has deteriorated since the negotiations were concluded. I have asked the industry for

a clear statement about what is happening. When that is to hand, I hope that I shall be able to put a further process in train.

Mr. Page: Is my hon. Friend aware that in 1986-87 corporation tax was nearly £13 billion—about £9 billion more than in 1981, despite a corporation tax reduction from 52 to 35 per cent.? Given those facts, does he agree that reducing taxation gives an increase in productivity and in enterprise and leads to the largest overseas investments of any country? That is the way to close our trade gap, and no other method will succeed.

Mr. Clark: Certainly taxation policy has a lot to do with it, but I remain convinced that other factors such as price, quality and delivery are all important.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Last year the deficit on manufactured trade on a balance of payments basis was about £7 billion. Ten years ago there was a surplus of about £12 billion at today's prices. Can the Minister tell us how many jobs that appalling turnround of £19 billion represents? How many jobs have been exported as a consequence? Is that not the new "jobgeld" that we are paying as tribute to Tory incompetence towards manufacturing industry?

Mr. Clark: Unemployment figures have continuously improved over the last 14 months. The trade gap is a ½ per cent. of our gross domestic product compared with 3½ per cent. of the United States gross domestic product. I remember the hon. Gentleman and many of his hon. Friends up to about a year ago further proselytising the deficit financing policy of the United States. Look where that got the United States.

Telecommunications

13. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has on moves to increase competition in the telecommunications sector in the European Community.

Mr. Butcher: The Commission's Green Paper on telecommunications, which was laid before the House on 17 July, contains a range of proposals for the development of a competitive Community market in both services and equipment. In a series of meetings with telecommunications Ministers of the Community I have underlined this objective and exchanged views on methods of increasing competition in this sector.

Mr. Nicholson: Is my hon. Friend aware that there are still complaints about the difficulties of access to a number of national markets in the European Community? Is he satisfied that rapid enough progress is being made towards the achievement of a single common market in telecommunications equipment? Is he aware that numerous parts of Britain, including Somerset, depend for job and wealth creation on that being achieved, and that we cannot wait until 1992?

Mr. Butcher: The short answer is no, I am not satisfied by the rate of progress. That is why I have arranged so many meetings with my European counterparts. We have all agreed that we should make the fastest possible progress towards a truly common market in telecommunications equipment. I am encouraged that the Commission's directives on the liberalisation of the terminals market borrows a great deal from British experience, and that many of the principles in the Commission's Green Paper borrow very directly from United Kingdom experience. In the meantime, we must see that our companies have access to what are, in practical terms, closed markets.

Mr. Lewis: Is the Minister aware of the concern about the growing importation from the continent of pornographic material by premium service operators of British Telecom? Many of us are fed up to the back teeth with the material that is being put out on the telephone and are sick of the "rent a knee trembler" performances that are being put out.

Mr. Butcher: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we looked into that matter and associated issues during the Adjournment debate in the early hours of this morning. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is content that the action that the Director General of Oftel is currently taking with a considerable degree of urgency will meet some of his concerns. Both DG Oftel and BT share a number of the hon. Gentleman's concerns. We want to see fast action, but it must be for DG Oftel to implement that action, if necessary through a licence change.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: While recognising that the Minister is not responsible for the approval of equipment that can be fitted to British Telecom lines in homes, may I ask whether he is aware that Telecom, or someone, is obstructing the approval of diverter equipment that can be used on telephone lines? It seems that that is because Telecom can gain far more by renting than by allowing people to buy. Will the Minister now look into that, make the necessary representations and clear the blockage?

Mr. Butcher: Yes, Sir.

Publishing Industry

14. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the level of output in the publishing industry in 1987 and in 1986.

Mr. Atkins: The index of production for the United Kingdom printing and publishing industries was 105·6 in 1986 and 116·3 in the first three quarters of 1987, based on 1980 equalling 100.

Mr. Butler: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Is that not a remarkable tribute to the publishing industry and to the economy as a whole? I know that the policy of the Labour party is to increase choice, but with over 52,000 titles being published every year in this country, is that not a mark of the range of choice provided by capitalism?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend's general philosophy is quite right. However, I am delighted to say that he was slightly wrong in the number of titles. The number of book titles published in 1986 was 58,000, which was an all-time record and yet again evidence of a success story.

Mr. Dalyell: To which of the hon. Gentleman's ministerial colleagues should our congratulations be sent for the boost that they have given to the publishing industry by the use of injunctions?

Mr. Atkins: It would seem, as ever, that the lawyers always win.

British Steel

17. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received on the proposals to denationalise British Steel.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have received a small number of letters from various parties about points of detail. I have so far received very few representations about the principle of privatisation itself.

Mr. Morley: Is the Minister aware that there is much concern among those who are employed at BSC at the moment because no details have yet been put forward about the way in which the privatisation will take place? Is he aware that the trustees of the BSC pension fund recently announced a £41 million payout over and above their income because of the sale of part-owned BSC shares in steel companies? Will he give some assurances to the people who rely on BSC pensions that their rights will be protected?

Mr. Clarke: We hope to publish the Bill turning the corporation into a Companies Act company shortly. Obviously, more details will begin to emerge during the debate on that. Meanwhile, I accept the hon. Gentleman's point about pension rights. It is an important matter and we shall have to reassure the employees—I am sure that we shall be able to—that their pension rights will not be affected by the change. When I have taken previous privatisation measures through the House, we have always been able to address that point successfully and I am sure that we shall be able to do so again.

Mr. William Powell: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that there is widespread demand that that measure proceeds as soon as possible, and can he tell us when he expects the Bill to be published, so that the House can get on with its consideration of the details?

Mr. Clarke: I expect the Bill to be published shortly. I advise my hon. Friend and others who are interested to wait for the business statement that follows this period of questions.

Dr. Bray: Does the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster think that the present levels of efficiency of the British Steel Corporation could conceivably have been achieved if it had been left in private ownership for the past 20 years?

Mr. Clarke: It could have been achieved at any time by good management, with the co-operation of a good work force in making the necessary changes in working practices and the necessary investment in new plant and equipment, which British Steel Corporation has done so successfully. Now that it is such a successful corporation, there is no need for it to remain under the constraints of the Treasury and Government ownership, and we are ready to return it to the market.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Will the Minister state whether it is correct that he has appointed merchant bankers, brokers and account managers for the flotation? If it is correct, why could he not tell me that in his answers to my written questions, and why does he presume that the Bill will pass through the House?

Mr. Clarke: I am not sure about the questions, which I have not handled myself. It is certainly the case that we have appointed our advisers and issued a press notice on that matter. I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman the fullest details of whom we have appointed: the Government merchant bank advisers are Samuel Montagu, the Government brokers are Rowe and Pitman, and the reporting accountants are Coopers and Lybrand.

Regional Aid

18. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much in real terms was spent on all aspects of Government regional aid policy in the financial years ended in April 1979 and April 1986 in *(a)* Bridgend, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* each of the standard planning regions of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Atkins: Total expenditure in the United Kingdom at constant 1986-87 prices on the main schemes of regional assistance in 1978-79 and 1985-86 was £1,377·8 million and £784·7 million respectively. With permission, Mr. Speaker, I will arrange for the full set of figures requested to be published in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Griffiths: I am sure the Minister will agree that it is absolutely astounding that at a time when unemployment was more than doubling, regional aid should have been virtually halved. Will the Government now make a commitment to reinstate regional spending in real terms so that areas with high unemployment, such as Wales, Scotland and the north, can receive an additional boost to attract new jobs?

Mr. Atkins: For the ensuing year regional aid expenditure will be comparable with what we spent last year, albeit spread into a variety of different initiatives and regional assistance.

Following are the figures:

Expenditure at constant prices (1986-87 = 100) on the main schemes of regional preferential assistance in the financial years 1978-79 and 1985-86 in *(a)* Bridgend, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* each of the standard planning regions of the United Kingdom were as follows:

£ million

	1978-79	*[5]1985-86*
Northern	311·1	97·4
North-West	172·5	88·6
South-West	18·5	12·2
East Midlands	8·4	8·6
West Midlands	—	5·7
Yorkshire and Humberside	73·3	35·4
England	583·8	[4]265·8
Wales	[2]265·1	149·1
Scotland	303·9	210·0
Northern Ireland[1]	225·0	159·8
United Kingdom	1,377·8	784·7
Bridgend	[3]62·3	[3]8·3

Notes:

Schemes included in the reply are regional development grants, regional selective assistance, expenditure on land and factories by the English Industrial Estates Corporation, the Scottish and Welsh Development Agencies, the Development Board for Rural Wales and the Highland and Islands Development Board, and grants by these boards.

[1] Northern Ireland has a different range of financial incentives. The items included under the expenditure data in the table are the equivalents of the schemes listed above for GB.

[2] Includes payments of £26 million to one project in Bridgend (£50·6 million at 1986-87 prices).
[3] Excludes Welsh Development Agency payments, which are not readily available.
[4] Expenditure on business improvement services and the exchange risk guarantee scheme (elements of regional selective assistance) in England in 1985-86 cannot be broken down by region. Hence the total shown for England is greater than the sum of the figures for the individual regions.
[5] Expenditure on RDG in 1985-86 was reduced by the four-month moratorium on payments under the original RDG scheme introduced in January 1985, which deferred payments into 1986-87.

Businesses (Bureaucratic Burdens)

21. **Mr. Page:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what new plans he has for lifting bureaucratic burdens on business.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Active work continues in every area of government to lighten the load of regulation and improve the delivery of Government services for business. We propose to issue a White Paper reporting progress and the next steps in the summer.

Mr. Page: In thanking my right hon. and learned Friend for his reply, may I ask whether he is aware that in 1979 we had one of the most wizened and shrunken small business sectors in the Western world? Does he accept that due to the Government lifting the bureaucratic burdens it is now starting to grow? What does my right hon. and learned Friend intend to do to relieve the load on small businesses of company law, particularly on the audit facility?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend that one of the most impressive achievements of the British economic recovery has been the rate at which small businesses have set up, and that sector has expanded. It is important that the Government continue to deal with small business in such a way that they do not waste management time or erect obstructions in the way of people intending to expand their business. We are now looking at several detailed proposals on company law reform and particularly aim to lift bureaucratic burdens in our changes. We have informed interested parties of the details of our intended reform of annual filing requirements for company accounts, and we are certainly giving detailed consideration to the small company audit and account requirements, to which my hon. Friend referred.

Mr. Cryer: If lightening bureaucratic burdens on small firms is so good, why is it so good to increase them for trade unions in Act after Act? Since we lose more days every year from industrial injury than from strike action, can the Minister assure us that the proposals to remove the bureaucratic burdens on small businesses will not extend to the removal of health and safety obligations—which most small firms of any decent standard welcome—to ensure that loss of life and limb is not increased?

Mr. Clarke: Trade unions can have their own bureaucracy, but I am sure that nothing that the Government have done puts more bureaucratic restraints on them. This is a matter, not for me, but for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, as the hon. Gentleman knows. We are seeking to strengthen the ways in which members can enforce legal rights, which this House has provided, against trade unions which might otherwise be unwilling to concede them. That does not conflict with the other general aims of our policy. The Government have no intention whatever of reducing the standards of health and safety achieved in the British workplace.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I sought to be called on question No. 1 as I represent Lancaster——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry that the hon. Lady was not called then, but she has her chance now on question 21.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I am now dealing with question 21, Mr. Speaker. I should like to point out that companies which come to Lancaster, despite any bureaucratic restrictions, rarely go into liquidation, because of the assistance given to them by local business men and the local city council. Anyone who comes to Lancaster will do exceedingly well.

Mr. Clarke: That is a very welcome message for us all. It is confirmed by my experiences of Lancashire, where the co-operation between the local business leadership and the local council, and the use they make of the assistance from the Government, is very effective and is showing up very well in the recovery of the economy in that area.

Competition Policy

23. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received in response to his recent statement on competition policy.

Mr. Maude: My Department has received a large number of representations in the course of the recent review, and I expect to receive more in response to the proposed Green Paper on the new restrictive trade practices law, due for publication shortly.

Mr. Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware of the possible takeover bid for British Bakeries in my constituency? Is he aware of a move by comparatively small companies to take over large companies, which then go in for asset-stripping on a big scale, which involves job losses? What will my hon. Friend do about this wicked practice?

Mr. Maude: Asset-stripping is a highly emotive and quite often misleading term. If any merger qualifies under the legislation, it falls to my right hon. and noble Friend to decide whether it should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. He does that on the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading. The proposed merger to which my hon. Friend referred is, I believe, in the process of being considered by the Director General.

Hong Kong (White Paper)

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the White Paper on Hong Kong.

A Hong Kong Government White Paper, "The Development of Representative Government: The Way Forward" was published in Hong Kong earlier today. Copies of the White Paper have been placed in the Library of the House.

The publication of the White Paper marks the end of a wide-ranging review of developments in representative government. A Green Paper, published in May 1987, sought the views of the Hong Kong community. It set out a range of options for possible change; none was ruled out in advance. The Green Paper elicited a widespread public response. We were also able to benefit from a wide range of views expressed in the House during the debate on 20 January.

The White Paper discusses the full range of issues raised in the review. The main decisions which it announces are as follows:

(a) ten directly elected members will be introduced into the Legislative Council in 1991;

(b) in 1988 the number of appointed members in the council will be reduced from 22 to 20, and the number of members elected by functional constituencies will increase from 12 to 14. In 1991, the present system of election by members of District Boards will be abolished; but the urban and regional councils will each continue to elect one member to the council;

(c) links between the urban district boards and the urban council will be strengthened;

(d) the Governor will continue to be the President of the Legislative Council for the immediate future.

We are committed to the steady development of representative government in Hong Kong. We believe that the decisions set out in the White Paper mark an important step in that direction and that they represent a balanced and reasonable response to the views expressed by the people of Hong Kong and their representatives.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Since the Secretary of State a week ago poured cold water on our request for a statement, we are glad that our renewed request for a statement has met with a better response today.

This is a very timid White Paper. It has been long anticipated, with considerable expectation and hope, and now that it is available it will come to many as a considerable let-down. For the most part, it does little more than tinker with the status quo.

The proposals for direct elections to the Legislative Council are distinctly inadequate. It is not simply that those elections are not to take place until 1991, rather than 1988, as many in Hong Kong campaigned for. Although I advocated 1988, I can understand, if not agree with, the Government's decision to be cautious in the light of the divisions of opinion in Hong Kong about timing. It is even more regrettable that, when direct elections are introduced, they will apply to only 18 per cent. of the Legislative Council—10 Members—rather than 25 per cent., the figure that many of us expected this year.

I cannot understand why the whole electorate of Hong Kong, whose potential number is 3,300,000, is to be given only 10 Members to elect when, under the new arrangement, accountants in Hong Kong—who cannot be especially numerous—are to have a Member of the Legislative Council all to themselves.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): There are a lot of accountants there.

Mr. Kaufman: But not 330,000.

Even at this late stage, I hope that the Government will reconsider the number of directly elected Members of the Legislative Council, even if the date of the election is immutable. The Government should consider reallocating the places of the two new functional Members to the directly elected section and increasing that number to a minimum of 12. In the event of a change of Government in this country before 1991, we would discuss the feasibility and desirability of increasing the number of elected Members of the Legislative Council with the Government of the People's Republic of China.

Hong Kong can and must afford lively controversy, and no doubt there will be lively controversy there over the contents of the White Paper. However, having registered our criticism of the White Paper's contents, it is right that I should say to the people of Hong Kong that, whatever disappointment there may be, the colony is at a turning point in its history and it cannot afford deep and lasting divisions. It is essential that everyone in Hong Kong unites to ensure that the new arrangements work and are successful. I am confident that that is what they will do.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his modest, but appropriate, thanks for our willingness to offer the statement this afternoon. I am also grateful to him for his expression of support for the need for steadiness and unity among the people of Hong Kong. They have always manifested that, to their great credit and to the greater success of the territory.

I do not accept the right hon. Gentleman's proposition that this represents a timid decision. It is an appropriate decision in response to the very careful and full consideration given to the matter in Hong Kong. Our key objective throughout has been to design a structure that will not be temporary or fallible, but one that will endure beyond 1997. I want to make it absolutely clear that the White Paper is entirely in line with the commitments given by the Government when the matter was last discussed. No commitment was made to introduce direct elections in 1988. It is nonsense to say—as some people said earlier today—that the White Paper means the postponement of direct election plans. The commitment in 1984 was to review in 1987. We have done that.

I note what the right hon. Gentleman has said about the number of directly elected Members. However, 14 elected Members from the functional constituencies will exist alongside the 10 directly elected Members. That is close to 50 per cent. of all the Members of the Legislative Council. We believe that they will represent a proper blend of continuity and change when the time comes. I am also grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's encouragement to the people of Hong Kong, after their mature reflection that has brought us this far, to continue to sustain the constitution in the way in which we would all wish.

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the decision to introduce an element of direct elections to the Legislative Council in

1991 will be welcomed by the majority of Conservative Members and, I believe on the evidence, by the majority of people of Hong Kong? Is he also aware that BBC radio news reported this morning that the Government of Hong Kong and this Government have gone back on an undertaking to introduce an element of direct elections in 1988? Will he make it perfectly clear that no such undertaking has ever been given?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his commendation of the decisions announced. I am grateful to him also for giving me the opportunity to set beyond doubt the fact that those reports had no foundation. As I said in my earlier answers, there was no commitment beyond that to undertake a review, and there is no foundation for the suggestion that we have gone back on any commitment. It is very important that that proposition should be nailed now and nailed firmly.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): Is the Foreign Secretary aware that he has caused considerable disappointment and a sense of betrayal among a large section of the Hong Kong community? Is he aware that democracy demands tradition and roots and that that implies a move to direct elections this year and a majority of elected members by 1991? Is he aware that his lame statement and his sell-out will make the eventual transition of Hong Kong in 1997 harder rather than easier? Finally, is he aware that it is a very risky course that he wishes to pursue in the next few years?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The intemperance of the language used by the hon. Gentleman, with phrases such as "sell-out", puts the value of his judgment in the right perspective. There is no case for such emotional and inaccurate phraseology, nor is there any suggestion that the Government are proceeding with undue caution. We have proceeded, as we have always advertised here, along an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary line, on the basis that each step should be carefully considered and that changes should command wide support and confidence in the community. What we said in the last White Paper is what has been said in this White Paper: these changes, after full consideration of all the views expressed, are well judged to command wide support and confidence and to ensure continuity, which is the foundation of stability.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Further to the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) about the BBC, is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the report this morning also stated as a bland fact that the decisions about elections had been made in deference to Beijing? Will my right hon. Friend take every step to see that that nonsense is flatly refuted? Will he stongly underline the commitment, in his own words, to the steady development of representative government in Hong Kong? Will he confirm beyond all doubt that there is no going back on the spirit and aim of the 1984 accord or on our very strong determination and commitment to see Hong Kong flourish as a free-enterprise society for many decades ahead?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for what he has said. He rightly drew attention to the importance of the joint declaration between the United Kingdom and the People's Republic of China. One of its provisions, designed to ensure the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong, was the proposition that the legislature of the Hong Kong special administrative region shall be constituted by election. That is the direction represented by the changes which I have announced today.

It is wrong to suggest that the decisions we have announced today are decisions of anyone other than ourselves. Clearly we have taken account of the wishes of the people of Hong Kong. Clearly some of those people themselves have wished to take account of the development that has taken place on the Basic Law which is being prepared by China. All these matters are important to the continuity which we want to achieve. That continuity is designed to secure the survival of Hong Kong as a prosperous, stable, free enterprise society in accordance with the joint declaration.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Is the Foreign Secretary really suggesting that direct elections earlier than 1991, and of a larger proportion of the legislature, would be revolutionary? If it is not he who thinks that, is it Beijing that thinks so, and has he received representations to that effect? What chance does he see for establishing two systems in one country if the democratic system is not firmly established in Hong Kong before the changeover?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman must come back to reflect on the pattern that prevailed in Hong Kong until the first steps were taken in the direction of representative government only a few years ago. What is now proposed is a substantial and important further step in that direction. The mood of the people of Hong Kong was rightly expressed in the last White Paper, when it was noted that there was considerable general public concern that too rapid progress towards direct elections could place the future stability and prosperity of Hong Kong in jeopardy.

In summary, there was strong public support for the idea of direct elections but little support for such elections in the immediate future. That was the position a couple of years ago. Against that background, we have announced today the introduction of direct elections in 1991 and made it clear that we think that that is the right pace at which to proceed.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that the House will think it fair if I now give preference to those who were not called in the debate on Wednesday 20 January.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the White Paper will be seen widely as an elegant compromise between the apprehensions of the traditionalists, who have viewed direct elections with considerable concern, and the more radical and adventurous section of the community that wanted direct elections much more swiftly and for a much greater proportion of seats? My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that timetabling the introduction for 1991 shows a much greater grasp of the realities involved in trying to arrange direct elections in a hurry than those who wanted the introduction in 1988?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We have striven to balance the two factors to which he has drawn attention. As a result, we will have contributed to the prospect of continuity, stability and prosperity.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Will the Foreign Secretary recognise that, if he does not think that the statement is timid, some talented and energetic people in Hong Kong will think it is, and that it will provide impetus to their wish to emigrate? To avoid that danger, will the Foreign Secretary accept and tell our friends in China that the higher the proportion of seats that become directly elected, the greater the prospect for stability and progress in Hong Kong?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have no doubt that the right hon. Gentleman is correct to say that there are some talented and energetic people in Hong Kong who disagree with the conclusions I have announced. That was implicit in the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman). We have striven to reach an answer that provides the best balance between all the opinions expressed and the anxieties felt in Hong Kong. I believe that that will prove to be the basis for continuity and stability of the system of government and continuity on the path towards and through 1997. I believe that it will prove to be the best way of retaining in Hong Kong the largest quantity of talent of the sort the right hon. Gentleman has in mind. It is a matter of judgment. I respect those who argue in the opposite direction, but I think that we have struck the right balance for the future.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many hon. Members consider themselves friends of Hong Kong and that many of us will feel that the proposals, although we understand the mixed views about them, are in the best interests of the people of Hong Kong and the territory's future? Is he aware that it was only a few years ago that a number of people from Hong Kong were seeking advice from us as to how they should move forward to representative government? Indeed, the first elections were held only two and a half years ago under the functional constituency system—an ingenious device that seemed particularly appropriate for Hong Kong and appears to have worked successfully. Can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the number of functional constituency seats is to be increased forthwith and that there will still be functional constituencies alongside directly elected Members after 1991?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his tribute to the balance of the conclusions we have reached. He is right to point out that it was only recently that moves were made in the direction of representative government against the historical background of Hong Kong. He is right to draw attention to the importance of the functional constituencies. The change that is taking place as a result of my statement today will take effect by the addition of 10 directly elected seats and a continuation of the functional constituencies in 1991.

Mr. Pat Wall (Bradford, North): Does not the Secretary of State's statement mark only a further extension of the long process of denying the Chinese people of Hong Kong a say in the running of their lives, both in relation to the rightful reunification with China and to the social and economic conditions in the colony? Does that not show that the Government have more in common with one-party totalitarian Stalinism than they have with democracy throughout the world?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I dare say that, if I wanted advice about one-party Stalinism, I should turn to the hon. Gentleman. I can assure him that the pattern of development in Hong Kong, the security that has been provided for the people of Hong Kong and the framework within which there has been an explosion of prosperity on a massive and demonstrative scale are a tribute to the free enterprise system which has underlain it and to the framework of government that has brought it thus far. The changes that we are making now are, in themselves, a further extension of the novelty of representative government which the hon. Gentleman appears to commend. I cannot see why he should complain about our movement in the direction of an increasingly democratic, free-enterprise society.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that we have heard a great deal about the lobby for 1988. I was recently on a private visit to Hong Kong, where I found that there were several other opinions, particularly in the business community. That community was looking forward to stability after the difficulties with the stock exchange and the devaluation of the Hong Kong dollar. It would have been a most inopportune time to bring forward a sweeping political change. My right hon. and learned Friend must have taken all that into account in the decision making that had to take place. I should have thought that today's decision was the right one, but I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will say something about the timetable of the Basic Law; we cannot have democratic elections without a Basic Law. There must be tremendous co-operation with the Governor of Hong Kong and the Chinese authorities.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend draws attention to another of the strands of opinion in Hong Kong, which emphasises the extent to which there are sharp divisions and variations in opinion there. That is one of the strong arguments for not making a major constitutional change in 1988, when opinion is divided in this way, but for proceeding along the timetable that he has commended.

My hon. Friend is also right to draw attention to the importance of the role of the Basic Law. As I have already said, the preparation of that is for the Government of the People's Republic of China, but it is being undertaken with the help of a Basic Law drafting committee on which Hong Kong people are well represented. I understand that the full text of the draft Basic Law will be formally published after refinement in May of this year and that Hong Kong people will then have four months to comment on it, before it is revised further. That other half of the equation is being carried forward quite sensibly.

This pattern of behaviour underlines the extent to which there is a fallacy in some people's thinking—that a choice must be made between the interests of Hong Kong and good relations between Britain and China. The truth is that we cannot have one without the other, and we are endeavouring to achieve both.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is it not clear that only when directly elected Members are in place will they have the authority to speak on the basis of democratic representation? Does it not ill become a Government who are supposed to be committed to democracy to say to other people, "You must wait for the system that we shall put in place and it will be only a short time before the final changeover takes place."?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: If life were that simple, what the hon. Lady says might be true. But life is not so simple. In making those changes from a system of government which has prevailed in Hong Kong, placed as it is historically and geographically, we are moving in the direction that she would wish, after the fullest possible consultation with the people concerned, on a time scale consistent with balance and continuity. We have done the best we can to take account of the diversity of opinion. With all humility, I believe that we have got the judgment about right.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that there will be a wide welcome in Hong Kong for the calm and considered way in which he presented his arguments today? Does he accept also that there will be some disappointment at the fact that there will be no direct elections in 1988? Does he agree that there will be some concern that what he has said today may not be the best way in which to ensure stability? Does he accept that there will be puzzlement about the fact that the small scale of what is proposed for 1991 falls short of the expectations not only of those who want direct elections this year but of those who are hostile to direct elections at any time?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have no doubt that my hon. Friend articulates the opinions of some people on the matter—I emphasise: some opinions of some people. We have made the best judgment that we can on the basis of an extensive survey and on the basis of debates in every conceivable representative institution and authority in Hong Kong. In almost all of them, as in the House, opinion was pretty evenly divided between both ends of the argument. The judgment that we have struck is as near right as one could get.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Foreign Secretary aware that it will not be lost on the British electorate that the Government who are handing over Hong Kong are the same Government who fought for the Falklands? They will be drawn to the irresistible conclusion that, whereas the Government were prepared to fight for the Falklands, they dare not do anything with Hong Kong because there are 1 million Chinese around the corner? *[Interruption.]* Sorry—1 billion Chinese around the corner. There will be only 18 per cent. participation in the elections. The Government are demanding that trade unions, tied hand and foot, must ballot for everything. Eighteen per cent. would not do service to the Iowa caucus. Before long, the hon. and right hon. learned Gentleman, if he is still in the job, will make arrangements for a one-party state in Hong Kong.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The people of this country will learn from the hon. Gentleman's intervention that, if they seek one of the longest possible interconnections of wholly unconnected topics, founded upon a wholly misleading over-simplification, they have no better champion of that type of behaviour than the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Dos my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the mixture of direct representation and functional representation is an intriguing experiment in proportionality? Does he consider that it bears particular study by her Majesty's Government?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am not quite sure in what respect that kind of sophisticated proportionality is to be commended. It might be commendable for the future tribulations of the parties that once constituted the alliance.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that the existence and popular expectation of representative government will do much to strengthen prospects for Hong Kong's institutions in 1997? Does he expect evolution to be speeded up a little between 1991 and 1997?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The pattern of development that has so far been identified seems to commend itself to the people of Hong Kong. We shall look forward to their experience in operating it when we consider the prospect for any further changes.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on achieving a judicious and skilful balance in his paper. Will he reassure the people of Hong Kong that it patently shows that we have absolutely no need to suck up to the People's Republic of China?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The idea that Britain should be obliged to have a confrontation with the People's Republic of China or be obliged, in my hon. Friend's elegant phrase, to "suck up to" the People's Republic of China is an unusually uncharacteristic over-simplification, of which my hon. Friend is not often guilty.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that he has weakened the authority of, and undermined confidence in, the Government of Hong Kong by so palpably bowing to pressures from the People's Republic of China in a matter in which that country has no legitimate interest and which relates entirely to a period long before the handover?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am sorry to tell the hon. Gentleman that his view is dramatically over-simplified and foolish. As I said in the last debate on this matter, and again today, all the evidence shows that Hong Kong prospers when London and Beijing can work in harmony. The overriding need for Hong Kong is to secure a foundation for lasting future stability and prosperity. That cannot be founded on confrontation between Britain and China; it can be founded, as it sensibly has been, on a continued understanding and the implementation of the joint declaration, to which we are both committed.

Mr. Michael Marshall (Arundel): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the whole future of Hong Kong—like its past—is based on its economic viability, which in turn is based on confidence? Is not the greatest threat to confidence in Hong Kong ill-considered statements urging on it a Westminster model, as some hon. Members have done, and as has been heard in some of the extreme statements of the Members of LegCo?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am sure my hon. Friend is right to remind the House of the importance of confidence as a foundation for stability—above all else—in Hong Kong. One of the remarkable things is the extent to which the people of Hong Kong and their representatives have, to a large degree, appreciated that, as is shown by the moderation and wisdom of what they say. That is a proposition that should be borne firmly in mind by Members of LegCo, this House and all others who are concerned to uphold prosperity, stability and continuity in Hong Kong.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept my reassurance that I think that he has got it just about right — which can only mean that the Prime Minister's uninformed intervention has not been allowed to play upon this particular matter? Is not the blunt fact that the major considerations up to 1997 must be both the maintenance and success of Hong Kong's economy and the realisation that we must go along with the Chinese Government's acceptance of the scale and speed of change?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am always glad to accept a compliment from the hon. Gentleman, however much it may be accompanied by the thorns that he sometimes feels obliged to offer at the same time. He puts his finger on it precisely when he says that the future must be built on exchanges and understandings of the mutual interest of the United Kingdom, China and the people of Hong Kong. If what we are building now is to be stable and survivable, it needs to be built in that way.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will call the four hon. Members who have been standing, to put their questions briefly.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): As any lingering doubt that my right hon. and learned Friend may have had about the good sense of his policy will have been confirmed by the support of the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds), and as everyone — including the People's Republic of China — is agreed that Hong Kong should have direct elections, why should they not be held as widely and as soon as possible if the tender seed of democracy is not planted until 1991? It may not be strong enough to withstand any of the winds by 1997.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The tender seed of democracy was first planted in the form of indirect elections as recently as 1985, and the judgment that we have formed is that to make a further change with the addition of direct elections only three years after that will be to hasten the process of maturation too quickly. I recognise that it is a matter of judgment. I do not think it would be easily possible to produce a conclusion that commended itself to the enthusiastic support of my hon. and learned Friend and, simultaneously, of the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds)—but I have to try my best.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the selection of a six-year period for partially elected representational government, instead of the nine-year period that was available to him, brings into question whether there is enough time to establish and experience representative government on a firm basis through direct elections, in addition to the ministerial system which must still come? Will he carefully consider his fine judgment of today and reflect on whether he ought not to speed up that process?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The arguments advanced by my hon. Friend are perfectly legitimate. I do not want to let him think, however, that we are likely to embark on a reconsideration of this matter. The important thing is to proceed with this next step, to get the process under way on a settled basis.

Mr. Alastair Goodlad (Eddisbury): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that his statement today will be broadly welcomed in Hong Kong and that it reflects the vast majority of the voices that spoke in the recent debate about the need for continuity and a measure of caution in these arrangements? As the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said, the people of Hong Kong will make the new arrangements work, and they will have the full support of this House in so doing.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend's experience of the people and colony of Hong Kong lends great authority to his observations. I am glad to endorse and accept them.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the last word.

Is it not a fact that, for more than a century, stability and autocracy have gone hand in hand in Hong Kong? Is there not a degree of illogicality in the words of those who say that the best way to maintain stability is fundamentally to change the system as a matter of urgency? Is there not also a certain illogicality in the proposition advanced by the Opposition Front Bench that, on the one hand, the document and the future discussions up to 1997 should be based purely on decisions taken in this House, as though the People's Republic of China did not exist and, on the other, to say, as did the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), that if there is to be a change of Government before 1991, the first thing that he will do is to consult Beijing? Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that most people think that he has got it right?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I thank my hon. Friend very much for that closing tribute. The least likely problem to affect the future of the people of Hong Kong is the prospect of the election of a Labour Government in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I shall take the application under Standing Order No. 20 first.

Heart Operation (Leeds)

4.7 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Committee No. 20 for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the postponement today of a desperately needed heart operation for two-year-old Jason Pullen from Halifax, who is awaiting surgery in Killingbeck hospital, Leeds."

The matter specifically relates to Jason, whose operation has been cancelled today. It is urgent because the child could die if he does not have the operation soon. It has had to be postponed four times because the hospital, whose staff are working under enormous pressure, cannot cope with the demand for cardiac surgery.

Only six of the 12 intensive care beds are in use, because the hospital cannot afford to employ enough skilled nurses to staff the rest of them. The surgeon, Duncan Walker, knows that life-saving operations are being restricted because of lack of funds, and he recently warned:

"increasing numbers of both children and adults will die on increasingly long waiting lists unless bottlenecks caused by lack of intensive care beds are relieved."

The doctors and nurses at Killingbeck have raised £300,000 for intensive care facilities and they are asking only for funding to staff them. The region does not have the money to do so, because the Government have persistently refused to staff the unit adequately. Staff are being put in an impossible position; in the words of the consultant:

"It is a matter of fact. We are not speculating. People are now dying on our waiting list."

Babies who are stable for the moment have to make way for acute emergencies, which often arise because those babies have been waiting too long on the waiting list.

Will Jason Pullen have to wait for his operation until his condition has so deteriorated that he is such an emergency himself, or will the Government give a commitment today that they will make sufficient funds available to end this dreadful lottery of who shall live and who shall die?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Lady asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that she believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the lack of beds in the intensive care unit at Killingbeck hospital, resulting in the cancellation of heart surgery for Jason Pullen for the fourth time."

I have listened with concern to what the hon. Lady has said. She knows that the only decision that I must take in looking at an SO 20 application is whether to give it precedence over the business set down for today or tomorrow. I regret that I cannot find the matter she has raised appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20, and cannot therefore submit her application to the House.

Points of Order

4.10 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Within your hearing at Question Time, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said that there would be a business statement after he had completed questions. What we had in mind was a business statement to explain how 60 tonnes of metal fell off a ship in the Mull of Galloway, and that metal was the bow of Trident——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I did not hear the hon. Gentleman ask a question about that during Question Time. I thought that his question had a rather different drift. My recollection is that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said that that there would be business questions tomorrow.

Mr. Dalyell: The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster might have had in mind some kind of explanation of how an extremely expensive part of the Trident submarine, somehow put on the deck of a Bahamas-registered ship, falls off the deck into the Mull of Galloway. We have it in print, and it has been cross-checked, that the Navy is now staking out the Mull of Galloway in order to try to prevent anybody else, such as the Russians, finding this exceedingly valuable, highly technical, sophisticated part of the Trident submarine.

Should not the House be told how an enormously expensive part of Trident comes to fall off the deck of a ship? Who had the idea and notion of strapping part of Trident to the deck of a ship, despite the gale warnings, which then falls into the sea, at heaven knows what expense——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sure that this is an important matter, but it is not a matter of order for me. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman pursues it in a different way. I should have thought that it would make an admirable Adjournment debate.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: It is not a point of order.

Dr. Bray: The steel in question was undoubtedly on its way from my constituency to Barrow and was made by the British Steel Corporation, to which the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's statement specifically related——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is an extension of Question Time, for which we have already had a full hour. The hon. Gentleman could have raised this matter on the question on steel, but it should not be pursued now.

Mr. Pat Wall (Bradford, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hope that I am in order to raise a matter in relation to the request made by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) about Killingbeck hospital. Four weeks ago in this Chamber I asked the Prime Minister about Killingbeck hospital and I was assured that everything would be fine. In that four weeks, the situation has become worse, and we should have a debate on that issue today.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Lady is successful in obtaining such a debate, the hon. Gentleman can join in.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will have noticed that, since my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised his

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

point of order about the storm last night and the bit of Trident dropping off into the sea, and the fact, about which you were a bit uncertain, that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster had said that there would be a business statement today, the Leader of the House has turned up. He obviously thinks that it is business questions today. We know that the Government had a bad shock last night which they have not got over. It is just conceivable that half the Government Treasury Bench thinks that it is Thursday. Will the Leader of the House let us have a statement about the important matter—more important than handing over Hong Kong to the Chinese—referred to by my hon. Friend?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I can confirm that it is Wednesday. If we go on like this, we shall be taking today's business into tomorrow.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am aware that it is Wednesday because in Liverpool today the North-West TUC has called a great demonstration—[HON. MEMBERS: "What is the point of order?"] If hon. Members give me time, I shall come to that.

The North-West TUC has called a great demonstration throughout the north-west, including Liverpool, in relation to the problems of the National Health Service and those who work in it and their effect on the patients of the NHS. Since thousands—I mean thousands—of ordinary people will be demonstrating, and are demonstrating at this moment, in Liverpool, Manchester and elsewhere in the north-west, may we have a debate on the future of the NHS along the lines referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon)?

Mr. Speaker: That is a Standing Order No. 20 application without notice, upon which I need not comment.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 26 FEBRUARY

Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. Gwilym Jones
Mr. James Couchman
Mr. John M. Taylor

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together the three motions on the statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft Statistics of Trade and Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 1988, be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Drug Trafficking Offences (Enforcement in England and Wales) Order 1988, be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Homes Insulation Grants Order 1987 (S.I., 1987, No. 2185) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

Question agreed to.

Credit (Control)

4.16 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to control the rate of interest charged by credit card companies by linking it to the rate recommended for borrowing by the Bank of England: to prohibit the making of inducements designed to promote excess borrowing by credit card users: to prohibit the charging of arrangement fees for consolidation and other forms of loans: to provide for clear written examples of what the APR means in financial terms and warnings for any loan scheme that may involve the loss of a house as part of the loan security conditions: and to make other provisions as to regulating such borrowing.

The Bill seeks to tackle the growing debt crisis in our society and recognises that much of the recent consumer boom has been financed on credit. Credit can be a useful and valuable option, but many families are paying a price for that credit in the misery of a spiral of debt that hangs round their necks like a chain.

It is time that some of the issues raised by such a credit expansion were brought out into the open. I have been motivated to introduce the Bill by my case work experience and the growing number of people who are turning to organisations such as the citizens advice bureaux and the money advice centres, locally and nationally, for help.

There is no limit to interest rates in Britain. I was shocked recently to be involved in a case in my constituency of a woman in her eighties. She was concerned about her electric and domestic bills and was unwell and vulnerable. She entered into a credit agreement with a finance company that charged her 1,000 per cent. APR interest.

On top of that, the lady was also charged for an insurance policy for redundancy even though it must have been clear to the agent who sold the policy that it was completely useless. I was able to obtain a refund for that lady, but, in the process, she died. There is no doubt that the stress of those loans added much to her ill health.

Loans at rates such as that are perfectly legal in Britain, but can they be justified? It is time that we had a maximum legal limit on consumer credit interest in Britain.

Initially, the Bill sought to tackle the many complaints that have been brought to me about the rate of interest being charged by bank and shop credit cards and the fact that when bank interest rates have fallen, the interest rates for credit have hardly moved. Those are two of the main facts that have led me to introduce the Bill.

Let me summarise the Bill's main proposals. First, it seeks to introduce a formula that will link all credit card interest rates, shop and bank, to the average bank personal loan lending rates, in a way that will allow credit card companies some flexibility, but will put a ceiling on the excessive interest rates being charged by some credit cards, particularly store cards.

Secondly, the Bill proposes to prohibit the marketing of credit cards by schemes that reward users with gifts according to the amount they spend on those cards; thirdly, it would ensure that all credit agreements print examples of repayments on money borrowed in cash terms as well as the APR; fourthly, it would make illegal the charging of arrangement fees for loans; fifthly, it would

ensure that all credit agreements that require the use of a person's home as security have a clear written warning that such schemes can lead to a loss of that person's house.

I should also like to suggest that all consumer credit organisations pay a levy from their profits to finance a chain of money advice centres, possibly incorporating existing ones, and the advisory role of the CAB that will enable anyone in Britain to get impartial debt advice.

Consumer debt in Britain has risen from £17·3 billion in 1980 to £41 billion in 1986-87, a figure that accounts for 10·7 per cent. of our total GDP. More than 2 million default summonses were issued in 1985, in the first quarter of the past financial year lending increased by 32 per cent., and there was a staggering 77 per cent. increase in credit card borrowing. That is the scale of the problem—all the more so when the interest rates of the two main credit cards have been on average at least 14 percentage points above the bank lending rate. The Government have considered that there is enough concern to refer credit cards to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

I seek to prohibit the marketing of credit cards by schemes which give gifts through accumulating points by spending on credit cards. The more one spends, the more points one gets. Although the introducers of the scheme associated with Barclaycard are aware of the dangers, at the very least such a scheme means that in effect those with debts are subsidising the richer users who get the gifts that are paid for by all the users. If credit card companies want to increase their market share, they should do so by marketing on reduced interest rates rather than by such schemes.

Since I announced the Bill, I have been contacted by a large number of organisations and individuals, and my attention has been drawn to the fact that many credit organisations at the shadier end of the market are capitalising on the misfortune of those who get into debt. Those consolidation loans often require a person's house as security, and may mean that people end up owing more money than they owed when they started. In some cases people are charged up to £2,000 in arrangement fees. When a credit firm is making a profit on interest repayments, there is no justification for such fees, and I propose that they are banned as soon as possible.

I also want all credit schemes that involve using the home as security to print a written warning in a prominent fashion so that people entering into such schemes are left in no doubt that such a schemes could lead to the loss of their homes.

According to a Marplan poll commissioned by the National Consumer Council, less than half the people questioned knew how APR was calculated. To make sure that people understand exactly what is being charged, I am therefore proposing that all credit agreements should give examples in cash terms of the monthly repayments and the total cost of the loan as well as the APR.

There are a great many issues of concern about consumer credit in Britain. Other proposals are needed in addition to those in the Bill, to deal with such issues as the way in which advertising by some credit companies is aimed particularly at those who are already in debt, and low-paid store assistants are given financial bonuses to get more customers on to their store credit card.

It is fair to say that many credit companies are responsible and reputable and are aware of all the points that I am laying out in the Bill, but can the range of credit card interest in Britain—from 19·5 per cent. of John Lewis to the nearly 40 per cent. of Dixons—be justified?

Has the number of people suffering from debt been underplayed by a Government who wish to portray consumer booms as an economic miracle of their making? When one considers that on current estimates over half those on social security have some form of debt, does that not raise questions about the introduction of loans to replace single payments under the new social fund that is due to be introduced in April, and the effect that that will have on people who already have debt problems, partly due to the issues that I have outlined?

Although the Bill is designed to obtain a fairer deal for people on all incomes, from the highest to the lowest, as always it is the poorest and weakest in our society who carry the greatest burden. The poor and the low-paid carry the greatest debts as a proportion of their incomes. As the gap between rich and poor continues to grow, the Bill gives the Government the opportunity to tackle some of the injustices and abuses of consumer credit, to ensure fairer interest rates, and to lift the burden in particular from those whose lives are being destroyed by the misery of debt and the unscrupulous who prey upon them.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Elliot Morley, Mr. Alan Meale, Mr. Gerry Steinberg, Ms. Marjorie Mowlam, Mr. Rhodri Morgan, Mr. Paul Flynn, Mr. Paul Murphy, Mr. Eric Illsley, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Mr. Paul Boateng, Mr. John McFall and Mr. Alun Michael.

CREDIT (CONTROL)

Mr. Elliot Morley accordingly presented a Bill to control the rate of interest charged by credit card companies by linking it to the rate recommended for borrowing by the Bank of England: to prohibit the making of inducements designed to promote excess borrowing by credit card users: to prohibit the charging of arrangement fees for consolidation and other forms of loans: to provide for clear written examples of what the APR means in financial terms and warnings for any loan scheme that may involve the loss of a house as part of the loan security conditions: and to make other provisions as to regulating such borrowing; And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 8 July and to be printed. [Bill 94.]

Orders of the Day

Employment Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

Clause 13

REQUIREMENT OF POSTAL BALLOT FOR CERTAIN BALLOTS AND ELECTIONS

4.26 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move amendment No. 10 in page 16, line 40, (Clause 13), at end insert—

'except where it is reasonable for the union to believe, and it does believe, that a ballot conducted under the terms of section 3 of the 1984 Act would result in a substantial increase in the number of members participating in the ballot by comparison with a ballot conducted entirely by the postal method.'.

The amendment seeks to allow a trade union, where it is reasonable if it believes that a workplace ballot would result in a substantial increase in participation compared to a purely postal ballot, to be entitled to use the workplace ballot.

Clause 13 as drafted will oblige unions to hold ballots for a political fund and for elections to the principal executive committee by postal ballot only. Our main objection to the clause is that there is no reason to suppose that postal ballots are inherently more democratic than are workplace ballots, or a combination of the two systems. Indeed, there is a great deal of evidence to the contrary.

Research produced by John Leopold in the *Industrial Relations Journal* last year, when he carried out work in regard to the political fund ballot that had recently taken place, reached the following findings. The average turnout in 38 unions using the workplace balloting method was 30 per cent. higher than the average for unions using the postal method. Only one union using a postal ballot achieved a turnout of more than 50 per cent., while only two unions using workplace ballots had turnouts of fewer than 50 per cent.

It is notable that those findings were not seriously disputed in the Green Paper. Chapter 5.13 of the Green Paper tacitly accepts that many unions will achieve better turnouts with workplace ballots than with postal ballots. Paragraph 5.13 merely claims, rather feebly:

"workplace ballots cannot guarantee a higher turnout".

Of course, no one claims that they can. We merely argue that one reason unions should be free to choose them is that they tend, in almost every instance, to produce higher participation. Since the Government always talk about choice, how about a bit of choice for trade unions?

Paragraph 5.13 lets the cat out of the bag. It says:

"even if . . . workplace ballots do produce higher turnout levels they are not without . . . serious disadvantages."

The rate of participation that most people would think was central to democracy is not the vital issue for the Government. They are happy to see the turnout reduced by clause 13. In many unions it would be reduced by up to one third. What concerns the Government so much?

Paragraph 5.13, which we discussed at considerable length in Committee, gives two examples of workplace ballots which have allegedly led to manipulation. The first, and most significant, is the Transport and General Workers Union general secretary election, which was re-run after an investigation by John Garnett of the Industrial Society found some irregularities. I point out that those irregularities were in fewer than 0·1 per cent. of the branches, or fewer than one in 1,000, but that is not something that we should ignore. Indeed, we do not.

Mr. Garnett did not find sufficient evidence of abuse to warrant a re-run. In fact, the union took the decision only after the personal intervention of the successful candidate, Mr. Ron Todd. The best that the Green Paper can make of this case — far and away the most important case that it cites—is that it suggests

"a need for more secure electoral arrangements."

Of course, the Opposition agree, and so does the Transport and General Workers Union. That is why the union, without any prompting, tightened up its procedure between the first general secretary ballot and the second, going considerably further than Mr. Garnett had recommended.

Does the Minister seriously believe that postal ballots are not, in theory at least or in practice, open to just as much abuse as workplace ballots? In Committee I quoted to the Minister, but he never answered the point—we should like an answer — the words of the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), when Secretary of State for Employment in 1985. On 23 April he said:

"I understand from the research that, in a fully postal ballot conducted by the AUEW . . . 200,000 members never received a vote and 20,000 received a vote to which they were not entitled." — [*Official Report*, 23 April 1985; Vol. 77, c. 775.]

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Does my hon. Friend agree that the best voting method in the trade union movement was followed by my old union, the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers? Every quarter it had what was called a star night. If a member did not attend, he was fined. Voting took place on the star nights.

The chairman of the branch called out the names of those who were standing for election and they were recorded. They were then checked by the secretary and the members. After the vote had been taken and collected nationally, the national executive issued a form which showed the number of votes for each candidate. The number could be checked, because it was in print, by every member of the branch and the union.

There was nothing wrong with that democratic process. It was far better than leaving it in the hands of some people dealing with ballots by post, which could be rigged. The Government have changed that voting method, which was a good democratic practice. Of course, the Government supposedly know better than the democratic practices of unions.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. More than one method can seriously be considered. It is arguable—I agree with my hon. Friend—that existing methods, even on the Government's criterion of protection from abuse, are better alternatives than what the Government insist on, and they achieve a higher turnout.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the only way a postal ballot can be rigged is if the union officials who are sending out the ballot forms cook them? Does the hon. Gentleman agree

that there is no possibility of putting pressure on people when they receive the vote at home but considerable pressure can be put on people voting in the workplace?

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Lady is a great deal more naive than I thought if she believes that postal ballots are not open to great interference by, for example, editorials in *The Sun* and the other Tory tabloids. They insist on having a full opportunity to interfere in union ballots. They have always done so, not least in the National Union of Mineworkers. I suspect that that is the prime reason why the Government insist on this method.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my hon. Friend aware that workplace ballots take place on a fairly big scale in the House of Commons? In 1975, when the present Prime Minister was elected leader of the Tory party after she beat the previous Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), a workplace ballot took place in the House of Commons among members of the Tory party, almost certainly including the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), who wants some other form of ballot for trade unionists. They all took part. The hon. Lady probably voted for who knows? She probably squealed at the top of her voice as well while she was doing it.

The Government have double standards: one thing for them, another for trade unionists. They have just announced another ballot some time in the future for the Chinese in Hong Kong. The percentage vote will be 18 per cent.—about as much as an Iowa caucus.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend has a point. I suspect that Tory Members are opposed to a postal ballot for themselves because most of them have two or more houses and it would not be clear to which the ballot was supposed to go.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Do not the rules of the House provide that Members who live, as I do, in a constituency 250 miles away from this honourable House and are proud to do so, must also live somewhere in London? Why be so derogatory about that? The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) says that we have two houses. Do not Opposition Members get precisely the same facilities?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): That is not a point of order.

Mr. Meacher: The only further argument which has been advanced in the Green Paper for clause 13—Ministers leaned heavily on this argument in Committee—is that there is

"scope for subtler forms of pressure in a workplace ballot"

and

"there is a real question whether such ballots can ever be totally free from suspicion."

I am sure that the House will take note of those words in the Green Paper. Despite the paranoia of the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), the Green Paper offers not a shred of evidence to justify that assertion. That is not especially surprising. We are now leaving the realms of reason and entering the dark areas of conspiracy theory which always lurk deep in the Government's collective psyche. Faced with this, perhaps the Opposition should offer counselling, because I do not think that we shall be able to convince by reason alone.

What the Government regard as subtle pressure a rational person might regard as the legitimate and wholly democratic attempt by the union and its members to secure by persuasion a vote in line with the union's declared policies. In other words—I say this especially to the hon. Member for Lancaster—if it is blustering editorials in *The Sun* trying to influence a postal ballot, it is legitimate pressure; but if it is talking with other people at the workplace and other union members and activists, it is illegitimate and dangerous brainwashing. We condemn such utter rubbish.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): Would the hon. Gentleman explain his case further? Clause 13 states that an individual trade unionist can

"have a voting paper sent to him by post at his home address or any other address which he has requested".

There is nothing to stop a trade unionist asking for his ballot paper to be sent to his place of work. He has the choice. Therefore, if he is worried that his ballot paper will get lost in the post, he can use that provision to overcome the problem.

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman is being extremely ingenious, and it sounds as though he is being rather defensive on the Government's behalf. Clearly the purpose of a postal ballot is to ensure that one is sent the ballot paper and can deal with it in the privacy of one's home. The number of workers at a given workplace who would take the initiative to ensure that ballot papers were sent to them at the workplace would be negligible, although I suppose that technically it may be an option. The hon. Gentleman should not use jesuitical arguments to wriggle out of the Government's clear intentions in the clause.

Quite apart from the number of members participating, there are real practical difficulties in requiring large unions to conduct postal ballots. Let me give an example. The largest union—the Transport and General Workers Union—has an extremely diverse membership employed in various trades by literally tens of thousands of employers. There are about 1·3 million members in 8,500 to 9,000 branches. The members are employed not only in travelling occupations—these include long-distance lorry drivers, coach drivers, air crew and travelling construction and agricultural workers—but at sea, in trawlers and lighthouses and on oil rigs and construction sites.

Furthermore, the union has a membership turnover—and I say this in answer to the question of the hon. Member for Lancaster about the post—of about 20 per cent. a year, or about 25,000 members a month. That is why the TGWU would have difficulties with postal ballots. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Lady wishes to make a speech on the matter, she can. I see the Minister pulling a face at the suggestion that his hon. Friend might make a speech, and I can understand that.

The co-ordination of elections, even with the central register of members that unions are required to collect under the Trade Union Act 1984, is a complex matter for large unions such as the TGWU. They require at least the degree of flexibility afforded by the Government's own previous anti-trade union Act—the 1984 Act—which is being taken away by the clause, if they are to ensure that every member is given a reasonable opportunity to take part in the democratic life of the union. Clause 13 as drafted will make that impossible. Perhaps that is what the Government intend, and that is precisely why we strongly oppose the clause.

[Mr. Meacher]

Our case is simple. In our view, the participation rate is probably the single most important democratic criterion for a ballot. Workplace ballots fulfil that criterion to a far higher degree than postal ballots. That is why trade unions should be given the choice to adopt the most suitable ballot for them.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The clause is another illustration of Government interference in the internal affairs of trade unions. I speak with some experience. The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) was shouting while my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) was speaking, but I am not sure that she is a trade unionist.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: As a matter of fact, I am.

Mr. Winnick: In that case, it will be interesting to know what part the hon. Lady has played in her trade union. For example, does she ever attend a branch meeting?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Yes.

Mr. Winnick: Frequently?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Yes.

4.45 pm

Mr. Winnick: I find that difficult to believe, and I would like some evidence from the hon. Lady that she knows what she is talking about.

I know what I am talking about. In a previous debate, I told the House that I am a national officer of my trade union, of which I have been a member for more than 30 years. I was an active member from day one.

I saw nothing wrong in the method used by unions, including mine, of conducting internal elections by the branch system. I did not consider it undemocratic. Ever since we came into existence 97 years ago, we have had elections. That may surprise Conservative Members, because they have not had much experience of democratic organisations. It took years and years for the Conservative party to get round to electing even its leader. The first such election was in 1965.

There is no election for the position of chairman of the Conservative party. His election is decided by whoever happens to be leader of the party at the time. That is why we make a valid comparison between the way in which the Communist party in the Soviet Union operates and the way in which the Conservative party operates.

I do not know whether the Communist party in the Soviet Union wants to lecture us on how to conduct our affairs, but the highly non-democratic organisation that now governs the United Kingdom certainly wants to lecture us and to pass legislation governing trade unions, which have always held elections. We did not have to be pressurised into holding elections. I challenge the House to name me a single trade union that did not hold elections from its inception. I certainly do not know of one. I am sure that the Minister will tell us if he has any such information.

My union is APEX—the Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff. I have often strongly disagreed with its policies, but those policies are decided at the annual conference. If I disagree with them, I campaign, as I have done over the years, for different policies. I have sometimes succeeded and sometimes not. I was elected to the executive as a result of campaigning; at first I did not succeed and then I did. But I could not for the life of me see what was wrong with the branch system.

Each year I would go along to the annual general meeting of my branch, where genuine elections took place. We would discuss the names to be nominated and ask each other, "What do you know of him or of this?" Two months later, when people had been duly nominated, we would have another branch meeting to decide how to cast our vote. We might spend 15 or 20 minutes on a particular position such as president or vice-president. Differing views would be expressed——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman enlighten us as to the proportion of members who attended those meetings?

Mr. Winnick: That is an interesting question——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Answer it.

Mr. Winnick: I shall reply to the hon. Lady, whose question I should have anticipated. In all honesty, I must say that it was not a large number of people, but the branch meetings were open to anyone who was a member and they could not be held on an authorised basis if a single member had not been notified beforehand of the proceedings. Anyone who wanted to could turn up. We would have a 15 or 20-minute discussion to decide whether X or Y or A or B should be given our vote. We would have a general discussion about those people's qualities.

The Government decided to go beyond that and have workplace ballots. As I have already said, there is an argument for the branch method, but given the choice between a workplace or postal ballot, I think that far more people are likely to participate in a workplace than in a postal ballot. My union is in the process of having a postal ballot; the votes have to be in by next Monday. I would imagine, although I could be wrong, that the percentage of members voting in the current elections in my union on a postal ballot basis will be far smaller than the percentage of members who participated two years ago in the workplace ballot. I very much doubt that I shall be wrong.

The hon. Member for Lancaster asked about the number of people that attend branch meetings. If the argument is that participation should be extended so that more people are involved, the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West was valid. If more people are likely to vote in a workplace than in a postal ballot, the workplace ballot is surely preferable. However, the important point is that the matter should be decided by the union. Some unions, including my own, prefer a postal ballot and that is a matter that the union executive and conference should decide.

In a democratic society, unions should not be dictated to. We know how Governments operate in dictatorships. Despite nine years of Thatcherism, I am glad to say that, in essence, this is still a democratic society. In such societies, trade unions should be able to conduct their own affairs.

Mr. David Lightbown (Staffordshire, South-East): Hear, hear.

Mr. Winnick: One of the Government Whips, the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown) says, "Hear, hear." In a previous debate on the Bill, I made a sedentary intervention to the effect that some

Conservative Members were involved in businesses that did not recognise trade unions. At that time, the hon. Gentleman nodded his head. We know that when hon. Members are appointed to the Government, they have to give up their shares and their directorships.

When the hon. Gentleman was conducting a business, no trade union was allowed to operate. Moreover, I imagine that the firm in which the hon. Gentleman was involved in a leading way would have victimised trade unionists if they had tried to organise their employment. So let us not have any lectures about democracy from the Conservative party when so many Conservative Members are directors of firms in which trade unionism is not allowed.

I have not the slightest doubt that this modest amendment will be defeated. If the Government are not willing to listen to reason on other matters, they will not listen to reason on this. It is nauseating to see trade unions being lectured day in and day out by an organisation such as the Conservative party, which does not believe in democracy in its own internal affairs.

The Minister is not sympathetic to Mr. Eric Chalker. Hon. Members may wonder, "Who is Eric Chalker?" I can tell hon. Members that he runs an organisation called the Tory Reform Movement, which is putting forward modest proposals. It believes, for example, that the chairman of the Conservative party should be elected. Surely there is nothing revolutionary about that. However, I imagine that if the Minister were lobbied by the Tory Reform Movement and by people such as Mr. Eric Chalker, he would show no sympathy whatever.

The Minister is not at all interested in democracy in the Conservative party and is the last person to lecture trade unions about how they should conduct their affairs. Trade unions have always been run on democratic lines. The members of trade unions are mere human beings and when occasionally there have been allegations of ballot rigging, the matter has been decided by a court. One type of ballot rigging, which I or my hon. Friends would be the last to defend, was decided against the people responsible, and rightly so, in the early 1960s in a court of law. As I say, trade unions do not require lectures about democracy, least of all from the Conservative party.

Mr. Madel: I have two questions to ask. One of them has been partly answered by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) because he spoke about the opening words of amendment No. 10:

"'except where it is reasonable for the union to believe, and it does believe'".

I take it from what the hon. Gentleman said that when he spoke about "the union", as does the amendment, he meant that the members of the union will take the decision under amendment No. 10 about whether they want a change in the way in which the voting is carried out.

I take it that the amendment does not mean that that decision will be made just by the general secretary or the executive council of the union but that it is the union members themselves who will vote on whether they wish to have a ballot system other than that laid down in clause 13. If it is the members of the union who will vote on that, then that is a perfectly reasonable starting point.

My second point is the one that I made in an intervention during the speech by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) who said that my point was jesuitical. I do not think it is. Clause 13(1) says that a voting paper can be sent to "any other address" that the individual member requests. It is perfectly reasonable for that other address to be the union member's place of work. If it is, it is up to employers to make sure that, if the voting paper goes to the place of work, it is easy for the employee to pick up the ballot paper and vote.

I take the point made earlier, that members of the Transport and General Workers Union have many different sorts of jobs. There are long-distance lorry drivers and people working at sea and on lighthouses, and on occasions such people would want the ballot papers sent to the place of work. When the Minister is winding up, will he confirm that line 30 of clause 13(1) means that "any other address" may be the place of work? If it goes out from the House that it can be the place of work, I expect employers and managers to respond in a positive way and to make sure that it is easy for each employee to have his postal ballot paper sent to his place of work and to record his vote in the way he chooses.

Mr. Heffer: I joined my trade union 50 years ago, and when I joined it I found that it was a very democratic organisation. I joined the Hertford and Ware branch of the union and the branch chairman was a distinguished local JP. He was portly, wore a bowler hat and a fob watch, and always came to branch meetings. He was a distinguished member of the local community.

Our union meetings were totally democratic. The only other branch of the union that I have ever been in was the Huyton branch just outside Liverpool. In the branches to which I belonged, there was always total democracy. As I said earlier, when we had a ballot for union officials or to decide any other issue, it was conducted in a most democratic fashion. Members who did not attend the branch meeting on the 'star' night when the elections took place, were fined. It was made absolutely clear that every member of the union should attend when there was to be an election for the appointment of a local official, a district committee or, in our area, a management committee, national officers or district or full-time officers.

Under the Government's policy, we know that if union members are fined by the union they can go to the court and be recompensed for not voting on democratic matters. We believed that it was important for people to vote and to attend branch meetings for elections to union positions, and I regard that as absolutely democratic. The chairman of the branch read out the names of all the people who were standing for election and they only stood if they had a minimum number of nominations from a number of branches.

The meeting was told that there were so many votes for George—I almost said George Brown, but he was not in my union. There might be five people standing and the votes for each of them were recorded. Every union member had a right to put down on a piece of paper the number of votes that were cast for each candidate. The details were sent to the national executive and a list was sent by them to each branch showing the votes that were recorded for each candidate. That meant that, if the votes did not tally, that if some branch official tried to swing the vote, every union member could see that and could say, "Hang on, that is not accurate," and the matter could be raised. That is democracy. That is what we grew up with in my trade union. It was always like that.

5 pm

When we had an issue such as a wage demand in the Liverpool area, we used to have a great aggregate meeting at which all the members of every branch in the area were called together. We used to use the Liverpool stadium. The negotiators would come together to explain to the members what they had been able to achieve for the membership. If the membership did not like it and said, "That is not good enough," they would vote it down at the meeting. The negotiators then had to go back to the employers and say, "Our membership is not having it," and they would have to discuss it again. If, in the last analysis, the membership said that it was not good enough and the employers said no, a ballot would be taken there and then in the branches and we would then take strike action throughout the entire area. To me, that has always been the basic democratic principle.

However, that changed once the union became part of the Union of Construction and Allied Trades Technicians. It was changed by the new people who began to organise UCATT, and who brought various unions together. However, after a period, the membership said no and the union reverted to the democratic election of officials.

Nobody needs to tell our movement about democracy. We grew up with it. We created it and we fought for it. Over the hundreds of years since our movement was formed, some of our members have died or have been sent to Australia in chains because they fought for democracy in this country.

We do not need any lectures about democracy from this Conservative Government. In fact, the Government have consistently been the people who have restrained democracy in the country. Over the years, the Conservative party has fought every effort to improve the democratic rights of the people. Therefore, we do not need any lectures.

My hon. Friends have tabled a reasonable and, if I may say so without being insulting—I think it is right—a moderate amendment. I would have gone much further. However, it does not make any difference whether the amendment is moderate, because the Government steamroller over everything, whether it is moderate, Left-wing, hard Left, soft Left or anything else. It does not make any difference because, if it is democratic, the Government steamroller over it. That is the Government's attitude.

Although the Government are saying to the unions, "Go back to the membership," I advise them that we never needed to go back to our membership; we are the membership and have always been the membership. We have always encouraged our people to participate totally in the life of our unions.

We do not need to be told about democracy. As union members, if we want changes, we have things called rules revision conferences. Every few years we change our constitution. We do so by going back to the members who vote. If the members want to change to a postal ballot, that is their decision. It is not a decision for the Government—it is the members' right. When the Government impose that on union members, they are being authoritarian.

Although I know that, in a sense, I am unfortunately talking to the wind, I ask the House—[HON. MEMBERS: "Not on this side."] No, not on this side, but unfortunately I am talking to the wind as far as Conservative Members are concerned. In any case, the quicker we get television in here, the better. Look at all the empty Benches, including our own. When we are discussing a matter of great importance for democracy in this country, hon. Members are not here. To me, such matters mean more than anything else because we are talking about the rights of ordinary working people who have always fought for democracy, supported it and died for it. That is the point about our people.

Those who fought and died in the last war were not all members of the Conservative party. When I was a member of the Royal Air Force, I spoke in Banbury on the eve of a general election poll. I said then that to listen to the Tory party, one would think that Mr. Churchill had won the war on his own. What had the rest of us been doing? We all fought that war for democracy. We all fought against Nazism. That is why the late Harold Macmillan made the point that the miners, the dockers and the others who fought for democracy were our people.

We have nothing to be ashamed of. We are the ones who have consistently fought for democratic rights in this country. We do not need any lessons from the Conservative party. If hon. Members are honest about democracy, they will vote for my hon. Friend's modest proposal.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Clause 13 is not quite the full-frontal attack on democracy that clause 3 was on Monday. However, the greatest insult that I can muster is to say that it runs it damn close. This clause contains a distillation of one of the key facets of Tory party policy—hyprocisy. It is hypocritical because the Tory party and the Government seek to corner the key words, the buzz words of "democracy" and "freedom". Their arguments have been exposed in Committee. However, on this occasion the buzz word is "choice" because if there is one thing that the clause does, it is to remove from 10 million trade unionists the possibility of choice in the way in which they conduct their elections.

It is important that, in moving the amendment, we make it clear that it is we in the Labour party who seek to restore choice to trade unions, against the Government who seek, by clause 13, to remove the possibility of choice. It is important to place one or two facts on the record. I had the privilege of serving in a national campaign related to political funds, in which all the unions did not follow one view. They chose many different ways in which to express their wish either to retain or not to retain political funds.

Some unions chose workplace ballots—for example, the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, the Union of Communication Workers, the National Communications Union, the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, the Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff, the Power Loom and Carpet Weavers and Textile Workers Union, the Ceramic and Allied Trades Union, the Transport and General Workers Union, the Confederation of Health Service Employees, the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers, the National Union of Domestic Appliances and General Operatives, the National League of the Blind and Disabled, the National Union of Footwear Leather and Allied Trades, the National Graphical Association, the Transport Workers Union, the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers, the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers-TASS, the

National Union of Public Employees, the National Union of Mineworkers, the Fire Brigades Union, and the Scottish Carpet Workers Union.

All those unions chose, of their own volition, a workplace ballot, which was carried out under the tight rules under which unions must administer their ballots and, in addition, the even more scrupulous and tighter rules that were put forward by the Government's own Trade Union Act 1984.

Other unions exercised their choice in a different way and, by and large, chose to go for a postal ballot system. They include the Furniture, Timber and Allied Trades Union, the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers-EFC, the Electrical, Electronic, Plumbing and Telecommunications Union, the National Union of Seamen, the National Union of Scalemakers, the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians, the Rossendale Union of Boot, Shoe and Slipper Operatives, the Musicians Union and the Union of Construction and Allied Trades Technicians. All exercised their choice in that way.

The one outstanding facet of those ballots, other than the fact that all those individual unions won their political fund campaign, was the turnout—the ability of people to turn out to vote for the unions in those nationwide ballots. It averaged out that 69 per cent. of those who could have voted did vote when it was a workplace ballot, but in postal ballots the average was 39 per cent. across those unions.

We are not being selective with figures. They are for national ballots held in 40-odd different trade unions. The figures stand the test. Clearly, a turnout of less than two thirds of the turnout possible under a workplace ballot was achieved by postal ballots. That is not to dismiss postal ballots. Trade unions have different circumstances and should be able to decide, but postal ballots produced a lower turnout.

The Government are saying, "We shall decide how you will ballot in future." They say to all those unions that have decided to use a workplace ballot, "I am sorry, but we are imposing on you a postal ballot, so the likely reduction in your turnout will be one third." The aggregate for the whole trade union movement will be 3 million, so 3 million working people will be robbed of the ability to cast a vote in key elections or in political fund campaigns. That degree of disfranchisement by the Government is unprecedented.

Indeed, in the past decades the Government have been loth to extend the franchise. It has taken about 100 years to force them to allow working people to have the vote in general elections to choose their Government. Even now, they are not content to maintain that position and are reducing the ability of trade unionists to vote in key elections.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West): No.

Mr. Allen: The hon. Gentleman does not agree, but I ask him to reconsider the figures, which cannot be contraverted.

The Government may come unstuck. The average percentage of people voting for a political fund in workplace ballots was 83 per cent. and in postal ballots it was 80 per cent. That is little difference, given the degree of national campaigning that went on. The Government, who are bad losers and took a right pasting in the political fund ballots, may well not achieve the outcome that they wish from changing the rules.

This legislation will not change an Act brought into being by a Labour Government or one of the revolutionary steps attributed to my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), who is accused of giving things away to trade unions. The legislation that is being changed was laid on the statute book by a Conservative Government in 1984. The Government are unpicking their legislation just four years after it reached the statute book. In 1984, the Government tried to murder the ability of trade unions to defend themselves politically and to campaign, but the system did not deliver. All the ground rules are up for grabs again and there will be change.

This reminds me a little of the great affinity of the alliance, particularly the SDP, for postal ballots. The Government have now taken on postal ballots in their entirety and to the exclusion of any other form of balloting, as, indeed, the SDP sought to do. For the Government, just as for the SDP, these postal ballots are not an advance of democracy; they are a device for reaching their ends by different means. The Government will ditch postal ballots, just as Dr. Death, the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), ditched them when they did not produce the results that he wanted. This is a farce. It is a fallacy to say that this is democratic and allows union members a choice, because it does not.

We have heard about corruption in ballots. The grossest ever corruption in trade union ballots is about to be perpetrated by the Government who will disfranchise thousands of people who would vote in a workplace ballot but who for some reason cannot vote in a postal ballot. On a re-run of all the political fund ballots, up to 3 million trade unionists may lose their ability to vote.

5.15 pm

As I said in Committee, this must be the largest vat of sour grapes ever trampled by the Government for having been hammered by 40-odd trade unions in retaining their political funds. The fact that the Government are bad losers is writ large. This is just the latest in a long line of attacks on the political funds of trade unions, stemming from the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act 1927. It is not that the Government have dreamed up something new. They thought that they could bend the rules in 1984. They even set the question — trade unions were not allowed to set the question — yet they could not win. They specified how the unions must ballot, but they could not win. The Government have had every possible advantage and the trade unions, by a united campaign, turned that round into victory.

Because of the fear that the Government engender in trade unionists, not only were the political funds held, but the insurance workers — not a radical or revolutionary bunch of people—set up a political fund; the teachers in Scotland have been radicalised and set up a political fund; post office clerical workers and even the tax men have set up political funds. In some perverse way I thank the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) for his foresight in introducing these political ballots. The nurses and other groups may be next.

There has been no obvious demand for this change. The Government are introducing it on the basis of dogma. The

[Mr. Allen]

certification officer received seven complaints—up to 10 million trade unionists were balloted in this exercise—in the first year of the political fund ballots and five complaints in the second year. He received 12 complaints out of a possible 9 million, so there is no demand. The Bill, particularly this clause, has been introduced because of dogma alone. It is undemocratic and hypocritical. I hope that if it is not defeated tonight or in the other place, it will be the first clause to be repealed when we are returned to government.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-Under-Lyme): I support the amendment but, like my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), feel that it does not go far enough. The same applies to this as to many other parts of the Bill: the matter should be for the unions to decide. It should be for the unions to determine how voting takes place.

What is the Government's justification for allowing the stock exchange, but not trade unions, self-regulation? The Minister has said that the unions must be controlled because of their power and influence. If that is the criterion, what of political parties? Should not their affairs be regulated by law? Does the Tory party intend to have a postal vote for elections or will it stick to conferences? Is it somehow different when it involves the Tory party rather than trade unions? Will hon. Members vote by post for the Tory chairman, or will he or, indeed, she, be appointed? Is the argument that Conservative Members and the Conservative party chairman are less important than union officials of a lower rank than president or general secretary? Are they less important than the chairman of the Conservative party?

Some unions like postal ballots. It makes sense when they have scattered membership. The last union ballot I participated in was with NUPE when I was branch secretary. We had three sorts of ballots. The first was a workplace ballot, where the members were informed with information which was readily available, then had discussions; then the union hired ballot booths from the local authority and set them up, the same as in the general election, and the members went in to vote in secret. That is how they organised it themselves, without anybody telling them to do it. The second method was by post, sent out by the union to members' homes. The response to that method was lower, but not considerably lower.

The third method was for me as branch secretary to deliver a vote to members' homes, to people such as caretakers who could not get to the workplace to vote. If the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) were still in the House, she would hear that postal ballots are delivered to members' homes and the person says, "Hello, Llin, come in and have a cup of tea." I would admire the garden, and then we turn to the vote, and they say, "Which way do you want me to vote?" As a good trade unionist, I would say, "Do what the executive recommends," or, "Have you read the leaflets?" or, "I think this, that or the other." Postal votes are influenced, and that was made clear to me as branch secretary when I went out to talk to members. It is there to be seen, and the Government are wrong in thinking that postal votes are not influenced.

It is for the union to decide where the membership should vote and how best to conduct it. Democracy consists of discussion, information and then voting. That is what we do in general elections and that is what happens in workplace ballots at all workplaces. It does not take place in postal ballots. In any case, it is easier to put pressure on people through postal ballots. Every Member of Parliament knows that calling to see somebody with a postal vote and having a little chat always pays dividends, because not only can the candidate put one side of the argument and dismiss the other side of the argument, but he does not have to argue both sides of the argument, as happens at work when people are airing their different opinions.

In the workplace, many views are voiced and members decide after listening to those views. The workplace vote generates a higher turnout because of greater informed interest, whereas the postal vote is often left on the mantlepiece. Small, well organised political groups can go around to houses with postal votes and put pressurre on people and influence the vote. It has occurred that pressure has been brought to bear on people in branches, and I would not like to see that perpetuated.

The Government, in preferring postal ballots to workplace ballots, have given way to the views of people without any practical experience at all. They have had no experience of trying to get members to take up their democratic rights. Members do not sit there waiting for the postal vote to drop through the letter box; someone must go to them to get them to vote and use the rights which have been won for them, often after a long and bitter struggle.

I understand that the Government are obsessed with postal voting because they think it will lead to a more secure electoral arrangement, but what is the use of a union having such a secure electoral system that members do not participate? Each union should decide on the best method for getting its members out to vote; it is not for the Government to decide.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Like the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) I am also concerned for disfranchised groups, but the clause is one of the jewels in the crown of this excellent Bill—but does it go far enough? There are still some underprivileged and potentially persecuted groups—disfranchised groups—which are urgently in need of the protection provided by the clause. One such group, admittedly of declining importance and reducing numbers, is sponsored by trade unions. My hon. Friends and I fully understand what they say and why they must say it.

Opposition Members are fond of leafing through the Register of Member's Interests, so it comes as no surprise to find that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is sponsored by COHSE, so we understand his remarks, and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) is sponsored by NUPE.

Mr. Allen: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Knapman: No. The hon. Gentleman has been begging me for months to make a contribution in the debate, and I am doing my best to intercede with the Minister on his behalf. The hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) shares that distinction with NUPE.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham Ladywood): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Knapman: No. The hon. Lady has also asked me many times——

Ms. Short: The hon. Gentleman has referred to me.

Mr. Knapman: Very well.

Ms. Short: The hon. Member does not understand what trade union sponsorship means. It means a link with a union for which one has political sympathy. In the case of NUPE, it represents many very low-paid women, typical of the women who live in my constituency, and I am proud to work with NUPE for the interests of those workers. I get no financial contribution of any kind for that work, and the hon. Member should understand that. Just because his hon. Friends take those kinds of jobs for large sums of money, he thinks that we are the same, but he will find that that is not so.

Mr. Knapman: I understand from the hon. Lady that the relationship between hon. Members and their unions is very slight, but I suggest that Conservative Members understand why they say what they say.

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): I want to say a little more about the potential inadequacies of secret ballots, and to try to disabuse Conservative members of the notion that, other than the concession they have made that there is sometimes a poorer turnout, there is absolutely nothing else wrong with the proposition.

Mr. Winnick: I missed the speech of the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) because I went to check in the Register of Members' Interests what involvement he has with trade unions. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the hon. Member for Stroud has listed himself as a partner in R. J. and R. M. Knapman, builders, and a member of a Lloyds underwriting syndicate? Would my hon. Friend find it of some interest to know whether the firm in which the hon. Member is involved allows employees to be members of trade unions, whether trade unions are recognised, and what sort of internal democracy—postal ballots or otherwise—takes place in Lloyds underwriting syndicates?

Mr. Clay: One of the colleagues of the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman), who is on the Standing Committee, had a different job every time he stood up to speak. Apart from his job here, he has been a management consultant for a building firm, like the one just referred to, and he had some other job. Goodness knows what sort of balloting went on there. The hon. Member for Stroud never spoke in Committee, to my recollection, so we never had the opportunity to raise those matters with him until tonight. I do not know whether he wants to respond to the question my hon. Friend has asked me—I cannot give the answer. He is sitting down; he obviously has something to hide. Postal votes certainly do not take place in Lloyds underwriters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) several time used the words "as in the general election" when referring to postal votes. When she described her activities as NUPE's branch secretary, she described how postal votes are distributed.

Last Monday and again today, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) made a point about how we take votes in this House. He described it as the Longbridge method. However, we must consider the votes that elect Members to this place. The general election is more like a workplace ballot than a postal ballot. What would happen if we conducted parliamentary elections by postal ballot?

I ask hon. Members on both sides of the House to speculate on the outcry that would occur if there was one story of a house-owner—man, woman, mother or father—who said to a child who might be 18, 19, or 20 years old and still living at home, "I'm not having any Tory voters in this house. You had better show me that ballot paper before you submit it; otherwise you are out of the house." What a hoo-hah there would be if that sort of thing happened in a general election. However, that cannot happen because the general election is not conducted by postal ballot.

5.30 pm

We are not simply concerned about trade union officers delivering ballot papers. As the clause is drafted at present, there will be remedies — although they are not very reliable — and procedures that may ensure that ballot papers are sent out properly. However, not even this Government could conceive of a law that would regulate the way in which the ballot papers were returned. Someone must collect those papers. Even if the papers are supposed to be posted back through the Post Office, nothing will stop the practice that happens during a general election with postal votes. That procedure involves someone visiting a house and telling the occupant, "If you have not put in your paper yet, I'll put it in for you."

We are not just concerned about influencing how people vote. We do not know whether postal votes will even be submitted. At least in a general election one can check the register to discover whether a person with a polling number has submitted a postal vote. That cannot happen in trade union elections unless the Government have even more hidden agendas in mind in terms of registers of trade union members available for public inspection. We would not need blacklists any more; employers would have a national register of union members. The only way in which we can prevent the abuse of postal ballots is by creating even greater abuses.

As late as the 1960s, I can remember canvassing in a by-election not in a wild rural area, but in mid-Bedfordshire. I remember farm workers in tied cottages telling me that they believed that the farmer who owned the cottages knew how they voted. I remember how difficult it was to persuade people that the ballot was secret. My goodness, if there had been a postal ballot, those farm workers in tied cottages would have said that the owner came round and made them show him their ballot papers.

Conservative Members must explain why it has never been seriously suggested that hon. Members should be elected to this place on a postal ballot except where voters are infirm or blind or suffer some other disability. I stress that a postal ballot is not secret. If a method of voting by going out and recording a vote in a ballot box in a designated place which can be properly scrutinised is good enough for electing Members to this place, why is it not good enough for trade unionists? We are not even asking for that: We are simply asking that trade unionists should have that option if they believe that that is best.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I will be very brief and ask a question. Is the Minister aware that not many days ago there was an election for the president of the National Union of Mineworkers? In Nottingham, British Coal—the employer — recognises only the other union, the Union of Democratic Mineworkers.

In years gone by, my experience has been that, when a ballot took place, facilities were provided at the workplace

[Mr. Frank Haynes]

—the pit. In the presidential election, members of the NUM were denied that facility. They were told to take their ballot box on to the street and to ballot there. That is what happened.

I want to refer to the point raised by the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel) about postal ballots and ballot papers going to the employer. Bearing in mind what I have just said about the management not co-operating with NUM members in the recent ballot for the NUM president, if the Minister's answer to the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, South-West is yes, can he assure us that there will be fair play for those NUM members in Nottinghamshire in future?

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I want to ask a specific question. To save the Minister intervening at this point, he can answer me in his reply. I know that, rightly, the Government are keen to reduce bureaucracy affecting businesses and especially small businesses, and they have my support in that. However, this measure will do the opposite for trade unions which, to some extent, must rely on the voluntary and unpaid efforts of individual members.

Has the Minister any estimate of the extra bureaucratic costs and the effect on unions of imposing the extra burden? Is the Minister pressing the clause on ideological grounds, irrespective of the effect of the costs on trade unions? If not, will he tell the House what homework he has done on the effects of the clause? Is he thinking of extending the principle to other organisations, or will it apply only to trade unions because they are trade unions? I am not sponsored by a trade union, but I can tell when an organisation is being persecuted.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Patrick Nicholls): The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) stated fairly that we had debated this point at length in Committee. We have also debated it at some length this afternoon. He said that postal balloting cannot be said to be inherently more democratic than workplace balloting, and of course he is right. How hon. Members vote on this clause will depend on whether they believe that the turnout is the most important consideration.

It was obvious from the debates in Committee and from what we have heard from many hon. Members today that many of them believe that turnout is the most important point. I can understand the sincerity with which hon. Members make that point, but the Government do not accept that turnout must be the final criterion. If we had to pick the most important point, we believe that it would be the ability of a person to vote knowing that he is voting secretly and in a system that offers the best chance—not a guarantee, because there is no such thing—of being able to vote in a secure, safe, free and secret manner. That must be the best criterion.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West referred to the evidence and to the example given in paragraph 5.13 of the Green Paper. Many references have been made to that in our deliberations. Paragraph 5.13 refers to the election of the general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union. All credit should go to the TGWU for having that matter investigated. I remember that well. The press campaign that preceded the union's decision to act in that way was considerable. Whatever else we might try to accuse the hon. Member for Oldham, West of, I fully believe that he is as appalled about rigging in union elections as any Conservative Member. I hope that he will accept that from me. There is no monopoly on outrage about those matters.

Opposition Members have said that there were irregularities in only eight branches out of 9,500. Only 12 branches were investigated. When it becomes evident that some 799 votes out of 800 were signed by the same hand and the remaining paper was spoilt, there can be no doubt about the abuse. Indeed, *The Observer*—which is not an uncritical organ of the Conservative party — was prompted to say about that election that it had interviewed a trade union official who complained of having writer's cramp. I am as appalled about what happened as the hon. Member for Oldham, West.

However, we must tackle the fact that such a vice can occur within the system. I accept fully that the hon. Member for Oldham, West and his hon. Friends feel as badly about that abuse as Conservative Members. Therefore, the House must ask whether it is possible to devise a method that will ensure that those abuses do not happen.

Mr. Heffer: I refer the Minister again to the system used by my old union, the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers. It is far better than anything else that has been suggested. Is he aware that in trade unions, whatever their political or religious views, members vote for people because they think they are the best people? In my branch, one member belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. He always nominated a member of the Communist party. I once asked him, "Why do you do that?" He said, "Because he is the best trade unionist. His politics have nothing to do with it." That is democracy in a trade union.

Mr. Nicholls: I would have come in due course to the contribution of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), but I will deal with it now. I accept what he has said about his experience in the trade union movement. I can understand that someone with his determination, commitment, industry and eloquence would never put up with some of the abuses which might happen. What we have to decide goes further.

Where trade union members do not have the benefit of the commitment of people such as the hon. Member for Walton to see that the procedure runs properly, can we provide a system that is free-standing?

The point has been made that many unions already have postal ballots. All we are saying is that essentially it is a question of trying to extend to all unions the benefits that some enjoy. It cannot be sufficient to leave it to the trade union when the present system can give rise to abuses which the hon. Member for Walton would deplore as much as I do.

5.45 pm

Another point ran through the contributions of several hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), the idea being that in some way we had abandoned the legislation which we passed as recently as 1984 and that we were embarking on a different course. If we consider the Trade Union Act 1984 as it finally emerged after debate in the House, it is clear that we had a commitment to the principle of postal balloting but it was said that in certain circumstances it need not take place.

The reason for my right hon. Friend taking that view was that he had heard, as we all had from trade unions, that it would be unfair to require postal ballots because unions had not had a chance to compile proper membership lists. We have moved on four years. We say that unions have had ample time to compile the lists and that it should now be possible to have a system of postal balloting.

In the end it must come down to this: can we leave this to the trade union movement and can we be certain that in every single case abuses will not take place? Obviously we cannot. Therefore, we have to devise a system which minimises the possibility of abuse. Although it is not a fail-safe or a guarantee, in the end a postal ballot comes nearer to that ideal.

Question put, That the amendment be made:

The House divided: Ayes 202, Noes 288.

Division No. 175] **[5.46 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, J.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alastair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, James
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Samuel
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Douglas
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, James
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lamble, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Tom
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, E. K.
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, John
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Steinberg, Gerald
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thomas, Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A. J.
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Anthony
Wray, James
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Frank Cook.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashdown, Paddy
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bigg-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*

Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Rydale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Timothy
Jessel, Toby
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, David
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Miss E. *(Devon W)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Roesi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Stephen Dorrell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 14

INDEPENDENT SCRUTINY OF CERTAIN BALLOTS AND ELECTIONS

The Minister for Employment (Mr. John Cope): I beg to move Government amendment No. 11, in page 19, line 1, leave out from '(a)' to 'either' in line 3 and insert

'within the period of three months after it receives the report—

(i) send a copy of the report to every member of the union to whom it is reasonably practicable to send such a copy; or

(ii) take all such other steps for notifying the contents of the report to the members of the union (whether by publishing the report or otherwise) as it is the practice of the union to take when matters of general interest to all its members need to be brought to their attention;

(b) ensure that any copy sent or notification given for the purposes of paragraph (a) above is accompanied by a statement that the union will, on request, supply any member of the union with a copy of the report,'.

The amendment implements the results of the review that we promised in Committee of the method of making the scrutineer's report available to union members. The Bill as drafted was silent on how the report should be sent to members, as long as it is sent by some method to all members. As amended, the clause gives unions a choice as to how they distribute the report, and I hope that it meets the point raised by the Opposition in Committee.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): This is a minor amendment, but one that we welcome. There may have been some speculation on Second Reading, and certainly in Committee, about the general thinking behind the

Government's approach to some aspects of the Bill. I have to say that we thought it ridiculous that a separate copy of the scrutineer's report should have to be sent to every member of the union.

The question that has to be asked is not why the Government are amending it, but why it was in the Bill in the first place. I suppose one could say that it was an error on the part of the civil servants. However, with your great experience, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of trade union affairs and the Department of Employment, that is unlikely. I suggest another proposition, which is that civil servants have been operating on the basis that it is the Government's intention to harass the unions and make it as difficult as possible for them to go about their democratic affairs.

We welcome this minor change. I think that the Minister will confirm that it means that the results of the scrutineer's report can be published in the union journal, along with the statement making it clear that any individual member of the union can write and ask for the full report. That is a more practical way of dealing with the matter than having to send a copy of the scrutineer's report to each union member.

Mr. Cope: I can confirm that the journal would be an appropriate method of doing that, if it is the way in which the union usually distributes information to its members. I would never blame our civil servants for any matter with which the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) or anybody else may disagree. We are responsible for it. However, I would not accept the alternative explanation offered by the hon. Member.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 16

BALLOTS ON INDUSTRIAL ACTION AFFECTING DIFFERENT PLACES OF WORK

Mr. Strang: I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 20, line 6, leave out clause 16.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take the following: Government amendment No. 22.

Amendment No. 13, in clause 17, page 21, line 33, at end insert

'including such provisions as may be necessary to ensure that a union conducting a ballot under section 11 of the 1984 Act does not create an artificial balloting constituency for the purposes of securing a particular result in that ballot.'.

6 pm

Mr. Strang: When he replied to the debate in Committee, the Under-Secretary of State agreed with me that this was one of the most important clauses in the Bill. Is it not reprehensible that the Green Paper did not refer to it? No notice was given to the trade union movement that this further imposition was to be included in this anti-trade union Bill. Was it not also remarkable that, on Second Reading, the Secretary of State did not refer to this important clause? That shows the contempt which the Government have shown for the trade union movement and their indifference to the position of many employers who are concerned about and opposed to the clause.

The Under-Secretary of State, who is a legal expert, agreed in Committee that this is a complex clause. Perhaps I can illustrate that by quoting an explanation which I obtained in a letter from the Minister of State when I wrote to him about this clause in November last year. The clause is about ballots and about the balloting constituency with which trade unions will have to comply if they are to have a ballot which will give them immunity in tort for industrial action.

In his letter, the Minister said:

"Ballots where the union properly gives entitlement to vote to all of its members (ie. the "balloting constituency" consists of all its members) will not be affected at all by the provisions of clause 16. Nor will any ballot be affected where the union properly gives entitlement to vote

(a) to all of its members employed by one employer, or by each of a number of employers taken together; or

(b) all of its members employed in one particular occupational description or grade or each of a number of descriptions or grades taken together; or

(c) to all of its members employed by one particular employer (or each of a number of employers taken together) in a particular occupational description or grade (or each of a number of descriptions or grades taken together).

There will also be other cases involving more complex permutations of membership and employment by particular employers in which the balloting constituency will not mean that separate ballots have to be held in order to preserve immunity."

That is how the Minister of State responded in part to my letter. This is a valid point. Surely we should be putting on the statute book industrial relations legislation which people clearly understand. For example, in a dispute such as that involving the National Union of Seamen, if the union takes legal advice, it should receive an answer in which the solicitor or the QC has some confidence. That will increase the prospects, when an employer takes legal advice from another individual, of the two sets of advice coinciding. That is a desirable prospect for industrial relations.

The clause is unacceptable, because legal experts disagree about what it means. It is not good enough for Ministers always to duck out of this, as they did in Committee, by saying that it is a matter for the courts. We want to be clear about what it means before the Bill goes on to the statute book, so that workers, trade unions, managers and employers recognise the requirements which must be met in respect of the balloting process. The clause is about ballots and about democracy. That is why it is an important clause. It concerns the ballots which will be taken to determine whether, for example, workers at the Ford Motor Company can come out on strike in circumstances which prevent their union's funds from being sequestered. That is an important element of the Bill.

Mr. Allen: One reason why the Government may not understand the full implications of their legislation is that it was introduced at a late stage and was not even in the Green Paper. It is not good industrial relations law, and it gives rise to some political venom from the Secretary of State for Employment who brought with him all his prejudices from his previous post as Secretary of State for Social Services—where, as I understand it, he had a bad time as a result of selective strikes. Perhaps that is why this clause, more than any other in the Bill, is a complete botch.

Mr. Strang: It is interesting to note that a number of correspondents at the time believed that it related to that, although Ministers denied in Committee that that was the intention of the clause.

The democracy issue is fundamental to this Bill, to these amendments and to the Government's approach to industrial relations. The 1984 Act, which requires a trade

[Mr. Strang]

union to ballot its members and to obtain a majority before it can take authorised industrial action without being subject to legal challenge, is a fundamental ingredient of industrial relations legislation. The Government argue that they had to intervene to impose these legislative requirements because a substantial number of strikes were not in response to the genuine aspirations of workers or trade unionists. They claim that those strikes were a consequence of hot-headed, militant trade union leaders dragging people out on strike and contributing to poor industrial relations and the loss of many working days.

Conservative Members will not be making too much of that point in the context of the current industrial strife. There has already been a reference to the day of action in north-west England about the state of the Health Service. Is it being suggested that, on that day of action, trade unions such as NUPE and COHSE are pulling out those nurses and workers against their will? Most hon. Members will understand what the role of most of those officials has been today. They have created the programme. They have created the situation in which the workers can take that action in a way that minimises the risk of serious hardship to their patients. That is the constructive role which most trade union officials will have been taking, in practice, today in respect of industrial action in the Health Service.

I referred to that point on Monday. In the seamen's dispute, the leadership is urging workers involved in selective action to resume working. It is not a question of the officials trying to bring the workers out on strike. It is a question of the determination or otherwise of the seamen themselves.

The same point applies to the Ford strike. The Secretary of State was brought here to answer a private notice question on Monday. His first point was that, although this was potentially an enormously important strike for the British economy, it had nothing to do with the Government. Indeed, he appeared to resent the fact that he had to appear before this House, but he admitted that the trade union officials had recommended the amended offer which was negotiated last Sunday. No one can suggest that the trade unionists at Ford are being pulled out on strike against their will.

If the Ford dispute is settled in an orderly way—it is in the interests of the trade unions and of the Ford Motor Company to do so—it will be settled on the basis of a negotiated settlement between the unions and the Ford Motor Company. Anything which the Government, or anyone else, might seek to do to create anarchy and to encourage workers to go back to work, when there is an official dispute, is more likely to prolong the dispute than help to secure a solution.

The clause is important. By imposing a further requirement on top of the Trade Union Act 1984, it will make the position worse rather than better. Why have the Government brought it forward in the first place? When challenged in Committee, the Minister said that they were worried that section 11 of the 1984 Act was defective because unions might create artificial balloting constituencies to get a majority in a strike ballot. In other words, they might put two groups of workers together, one militant and one not, to get an overall majority for a strike and thus get the moderate group of workers into a dispute with their employer.

Some of us wondered how the Government discovered the problem of artificial balloting constituencies. We asked for examples. In Committee, we eventually dragged out half an example. We demonstrated that it did not make the case for the clause. We are aware that, in its submission, the Institute of Personnel Management suggested that it was a possibility. I wonder. Is it because of what the IPM has said could happen that civil servants decided to put such a monstrous and damaging industrial relations proposal to the Ministers?

The Government did not know whether the problem was real and needed to be addressed in legislation or whether it existed purely in the minds of certain individuals who were scrutinising industrial relations legislation. It is as though a college of cardinals had met to discuss the number of angels who could congregate on a pinhead and decided to frame the result in legislation. The result is a clause that can only damage industrial relations.

As it stands, clause 16 amends sections 10 and 11 of the Trade Union Act 1984. Section 10 obliges a union, if it is to be immune from action in tort, to hold a ballot and achieve a majority vote before an industrial dispute can take place. Section 11 defines the constituency of trade union members who must be able to vote in such a ballot. In particular, section 11 (1)(a) requires that entitlement to vote be given to all members of the relevant union, who "it is reasonable at the time of the ballot for the union to believe will be called upon in the . . . industrial action to . . . breach . . . or interfere with the performance of their contract of employment".

The Bill goes on to state that the ballot should not be extended to any other workers. That is simple and clear. The Government are seeking to enact a change in the legislation, which of course moves away from that. Clause 16 will become section 11(1)(1A) and (1B) of the 1984 Act. Section 11(1A) subdivides balloting constituencies that fall within section 11 as a whole, thereby placing further restrictions on unions.

In general, ballots will not lead to immunity in tort unless they satisfy the further and, frankly, ridiculous requirement that each workplace affected by industrial action has been balloted and a majority obtained in each one. That is absurd, to put it mildly. The Government, as under clause 3, seem happy to impose on unions requirements that make an absolute mockery of democracy.

In practice, exemptions from the requirement will be crucial. In Committee, we pressed the Ministers to find out just how far the terms "occupational description" and "grade" would go and just what sort of constituency would be covered. When will an aggregate ballot be allowed? Obviously, the force of our argument persuaded the Ministers that the exceptions were not wide enough. That is why they came back with the amendment, full of vague talk about factors and reasonable beliefs.

Faced with the original form of clause 16, Opposition Members were baffled—more important, so were the unions and employers. The Engineering Employers Federation made that clear to me in a letter that I quoted in Committee.

6.15 pm

It is not good enough for the Government to bring forward legislation of this nature and tell us that it is up to the courts. We have looked at the Government's amendment. We do not believe that it will contribute in any way to solving the problem. All that will now be

required is for a union to believe that all balloted members have some factor, not necessarily common to all, that marks them off from other workers employed by the same employer, and which is not a consequence of their place of work. That would allow artificial balloting constituencies to occur in certain circumstances.

I shall give an example in the fantasy terms that Conservative Members might understand. In a factory with two moderate Labour-voting supervisors and 10 readers of *Socialist Worker* who share a certain machine in a production process but who have the same grade and occupational description as 1,000 Tory party supporters elsewhere in the plant, a Machiavellian union could ballot the 10 militants and two supervisors on a wholly spurious grievance and bring the plant to a halt. Under the Bill as it previously stood, that would not have been allowed. Under the Government's amendment, it could happen.

Opposition Members have moved their own amendment. If the Government are determined to do something along these lines, the sensible approach would be to delete the clause and to lay down the objective of avoiding artificial balloting constituencies. We support that remark. We do not see this as a problem. Of course we recognise that artificial balloting constituencies are not created. If the objective is to prevent that, surely it would be sensible to approach the matter with a code of practice.

We reject clause 16 and the amendments, because no problem needs to be addressed. We have not heard any evidence or justification from the Government. We reject it because it is complicated, and we do not believe that is in the interests of the House or the country to put industrial relations legislation on the statute book that, frankly, most people cannot understand. We are opposed to it because it will not only be ineffective but will worsen industrial relations. Rather than improve the legislative framework within which managers, employers and workers go about their daily affairs, it will make it worse.

Mr. Cope: I am not quite sure whether I exaggerate when I say that it seemed to me that both sides of the Committee moved at least a little nearer to one another in the course of the extensive debates on the clause. The result of the debates, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) said, is that we redrafted part of the clause in the direction—the hon. Gentleman did not seem to accept it—that Opposition Members and others outside wish. From some of the hon. Gentleman's comments and from amendment No. 13, it seems that Opposition Members have moved far enough at least to recognise the possibility of a problem occurring. The hon. Gentleman said that Opposition Members support the objective of removing artificial constituencies. That is the main purpose of the clause as a whole.

In Committee, we promised to consider whether it was possible to amend the clause to enable an aggregate ballot of members employed at different places of work if they were in the same bargaining unit or bargaining group. We pointed out that, although the terms "bargaining unit" and "bargaining group" are well understood in general parlance, they are not easy to write into legislation. That is why we propose the definition in the amendment. It retains the general intended effect of clause 16, but I hope it will go some way to meet the concerns expressed in Committee in favour of a greater element of flexibility.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East mentioned vague talk about factors. I describe that as flexibility, which is necessary in this matter. I was interested to hear him complain that he thought that the clause as amended would still allow some artificial balloting constituencies to be created in certain circumstances. In other words, he was complaining that we were not putting enough protection into the Bill.

However, the amendment will enable a union to hold a single aggregated ballot covering members employed at different places of work, if all the members of a union who are accorded entitlement to vote and who are employed by the same employer have a factor or factors in common. That is the way of defining the bargaining unit, among other things.

The factor or factors in common must relate to their terms or conditions of employment, or occupational description, and a factor must not be one common to any other member employed by the same employer who is not accorded entitlement to vote. When, and only when, other members of the union employed by the same employer or employers are not in the balloting constituency and are not being given the opportunity to vote, members of the constituency should not have a factor in common merely because they work in the same place or places. They cannot be left out merely because of where they work.

The amendment does not affect the ability of unions —provided by the clause as it stands— to aggregate ballot votes across groups or employers, provided that the conditions of the new subsection are met for the groups within the balloting constituency.

I accept what the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East said in Committee—we accepted it there—about the desirability of understandable legislation, but it is my experience, derived from much legislation—by no means exclusively to do with industrial relations or trade unions —that understandable legislation is difficult to achieve.

I respond more to what the hon. Gentleman said about the importance of legislation being certain. That is not quite the way he put it, but it lay behind what he said. Certain legislation is not always understandable legislation; it means that we must use legal language, and what sometimes seems convoluted language, accurately to define the concept we are getting at, which can sometimes be described more easily in homely terms when we are not writing legislation. Nevertheless, I should like to feel that the Opposition at least think we have gone some way to meeting the concerns expressed in Committee about the bargaining unit, while continuing to address the problem to which outside observers have drawn attention.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): Some of the clauses may be described as designed to inflict injury on the trade union movement and to interfere with its operations. Others may be described as the "adding insult to injury" clauses, which may not be so offensive in their operation, but are designed to irritate, confuse and cause general disruption for trade unions who are carrying out their business.

I discussed some of the previous clauses with the Minister on Monday, and he complained that I had referred to some of them as having the apparent objective of extending balloting in certain areas. He asked what was wrong with that. We know the answer to that: these matters should be left to the trade unions, and it is insulting that the Minister should propose a Bill to teach the trade unions how to run ballots. They have been doing that for generations, building up their different

[Mr. Michael Foot]

organisations and traditions for dealing with these matters. That is why the clauses are insulting. The Government are forcing all unions to use the same methods of operation, despite their different traditions.

Clause 16 is different, and a different intention lay behind it in the first place. I was interested to hear that it was not included in the Green Paper and that the Government did not even take the trouble—or have the knowledge—to want to introduce it then. That makes us doubly suspicious, as it did my hon. Friends in Committee.

The Government came forward with fresh proposals to try to deal with the matter. It would have been much better if the Government had accepted the advice of my hon. Friends and knocked out clause 16. The Government's intention was clearly not to assist the trade union movement.

Instead, the Government have produced a clause that they say is extremely convoluted. I am sure that those of us who follow these matters closely will have understood exactly what the Minister was saying. There was no confusion or doubt about that after he sat down. But even he, who had studied the matter carefully and been skilfully briefed by the people in the Department of Employment —no one knows better than I how skilful they are—had to admit at the end of his speech that the clause was still convoluted.

Two sets of people, who are not specially qualified, will have to deal with this convoluted legislation and decide whether a strike is legitimate. The first set are the ordinary workers trying to work out what they can do in particular circumstances. I am not blaming them — usually they know trade union law a great deal better than junior Ministers or anyone else. They have had practice in dealing with it, and have some idea of what it means. I confess to having no faith in the second set of people: Her Majesty's judges. They will get at the legislation even before workers can operate the new law.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) referred to the strike that almost took place among the seamen. That action is strictly relevant to this matter, because, presumably, the 1984 Act was clear. It was not as convoluted as this clause. What happened is a revelation of the way in which this shoddy sort of legislation operates. The general secretary of the National Union of Seamen has considerable experience of these matters and has engaged, with some considerable success, in industrial action. Perhaps that is why the Government wanted fresh legislation—to make it more difficult for that union to operate.

When the general secretary and the executive committee of the National Union of Seamen arrived at their view on the present legislation a few weeks ago, they thought that the action they were going to take would be fully within the 1984 law. So did many of their legal advisers. However, when they went to court, they received a different verdict and had to take a different view of their position. The National Union of Seamen, like other unions, wants to abide by the law. We hate it. It is unfair, monstrous and unjust, and it threatens to confiscate that union's funds on a huge scale, but the union has to abide by it.

As I came to the House this afternoon I listened to what the judge said in this matter. I do not know whether the general secretary was present. He and his associates have, in the past few days, done their best to observe the present convoluted law. They hate it, but they have done their best to implement it.

The judge told the seamen's representative today that it seemed that the general secretary still has some clout. Judges should try to use more restrained language. To sink into the vernacular is not the proper thing for respectable members of the judicial bench. Whether the general secretary will have any clout after this legislation comes into force and minorities are given an absolute right to disobey the majority view on a ballot is another matter. I should be interested to hear the views of Her Majesty's judges on that matter.

6.30 pm

The judge thought that the NUS had enough clout to tell its members that it would be disobeying the law in certain circumstances. It would not have such clout if it was deprived of effective disciplinary powers inside the union, as it will be under this legislation.

What happened to the seamen is relevant to the Bill because it will weaken the power of trade union general secretaries to ensure that their members obey the law and to use their position under the law to advance their interests. Clause 16, in its amended convoluted form, as the Minister has described it, or in any other form, will make it more difficult for the NUS in particular to know whether the constituency in which it is asked to have a ballot covers all the areas, and there will be even more confusion in the case of some other unions. When the Minister replies, I shall be happy to hear what will be the application of clause 16, if it remains in the Bill, in a situation such as that recently experienced by the NUS.

It is fascinating to be discussing the Government's amendments to the Trade Union Act 1984 and the previous measures that they have introduced at the very moment when we are having illustration after illustration of the unworkability of the previous legislation. In the example that I have just given of the NUS there was gross confusion about the law.

The Ford strike is the latest in a series of examples, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East referred, where the law is certainly not operating as the Government intended. Surely the Government never intended to ensure that trade union negotiators should be so deprived of their powers to negotiate that, in the Transport and General Workers Union case in the courts, even when it was thought that there was a possibility of a negotiation, the Government's legislation robbed them of the operation of a ballot.

We are seeing the frustration of the feelings of people on the picket line throughout Britain. There is a report in *The Independent* today of what was said on the Ford picket line by one of the leaders of the Transport and General Workers Union. Talking of the Prime Minister, she says:

"She's getting stuffed by her own legislation."

The cost to the country is huge.

Partly as a result of that legislation, we have had to have the dribble of legislation, of which the Bill is another example. The Government find that some of the chinks that they thought had been closed have not been, so they must discover some other way of closing them. Then the Government discover some legal loophole or convoluted openings that have been left, so they have to come along with legislation such as this.

Perhaps the explanation for the major clause in the Bill about giving minorities rights which the majorities should have had, which is causing such confusion, is that the rest of the Bill is such trivial nonsense. My hon. Friends were forced into hour upon hour of discussion in Committee.

There is not the slightest guarantee that this Bill will be better than the previous three or four. All of them have been produced for the wrong motives and all have failed to go through the procedure that we always followed for industrial legislation. We always attempted to discuss matters with the people who knew something about them, whether it was the employers or the unions. We even set up some organisations in which employers and unions were represented, precisely so that we should be able to obtain that information properly. In other parts of the Bill the Government are seeking to undermine that balance. That does not give rise to any confidence about what the Government will do in future.

The Government did not trouble to consult anybody. They did not know the exact evil with which they were trying to deal. They were pushed into Committee with no attempt to discuss the Bill with anybody. Nobody jogged the Government's elbow and said that they might have put some reference into the Green Paper. Now, at the last moment, the Minister comes along to say that he is sorry, but he too thinks that the clause is convoluted.

The Government should take away this convoluted clause. I use the most moderate language that I possibly can. It would be best if the Government took away the Bill, but at least they should take away some of the clauses that have not been examined properly. They should have the courtesy to discuss them with the people who know something about them.

It is a wonderful irony that the Government started out with the idea that one of the main things that they would do was to injure and impale the trade union movement on their legislation. They thought that it was wonderfully popular and that they could carry it further and further. They have now overreached themselves and my prophecy is that more and more, as trade unions recover their strength, power and cohesion—the Ford strike and the seamen's strike are only two instances—they will expose the shoddiness and shame of the Government's legislation.

It would be a splendid beginning to the learning of wisdom in the face of what is happening at Ford's and in the seamen's strike if, for the first time in the Bill's passage through the House, the Government were to make a concession. I am shocked to hear that in all the discussions in Committee not one concession was made. The Government seem to think that they know it all. They thought that they knew so much about the trade union movement that they would not even concede one matter. That is a shocking way in which to try to deal with industrial relations in Britain.

The Government will pay, because those relations will become more and more embittered and the people who will be responsible are the successive Ministers at the Department of Employment. I am sad to say that, because there was a time when the Department of Employment used its best endeavours—to use a phrase—to try to obtain industrial peace and decent industrial relations. But that cannot be said of this Bill, the Government or the Minister involved.

Mr. Allen: First, I welcome the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) who was absent from much of the Committee stage due to illness. It is a pleasure to see him in the Chamber, and I hope that he will soon be fully recovered. It may be some consolation to him that his brief contribution probably was more than the aggregate of about nine Conservative Back Benchers in three months' service on the Committee.

The Government were allowed every possible opportunity to present practical examples of how clause 16 would affect real industrial relations. Indeed, there was even a break at the weekend in which we thought that Ministers might dare to decide what would be the effects of the Bill in particular circumstances. Opposition Members without exception pressed the Government for specific examples in every possible form, shape, structure and convolution to assist Ministers to come to terms with their own legislation. However, that was not possible at any stage.

I put one question to the Minister tonight. If he cares to listen to the debate, he should listen to this question. If there is a national ballot that is not successful, will trade unions be in a position to ballot particular workplaces and call out those workplaces on strike, having failed to secure a majority nationally? I hope that the Minister can answer that question this evening.

The Government do not know what they want from the clause. There are deeper implications in not knowing the purpose of the clause. If it is cloudy and unclear to the Government, clearly it will be difficult for trade unions to know what will happen. The suspense with which they will carry out their day-to-day activities will rest heavily upon them.

I should like to repeat a brief story that I mentioned in Committee. When the great fast bowler Freddie Trueman was asked about all the variations in his style of bowling, he said, "I just run up and bowl it. If I don't know where the bugger is going to be how can the bugger at the other end know"——

Mr. Speaker: Order. the hon. Gentleman should not use such unparliamentary language.

Mr. Allen: That was a quotation from Freddie Trueman's autobiography. The person—if I may clean up Mr. Truman's language—at the other end who does not know where the ball is going, whether it will be swinging out, swinging in, a dipper, a yorker or a bouncer, is the trade unionist. The trade unions will be at the other end of the wicket when the legislation is hurled down on them. They will not know its effect because the Government themselves do not know the effect. That theme runs right through clause 16.

Even today, the clause does not contain an adequate definition of such items such as workplace, occupation and grade. The Government themselves do not know what their own clause means and they cannot give practical examples of how the clause will affect real trade unionists out in the country. The only honourable course would be for the Government to withdraw the clause and start again.

Mr. Strang: I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau, Gwent (Mr. Foot) reminded the House that we voted against clause 16 in Committee. We wanted the clause to be removed. My right hon. Friend, with his great experience of these matters, fully

[Mr. Strang]

understands the impact of the Bill and previous Tory Acts which attempt to undermine trade unions, and will have an adverse effect on industrial relations in Britain.

In view of what the Minister said, perhaps inadvertently, I must emphasise that Opposition Members do not see a problem that requires legislation. We do not see a problem that requires the Bill. Clause 16 will make things worse, and the Government's amendment will make them worse still. We are moving from a bad scenario to a worse one.

If a trade union created an artificial balloting constituency, by lumping together a certain group of workers with another group of workers in a wholly unjustifiable way in order to obtain a particular outcome in the ballot—an outcome in favour of industrial action —our view would be that that was bad trade unionism. A trade union would not get away with that.

6.45 pm

That is why there are no examples. Trade unionists are not so stupid. If the leadership of a trade union such as the CPSA—and this clause has a great bearing on the Civil Service—or any other trade union—it could apply to the TGWU in relation to the Ford plants—did not ballot all its members, the members themselves would consider that to be unfair. If there is to be a requirement for a ballot on the statute book as in the 1984 Act, the correct approach is to sustain the wording in the 1984 Act, because it is clear. It puts the requirement on the union to ballot those workers who are its members whom it may call out on strike. That is very clear. That is why it corresponds with the bargaining unit, and that is why it is consistent in that sense. Although we do not support the 1984 Act, it is consistent with collective agreements and the prevailing situation in regard to the public sector and throughout many industries.

I conclude by making it absolutely clear that the Opposition are totally opposed to the clause. We are entirely opposed to the clause. We tabled our amendment because, as the Opposition, we are trying to minimise the damage that the Bill will impose. We accept that we may not defeat the Bill, so we must try to alter it in a way that reduces its impact and the damage that it will do to industrial relations legislation. That is why we shall vote for our amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 219, Noes 269.

Division No. 176] **[6.47 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Cleiland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cummings, J.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alastair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, James
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Samuel
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Douglas
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, James
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Tom
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, E. K.
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, John
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerald

Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A. J.
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Anthony
Wray, James
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bigge-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Rydale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Timothy
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Miss E. *(Devon W)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. David Maclean.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment made: No. 22, in page 20, leave out lines 29 to 38 and insert—

'(b) that there is, in relation to each of the members of the union, who is accorded entitlement to vote in the ballot, some factor (whether or not the same factor) which—

(i) relates to the terms or conditions of that member's employment or to the occupational description which is applicable to that member in his employment;

(ii) is a factor which that member has in common with some or all of the other members of the union who are accorded that entitlement and have the same employer as that member; and

(iii) in a case where there are individuals employed by that employer who are members of the union but are not accorded that entitlement, is neither a factor which that member has in common with any of those individuals nor a factor which individuals employed by that employer have in common as a consequence of having the same place of work;'.—*[Mr. Nicholls.]*

Clause 20

PROVISIONS SUPPLEMENTAL TO SECTION 19

7 pm

Mr. Nicholls: I beg to move amendment No. 14, in page 24, line 22, leave out 'or expenses which, (whether' and insert 'which.'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 15, 25, 17 and 18.

Mr. Nicholls: Amendments Nos. 25 and 18 address concern expressed in Committee about the commissioner's ability to recoup his outlay from any award or settlement made.

Amendments Nos. 15 and 17 ensure that subsections (2) and (3) express themselves in language appropriate to the legal systems of England and Wales and of Scotland respectively.

Mr. Strang: We welcome the fact that the Government have tabled the amendments, some of which relate directly to concessions that we obtained in Committee. They are minor but they will be of some significant benefit to the trade union movement and we are grateful for them.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 15, in page 24, line 23, leave out 'or an agreement or otherwise)'.

No. 25, in page 24, line 26, leave out

'so far as relates to any costs or expenses, on his rights'

and insert

'on any sum payable to the applicant'.

No. 17, in page 24, line 33, leave out from 'of' to 'and' in line 34 and insert

'any expenses which, by virtue of a judgement or order of the court, are payable to the applicant by any other person in respect of the matter in connection with which the assistance is provided;'.

No. 18, in page 24, line 35, leave out

'so far as relates to any costs or expenses,'. — *[Mr. Nicholls.]*

Clause 23

THE TRAINING COMMISSION

Mr. Meacher: I beg to move amendment No. 19, in page 24, line 44, leave out clauses 23 to 28 (part II of the Bill).

We now come to part II of the Bill. The Opposition deliberately formulated this amendment to delete the clauses constituting part II of the Bill so as to ensure a broad debate on the Government's proposals for training for the unemployed as a whole. We would certainly agree that there has long been a need for major improvement in adult training for the unemployed, but in our view there are several fundamental objections to the way in which the Government propose to proceed.

First, it should be recognised that by restricting the scheme to the unemployed they are making it very lopsided. Enhanced training for the employed is just as important, if not more so, but under this Government it has been run down to its lowest level for decades and is still being neglected. Britain now spends only just over 0·1 per cent. of its payroll on training to improve the skills of those in work, as compared with 2 per cent. to 3 per cent. in Germany and Sweden. There is a huge gap. Having dismantled most of Britain's training programmes, the Government are still ignoring the major part of the problem.

Furthermore, there is a fundamental dilemma over funding at the heart of the proposals, which we believe will make them unworkable. It is proposed both to increase the number of participants by 50 per cent. and to upgrade substantially the quality of training, but to achieve both those considerable extra objectives within the same budget as before—£1·5 billion. Frankly, that is impossible. The aims can be reconciled only by very large cuts in the allowances payable to trainees, which will severely impair incentives and fatally damage any prospect of a voluntary scheme. Once compulsion is introduced to overcome the consequences of inadequate funding, the whole character of the proposals will alter for the worse. There is risk that the scheme will be a monumental flop like the job training scheme, and for similar reasons.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science has talked about extending freedom of choice for young people, while the Secretary of State for Employment has favoured compulsion for the youth training scheme, which will sour the whole atmosphere of the scheme. If the Secretary of State of Employment is not to do the same for adult training, he must put his money where his mouth is. That will mean a substantial lift in the current budget ceiling. If the scheme is to remain voluntary and adequate incentives are to be provided for trainees, it is sheer fantasy to talk of enhanced high quality training—as the report does and as the Secretary of State does—without any increase in funding.

Paragraph 6.12 of the Manpower Services Commission working party report proposes £16 a week for the training component. I do not know whether the Secretary of State agrees with that, but it is plainly absurd for high-quality training. Moreover, a major part of the new proposal is the increased involvement of private employers who are to be offered £25 per week per trainee—the figure proposed by the MSC. That might be enough for cheap labour, but it is certainly not enough for enhanced training. Unless the Secretary of State faces up to the Treasury better than he has in the past, there are all the signs that the latest proposals will degenerate to provide the same kind of low-quality work placements as their predecessors.

The community programme managers have already made it clear that the present training and job search content cannot even be maintained unless the current fee of £440 per place is increased. But with many more participants working full-time, more training aids needed, more space used and more heating, lighting and telephone

costs incurred, anything less than a 50 per cent. increase in costs is simply not viable. So far, the Secretary of State has turned a blind eye to the basic practicalities.

The next issue is the fundamental one that participation in training schemes must be voluntary. The Secretary of State has denied the element of compulsion — it is amazing that he has done so — but the Government's approach is increasingly riddled with compulsion, as I shall show. First, clause 4 of the Social Security Bill brings compulsion into YTS; there is no question about that. Then there is clause 26 dealing with adult training programmes, in which at least the potential for compulsion is also apparent. Thirdly, there is restart, the tighter availability for work rules and claimants being referred to the claimant adviser, who certainly puts the strongest pressure on claimants to get off the register, even if not into a job.

If there is the odd individual case of abuse—and of course there always will be—the Government can use the armoury of rules that they already have to prevent abuse of the benefits system. The legal powers available are already strictly applied. Section 20 of the Social Security Act 1975 specifically penalises claimants who have refused to avail themselves of a suitable opportunity of a place on an approved training programme. They are disqualified from receiving unemployment benefit for 13 weeks.

The Government now propose to make that 26 weeks, which is a very long time to suffer a reduction of supplementary benefit from £18·75 — not itself exactly generous—by 40 per cent. down to £11·25. Anyone who has tried to live on £11·25 a week for six months knows that that is a fearsome financial penalty. If the authorities believe that a claimant is not available for work, they can withdraw benefit altogether.

The evidence of those who decline to enter YTS or leave early shows that they do not deliberately become unemployed. Let me give one figure from the Government's own case. Of those declining a place on YTS—estimated by the MSC to be between 20,000 and 30,000 each year—fewer than 700 per year—2 per cent. to 3 per cent.—have had their benefit reduced for being voluntarily unemployed. There are powers to deal with the occasional case of abuse. No one challenges those powers, but there is no justification whatever for what is proposed in the Bill—the blanket and virtually automatic removal of benefit from all 16 to 17-year-olds. That is a completely different matter and we utterly reject the proposal.

As I have said, the provisions of clause 26 will mean that the new adult training programme will be anything but voluntary. The clause means that few claimants will be able to exercise their judgment and choice about whether a training scheme is appropriate to their circumstances or whether it will lead to a better chance of finding work. We still believe that the provisions in the 1975 Act are right. Under those provisions, unemployed people did not have to enter a programme if they could establish that it would not lead to a better chance of finding appropriate work. That reasonable allowance in the scheme is now explicitly ruled out. Clause 26 means that an offer of a place on the new scheme will be unrefusable, regardless of the quality or appropriateness of the scheme.

My next point is one that we did not raise in Committee. Any suggestion that voluntary work is an acceptable exit from this scheme, as is proposed in paragraph 5.37 of the MSC report, should be immediately scotched. If it is not, some people could be forced on to the scheme by threat of the withdrawal of benefit and simply offered unpaid voluntary work as a follow-up. They will be deprived of payment if they do not join the scheme and deprived of payment afterwards if they do. That is intolerable.

That brings me to the matter of employee status. Under the Employment Protection Act 1975, a worker has the right to take an employer before an industrial tribunal if he thinks that he has been unfairly dismissed for trade union activities. After six months' employment, an employee is entitled to written responses for a dismissal, and if that statement of response is untrue or inadequate, the employee is entitled to compensation. That sort of provision should also apply to trainees. It is vital that adult trainees should enjoy not only a safe and non-discriminatory working environment, but that they should be free to undertake trade union activities, have the right to challenge arbitrary or unfair disciplinary procedures and should be allowed to appeal against unfair dismissal. That is not the case under the Bill.

7.15 pm

Introducing trainees to workplaces inevitably leads to an element of job substitution and displacement. Those things are on a considerable scale — greater than the Government have yet admitted. A study commissioned by the MSC shows that in 1986 the YTS had a job substitution effect of 17 per cent. A subsequent study published in the *Employment Gazette* in October suggested that job substitution in the YTS might be considerably greater. That is the Government's own official gazette and it speaks about a job displacement rate of up to 62 per cent. in establishments with fewer than 100 employees.

In 1986, the Technical Change Centre Research Organisation found that nearly one third of the employers that it surveyed gave savings in labour costs as the motive for participating in YTS. A further 16 per cent. who did not expect to save on labour costs found that they did so. The survey also found that nearly one in five of the employers involved would have taken on employees if they had not recruited YTS trainees. That is 20 per cent. of the employers surveyed. Another 18 per cent. would have taken on extra staff at peak periods and others would have had to subcontract some work. That shows the displacement and job substitution effect of the YTS and it is very worrying.

I shall now turn to the matter of the rate for the job. Last year, a YTS study gave estimates of the YTS trainees' output. They varied from £18 a week in mechanical engineering and £21 a week in construction to £36 a week in repair of consumer goods and vehicles and £33 a week in retail distribution. Those figures show the value of what are, supposedly, trainees.

If we assume, not unreasonably, that adult trainees would produce at least as much and in some case considerably more, it can be seen that many trainees will make a net contribution to their placement employer's profits after the managing agents' charges of £4 to £8 per day have been deduced. For that reason, trainees should be paid not some flimsy little allowance but the proper rate for the job.

The MSC claims that projects operating under the community programme will be able to continue as normal under the new programme. If that is true—and it is the MSC that says it—participants will be engaged in work

[Mr. Meacher]

for the majority of their time, 60 per cent., and will spend only 40 per cent. of their time in directed training. That is less than half. Therefore, participants will be engaged in the same activities as the ones that they are now engaged in — producing goods and services of benefit to the community—but they will become trainees and will lose their rights as employees. The value of their work will be downgraded because they will not receive the rate for the job.

If, as expected, the Government accept the proposed allowance on top of benefit—£10 plus an extra £1·95 for under 25-year-olds and £1·25 for married people without children—the amount will certainly not be sufficient to provide the motivation to join the scheme or to provide motivation on the scheme. There will be wide discrepancies of payment to participants, calculated at between £38 and £90 a week or even more. That is for people doing exactly the same work.

The Government claim that payments will reflect need rather than the rate for the job. That is totally spurious because the Government have deliberately held down the community programme average wage of £67 a week. That would now be over £85 a week if it had kept up with inflation since the time the community programme was introduced.

When the idea of the benefit-plus scheme for the long-term unemployed was originally suggested by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his 1982 Budget, the premium suggested was £15. In the discussion on the Government's manifesto proposals during the recent election campaign, the then Secretary of State for Employment also suggested that the level of the premium would be about £15 a week. Therefore, £10 is a significant reduction on what the Government previously said, apart from being a major cut in present community programme payments.

It is undeniable that the vast majority of people currently employed in the community programme will be substantially worse off than they are under the present rate-for-the-job wage. I shall give two figures to illustrate that. On average, men employed as ordinary workers on the community programme are £39 a week better off than they were on benefit. That is the difference between £28 and £67. Women workers are £35 a week better off. Those figures show just how much those people will lose because of the change to benefit-plus.

Topping up is an important matter. The proposed income support arrangements will make effective topping up of wages difficult, if not virtually impossible. It will not enable unions to negotiate the full rate for the job, because, under the social security regulations, anything that a claimant receives over the additional £10 a week will be deducted pound for pound from his benefit entitlement. Similarly, spouses' earnings are likely to be deducted from a trainee's benefit-plus income. This will discourage employers from giving overtime or from asking people to work unsocial hours for higher wages or to work on Saturdays.

The final issue that concerns us involves trade unions and local advisory bodies. At present, trade unions, local authorities, local businesses and others exercise a monitoring role in the delivery of MSC programmes to the area manpower boards. However, the MSC is now proposing to replace the area manpower boards with a new structure of local advisory bodies, involving major changes, which have the Government's agreement.

One directly related change is that individual trade unions will lose their powers to scrutinise and to withhold approval from existing community programme schemes. Under the new programme, trade unions will merely have the right to be consulted where they are recognised and appropriate, and

"any difficulty arising in establishing a programme shall be referred to the MSC area manager who, if necessary, will invite one employer and one trade union member of the local board to assist him or her in resolving the disagreement. Only where the area manager agrees that jobs are threatened, the project should not be implemented."

The size and composition of the new boards will, of course, reflect the changes in the commission itself, which has been deliberately biased by the Government in favour of the employers to humiliate and marginalise the trade unions. The boards are likely to be much smaller, with no more than 12 or 15 members. Again, employers will be in a majority, with the remainder of board members drawn from local authorities, trade unions, the education service and voluntary organisations. Significantly, the membership will be determined by the chairman, and who appoints the chairman? The Secretary of State. *[Interruption.]* Yes, no doubt it will be the Prime Minister, who is well known for spending much of her time, when she has some time to spare in the evening, looking through the patronage lists of the good and the great.

The MSC working party report proposes that local action plans involve only employers, and not the unions. That is another attempt by the Government to push aside any contribution from the unions. I should point out that trade unions have an obvious and necessary input into all training matters. Trying to oust them for reasons of political dogma will simply scupper the whole project—as happened, and rightly so, in the case of the job training scheme.

In conclusion, the co-operation of all sides — the trade unions, local authorities, voluntary organisations, and the area management boards as well as the employers —is essential if sufficient places are to be provided on schemes for long-term unemployed people. Such co-operation will be given if the Government adhere to the principles that I have outlined and, as a result, the scheme can be clearly demonstrated to be fair, effective and good for participants without damaging public service provision and employment. The principles that we have outlined —and nothing less than all those principles—should be the bedrock on which an improved training scheme can be built.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Norman Fowler): Part II, which the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) seeks to remove, brings up to date the Employment and Training Act 1973, which created the Manpower Services Commission. The Bill brings that Act up to date because, in the 15 years since it reached the statute book, there have been considerable changes in the nature of our labour market, but at no time have the changes been as marked as they are now.

The unprecedented growth in output of the past six years has resulted in the creation of nearly 1·5 million new jobs. Unemployment is falling. In fact, it is undergoing the largest sustained fall on record. The seasonally adjusted December figure was the lowest for five and a half years.

Youth unemployment is falling. It is down by one third over the past 12 months. There were fewer unemployed school leavers last September than in any September since 1974.

Those factors have highlighted the need to develop fresh approaches to people and work, and they have given us the opportunity to do so. It is this opportunity to respond to the needs of the new labour market which the Opposition are now attempting to block.

It is important to remind the House of the major change which took place last October—the establishment of an integrated employment service. Indeed, one of the most important aspects of part II is that it gives the Department of Employment the powers to operate the service for the longer term.

The new service seeks to bring together the work of the jobcentres and the unemployment benefit offices. Its main priority is to tackle the problem of long-term unemployment and to make sure that the unemployed get their fair share of the new jobs that the economy is creating. People who have been out of work for a long time clearly find it particularly difficult to get back into a job. They need special, individual help. However, under the previous system there was a risk that people attending only one of the two offices—either the unemployment benefit office or the jobcentre—could miss out on some of the services on offer. The new arrangements are designed to close that gap.

The new employment service is already, through the work of restart counsellors, implementing our commitment to provide counselling for the long-term unemployed to help them into a job or training. People who have been unemployed for more than six months are now being given this assistance at six-monthly intervals. It is proving to be an effective form of assistance. In the 18 months that the programme has been operating nationally, about 3 million people have been interviewed and over 85 per cent. have received a positive offer in the form of a place on a community programme, in a job club or on a job training scheme, and the like.

A second source of help provided by the employment service is the work of the claimant advisers. They can help to ensure that the person involved receives the right benefit. They can also show people with high benefit entitlement that it pays to work—*[Interruption.]* Well, the fact is—I think that we will be able to establish this even to the satisfaction of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short)—that many of the people who currently turn down jobs are doing so in the mistaken belief that they will be better off on benefit. The new family credit which replaces the family income supplement in April means that virtually no one will be better off on benefit.

Ms. Short *rose*——

Mr. Fowler: I shall give way in a moment.

I hope that, by re-integrating the jobcentres within the Department, we will clear the way for the new role of the Manpower Services Commission, which will now be called the Training Commission and which will provide a focus for our training efforts and will be directly responsible——

Ms. Short *rose*——

Mr. Fowler: If the hon. Lady will wait a moment.

It will be directly responsible for training provision which is financed by public funds, and it will have a wider remit to encourage training by employers for their own employees.

Ms. Short: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. However, it is not good enough to misdescribe the changes that his Government have made through the availability for work tests and the claimant advisers, because unemployed people throughout the country know that those individuals exist to threaten and frighten them into taking up places on schemes that they do not find attractive. For the Secretary of State to stand at the Dispatch Box and say that those people are there to help is an insult to the experience of unemployed people in this country.

Mr. Fowler: What the hon. Lady has just said is wholly untrue and wholly without foundation. She should be thoroughly ashamed of herself for putting forward that view. The fact is that one job of a claimant adviser is to seek to explain to people—surely there cannot be any conflict among us that the social security system is sometimes difficult to understand—what the benefits are, not just out of work but in work. The hon. Lady has just revealed the destructiveness of her attitude, which was exhibited throughout the whole Committee stage.

The Training Commission will provide a focus for our training efforts. It will be directly responsible for training provision which is financed by public funds. I agree with the hon. Member for Oldham, West that there should be a responsibility on employers, which is why we are giving such a wide remit to encourage training by employers for their employees. I agree with the hon. Gentleman's first remarks that training for the unemployed is only one part of the issue; training for the employed must also be encompassed.

7.30 pm

The theme of the work of the Training Commission must be and will be training through life. The aim will be to fit people for a labour market which will change substantially during their working lives.

Of the clauses that the Opposition seek to remove, clause 23 enables me to appoint up to six additional employers to the commission. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Clearly employers are the major providers of training and employment. We cannot have an effective training strategy without industry, nor can we have an effective industry without training. My aim will be to appoint members from some of the areas of major employment growth—for example financial services, tourism and small firms. They will come not necessarily entirely from those areas, but from areas of that type where new jobs are being created.

Clause 24 adjusts the powers of the commission to take account of its new training function and the establishment of the employment service. Together with the largely technical provisions of the clause is the new power to pay a YTS bridging allowance.

Mr. Foot: The right hon. Gentleman says that when he enlarges the commission he will appoint some employers who represent new developments or industries. Why does he not appoint trade unionists from those industries in an equivalent number? The MSC was founded on the basis of that equality. It worked for a considerable time and, according to the right hon. Gentleman, it worked well.

[Mr. Foot]

Now he is unbalancing the whole arrangement and he has not given any excuse for it. Trade unionists are as interested as employers or anybody else in developing these new industries.

Mr. Fowler: We set out these proposals clearly when we went to the country. We want to extend the representation on the commission because we believe that, in addition to its present members and make-up, there are others who can make a contribution in terms of their experience in job creation. Small firms are a classic area where there has been one of the greatest expansions in jobs. We should like to have someone from that area on the commission. There will still be trade union members on the commission. We have made no secret of the fact that we are not aiming for an equality of representation; we are trying to get the maximum amount of experience around the commission table for the creation of jobs.

Mr. Foot: If the Bill goes through, naturally we shall want the Training Commission to be successful. Indeed, the whole future of our industry depends on the new training system, however it may be devised, being successful. If the Secretary of State is so determined about its success, why does he not preserve one element of the old system which proved so successful and give some proper recognition to the trade union contribution? He talks as though trade unions cannot make a contribution equivalent to that of employers, but of course they can. He has weighted the commission in favour of employers without any excuse, and some half-sentence in a manifesto is not a proper excuse. He should give the House the reason why he will undermine the MSC which for many years worked on the basis of equivalence.

Mr. Fowler: The right hon. Gentleman may not accept my arguments, but I have given the reasons which he seeks. We are not doing what he accuses us of doing. We are not for a moment saying that trade unions do not have a contribution to make. That would be absurd. We are saying that others from outside not only the TUC but the CBI, have a greater contribution to make. They have experience of providing jobs in particular areas where over the past few years job creation has been most successful.

Clause 24 provides a new power to pay a YTS bridging allowance. The new guarantee to all 16 and 17-year-olds of a suitable YTS place is crucial. The vocational training leading to a recognised qualification will now be the norm, not the exception. It will be a universal opportunity—not, as so often in the past, a privilege for the lucky few. We shall seek to give the options of full-time education, training or employment. One effect of the hon. Gentleman's proposals would be to prevent our offering young people the short-term allowance to ease the transfer from one YTS job to another.

The provision of training for adults, both employed and unemployed, is not yet a match for our training of young people. Clearly, that is the most practical issue that the commission will have to address. A key aspect of its strategy will be the development of a new comprehensive training programme for the adult unemployed.

I shall seek to make a statement to the House on that new adult training programme shortly and, clearly, hon. Members will be able to ask questions. The House will not expect me to go into intricate detail now, but I shall make a couple of comments about it.

Broadly speaking, the new programme, for which the Government will be making available more than £1·4 billion, will have two objectives. It will aim to equip the unemployed, particularly the long-term unemployed, with the skills they need to re-enter and make the fullest possible contribution to the new labour market by providing a mixture of directed and practical training and by placing as much reliance as possible on training with employers. That is the best way to ensure that training meets the needs of industry. From the trainees' point of view, it is also the best way to help them get a job at the end of the programme.

Mr. Meacher: Could the Secretary of State get away from his gramophone record speech and perhaps answer one or two of my specific questions? How is it possible in the same budget to increase the number of participants by 50 per cent. and to produce enhanced high quality training without so cutting back the level of trainee allowances as to reduce the motivation for people to join the scheme, leading to compulsion to ensure that the places are taken up, which will sour the scheme?

Mr. Fowler: I come precisely to that matter. The first point to make in response to what the hon. Gentleman said is that he is under a misconception about what the £1·4 billion refers to. There are 500,000 people under training, not the 400,000 that he has been quoting. The 400,000 refers to a previous year of training.

The second aim of the new programme is to ensure that all unemployed people have an incentive to participate in it, which is why we are seeking to move from the present system of payment to an allowance based on benefit entitlement plus a premium. I accept entirely the hon. Gentleman's point that the success of the new programme will depend on its ability to deliver high-quality training.

First, we will convert the £1 billion a year spent on temporary work projects in the community programme to money to be spent on training. That is an enormous turnaround. Secondly, the new programme will bring together more than 30 schemes that the MSC runs. As a result, we will be able to do away with wasteful divisions and complexities in the current arrangements and instead will have a simpler, more efficient and more flexible arrangement, ensuring better use of resources.

Thirdly, the new programme will have the substantial budget of about £1·4 billion a year, which will enable 600,000 people to be trained each year. On top of that budget, the proposals of the MSC envisage employers contributing £150 million a year towards training costs. Almost all the contributions from employers will be new money and will therefore provide a further means of enabling training quality to be enhanced.

Fourthly, I have said many times that the proposals of the MSC—I accept what the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) said about the MSC—are its unanimous recommendations for training 600,000 people a year with £1·4 billion from the Government.

Ms. Short *rose*——

Mr. Fowler: If I could go on.

The MSC's proposals are not for a cheapskate scheme but for a programme delivering high-quality training. The MSC has proposed built-in measures to ensure that the quality standards are achieved and maintained. Approved status against set criteria will be required of all training

agents and training managers. Inspections will be made by the training standards advisory service, and recognised qualifications will be offered wherever possible. The MSC would not have put forward its report unless it considered that all this could be done within the resources available. Therefore, I have no fears about the quality of the new programme.

Ms. Short: I am sure that the Secretary of State would not wish to mislead the House. He set down parameters; he wrote to the Manpower Services Commission and said, "For this £1·4 billion you have to get 600,000 people through the scheme." The commission has come up with the best possible deal that can be got within those parameters. The Secretary of State knows, as I and many others know, that many trade union representatives on the commission have agonised about whether they are right to endorse that deal. They feel that perhaps they should stay in because they have got a few more pounds for the unemployed than would have been available without those trade union negotiators, but all of them are deeply unhappy about the proposed scheme. That is the truth.

Mr. Fowler: I do not accept what the hon. Lady says. She again seeks, as she does in all her contributions on training, to destroy any consensus on it. It can hardly be denied that the MSC has made a unanimous report on the scheme. Whatever concerns there may be in the background, that is the most important point to grasp. The hon. Lady referred to the attitude of trade unionists, but it seems to me that their attitude is a darn sight more constructive to the proposals than is the attitude that she has shown in these proceedings.

7.45 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): The Secretary of State sent a letter to the commission on 18 September outlining the framework for the proposals. Did that framework include the sum of money and number of places he envisaged?

Mr. Fowler: The framework included, from memory, the budget which was there; that is broadly correct. Of course, that was our proposition to the Manpower Services Commission, but it has had the opportunity of considering it and responding to it.

I want there to be no mistake about this. I have endorsed the commission's recommendation that the new programme should be voluntary. I have no plans to designate it approved training for the purpose of benefit sanctions under section 20 of the Social Security Act 1975. The quality of the new programme and the guaranteed lead over benefit will provide a more than adequate incenitive to those who genuinely want to work. I agree with what the hon. Gentleman said; the vast majority of people want to work.

Mr. Meacher: That is a very important point. Does the Secretary of State believe that a £10 lead over benefit, from which we have to deduct the £5 cost of work expenses that will not be covered—so it is a £5 lead over benefit—will offer a real incentive to hundreds of thousands of people, when the community programme allowance has not been increased in line with inflation and is some £20 or £30 higher than the level of benefit? Will not that constitute a huge disincentive to getting the numbers that the right hon. Gentleman wants and will it not lead remorselessly to compulsion?

Mr. Fowler: It will not lead remorselessly to compulsion. I have made it clear that I have endorsed the commission's recommendation that the new programme should be voluntary, so I hope that that is understood.

I shall refer to the details of the payment when I make my statement to the House. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not expect me to make a statement on that now. It must be common ground—I am not the only one to have observed this; organisations such as Youth Aid have observed it—that the present structure of payment for community programmes leaves out many married people with children simply because it does not attract the average of £67. In the end, the community programme is a part-time scheme, predominantly for young people. It leaves out many long-term unemployed people who are married and have families. We will seek to expand on those points in the White Paper and my statement on it.

Ms. Short: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fowler: I will not give way again, but I will listen to what the hon. Lady has said. I want to underline the fact that the new programme is to be voluntary. I hope that that message, if no other, comes from this debate.

Part II of the Bill, which the Opposition are trying to remove, provides the foundation of our strategy for employment and training. That strategy takes account of, and builds on, the many developments in the labour markets that have already taken place. That strategy looks forward to the labour market of the 1990s and, above all, to the skills that working people will need then. Trying to remove the provisions in part II is an attempt to turn the clock back to the early 1970s. That is a futile objective and I resist the amendment.

Mr. McLeish: You will forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker, for not giving the same account of part II as that given by the Secretary of State for Employment. Many of my hon. Friends and I believe that part II is so important and so bad that we want to delete—not amend—a whole section of a major Bill. That speaks volumes for our general concerns.

Each clause in part II is significant and far-reaching, for the unemployed and for society in general. However, my hon. Friends are worried that part II is much more than the sum of its individual clauses. The debate is timely because, as the Secretary of State said, a White Paper on the new adult programme will be presented soon. Clearly, this legislation paves the way for the introduction of that programme.

The Opposition stress that in the past nine years, training has become a devalued concept in the public's eyes because of the abuse heaped on it by the Government. Training has been discussed in great detail, but, considering the serious or effective training in the United Kingdom, many people would doubt the validity of this Government using the training concept.

Part II provides a fascinating insight into Government thinking about the unemployed. It marks a watershed in the consensus that has existed over the past few years in our ability to identify problems and, one hopes, come up with constructive measures to tackle them. I also believe that part II represents a fundamental shift in the attitude of Governments since the war to those problems. Clearly

[Mr. McLeish]

it identifies a positive merging for the first time of the social security benefit system with the provision of temporary work and temporary training programmes.

To use an ugly word, it is workfare. That concept has been imported from the United States. It is alien to the unemployed — I notice that the Secretary of State is shaking his head. I understand that he will be visiting the United States at Easter to study what is happening in more detail, and many of his colleagues have already been to the United States. For the first time, the unemployed will be subjected to social security payments and poor-quality training.

While Ministers stand at the Dispatch Box and speak very plausibly about the needs of the unemployed and the sincerity of the Government's approach, they have adopted a sinister, pathological approach to the unemployed. The Government are not concerned about problems with the economy. The Government's proposals have nothing to do with the fact that there are still 2·6 million people on the dole, 500,000 young people forced into YTS and another 600,000 people about to embark on the new adult programme. The Government are not concerned with economic policies. They are telling the unemployed, "Look, we are helping you out because your deficiencies have created your position." That smacks of the old Poor Law mentality that some of my older colleagues may recall—although perhaps that is before their time.

This is a fundamental shift in the Government's approach to unemployment and training — *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State is obviously enjoying my contribution, so I will probably speak for at least three hours longer than I had originally envisaged.

Why are we suggesting that the whole of part II should be deleted? Let us consider part II in detail. Not many Conservative Members present today were in Committee. For their benefit, I will explain that clause 23 suggests that the Manpower Services Commission should become the Training Commission. That is fine. There is no problem about that. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has said, that Training Commission will be packed with employers' or quasi-employers' representatives. No justification has been given for that. Those changes undermine the MSC's status and they are an attempt to smash the tripartite arrangements and the consensus that existed for many years about those specific problems.

Clause 24 is interesting. It introduces the bridging allowance concept. The Government are guaranteeing every young person a place on the new programme. However, they have come up with the idea of an eight-week allowance at £15 a head in case young people do not get a place as quickly as the Government guarantee. That is obviously necessary because of the outrageous proposal contained in clause 4 of the Social Security Bill, which intends to withdraw the general entitlement to benefit from 16 and 17-year-olds. The Government create one mess and put forward another in its place as a sop to young people who, when they leave a programme or a job, find difficulty getting another.

Clause 25 is sinister. It allows the Secretary of State to take dramatic powers to control the destiny of young people and adults in any designated training programme. It affects conditions and pay and it means that unprecedented decisions can be taken by the Department. There will be no decentralisation, but the Secretary of State will designate groups, and his power will mean that young people's status, conditions and pay will be affected, as my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West said earlier.

Clause 26 deals with the compulsory element with the amendments to the Social Security Act 1975. It is outrageous for the Secretary of State to suggest that this measure is all about sweetness and light and the willing hand of Government seeking to help people in difficulties. While the plausibility may be accepted by people who understand nothing about training, the young kids at the sharp end in Scotland, Liverpool, Birmingham and London will feel very sour when they hear those comments as the reality is more difficult than the Secretary of State is willing or able to accept.

What is the real reason for the Opposition voting to support amendment No. 19? We will vote for it because of this sequence of events. Part II seeks to emasculate the MSC. It builds on the withdrawal of the genuine entitlement to benefit of 16 and 17-year-olds. That age group is isolated, vulnerable and prey to the sort of policies and programmes envisaged in the Bill. I have already referred to the Secretary of State's remarkable power to intervene on the status of young people. I believe that all the powers in part II mean a dramatic intensification of the states power to meddle, interfere and coerce and to make compulsory many things that people believe should be voluntary because they are all related to personal choice.

I am a new Member. I have been involved in training and was a member of a manpower area board. I carried out consultancy work with young people and I have a passionate interest in education. However, as a result of the Secretary of State's delivery at the Dispatch Box and the contributions in Committee, I am fundamentally worried that we are returning to a Poor Law philosophy on the back of workfare. The Government have adopted a punitive approach to people who do not fit into this expanding economy that we hear so much about. I have already referred to the individualistic approach — blaming those who do not fit in and no one else.

The Secretary of State said much about the expansion in the number of jobs and the labour market. However, there are more part-time jobs in that labour market. People receive less pay in that labour market than they did three or four years ago. I accept that the labour market is changing, but many young people will not be too willing to enter the labour market that has been created by this Government.

I want to make a serious point about the Government's attack on the unemployed. We have been told that there must be co-operation for the new adult scheme to work. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West said, many groups including voluntary organisations and local authorities are among the most important providers. The Secretary of State said that, if employers are providing enough training, the providers must be considered and the MSC area boards will be packed to allow that to happen.

If the Secretary of State cannot get the co-operation of voluntary organisations and local authorities, the new programme is dead. Over 90 per cent. of places are provided by these two sponsors. If the Secretary of State treats with contempt the representations they have made, there will be a sad outcome for the unemployed. It is not the Labour party which will suffer but the Government,

who are so arrogant and so devoid of sanity that they are willing to jeopardise a £1·5 billion programme because of the dogma and prejudice enshrined in part II of the Bill.

8 pm

It is regrettable that we have reached this stage in relation to a group of people who need a radical, imaginative and innovative programme. People are apprehensive. If the Bill is enacted, their apprehensions will be reinforced. If the White Paper which the Secretary is to present contains some of the proposals which we suspect it will, I fear for the future of the new programme.

The Secretary of State has talked about the new labour market. We have heard about a refreshing change and policies designed to complement what is happening in society. In reality, Britain is fast becoming a country where quantity is overtaking quality. Germany, France, Denmark and Sweden are all approaching the problem positively, with policies to tackle the industrial needs of those in work and those out of work. In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) was always talking about the Secretary of State's visit to Sweden.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has said that we have the worst trained work force in Europe. In comparison to the OECD countries, our record is even worse. Some countries whose industrial performance we might laugh at have more effective industrial training policies. That is the economy which Government Members ask us to contemplate. If we are serious about training for adults and for young people, in work or out of work, we must start learning a lesson from countries which provide dramatic examples of what can be done.

When we have discussions about training, we should remember the regional imbalances. It is fine for the Secretary of State to say in this Chamber in London that all the young people in Westminster can find jobs as soon as they leave school. Young people in my constituency do not have that luxury. Parents are desperate to find work for their children. It is the same in Wales and in the regions. We will be viewed with suspicion if we spout in this Chamber about conditions in London when things are so different when one drives 20 or 30 miles from here.

As for sex, race and disability, many fine words have been spoken about equal opportunities. I hope that, when the Secretary of State presents his White Paper, he will cover those points.

If the Government are as serious about training as we are, they should say so. We want the Government to regard training not as an alternative to the dole queue but as important in itself. Any self-respecting industrial nation wants to invest resources in training. When the Secretary of State replies to the debate, I want him to say that the Government are taking training seriously, but not as a sop to the dole queue. If there is one thing a young person or an adult does not like it is being made to feel that he is being used, with no end product as a result.

I ask the Secretary of State to accept the simple proposition emerging from the Manpower Services Commission, from the Labour party and from other groups which could not be classified as political. When will we get out of the rut of producing narrow-based, high-volume programmes for kids, young people and adults? Has the Secretary of State any self-respect when he says that we can spend £1·5 billion on 600,000 people and then talk about real quality? I cannot believe that that is a reality. If we are serious about wanting people to have respect for what the Government are doing, that is not how to do it.

"Freedom", "independence" and "choice" are words that trip off the tongues of Ministers on every subject. What freedom, what independence and what choice are there for many young people and adults who are victims of economic policies beyond their responsibility? It cannot be right to talk about a choice for kids when the Government are withdrawing university places and treating further education provision with contempt, and when they have smashed apprenticeships and job opportunities for many years. Some people may regard that as choice, but I do not believe it is. That is why there is cynicism and great disrespect for the Government's provisions.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I came into the Chamber to listen and not to speak, but I think that there are important things to be said from the Government Benches to Opposition Members who in many cases are rehearsing arguments which they have gone over in Committee.

I have been saddened by some of the contributions. We have heard talk of cheap labour, of insufficient benefit and of trade unions not having enough say. Opposition Members should remember that the Government have no money; it is the taxpayers' money, which has to be used sensibly. The greatest motivation for a person is not how much money he will be paid while he is training but what the prospects will be at the end of the training, when he has gained new skills which one hopes will lead to a permanent job so that he may marry, have a family and perhaps purchase his own home. These are the things that motivate people towards getting proper permanent jobs rather than false jobs.

It is not so long since the Opposition were always reminding us that training schemes were a way of disguising the unemployment figures. We do not hear much of that now, because our Action for Jobs programme happens to be working very well. The Conservative Government have come up with schemes that were beyond the wildest imagination of the Opposition. In the Labour party manifesto at the general election, we did not see much evidence of what it would do. The Conservative Government, with their Action for Jobs, are getting people back to work and are training for the needs of industry.

Hon. Members should realise that industry in this country is taking off faster than in the rest of Europe. If we do not have training schemes, we will not have people with sufficient skill in the right industry to take up the positions that will be on offer. Let us make no mistake: the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) gave me the impression that he would rather pay people a large benefit to sit at home doing nothing. Yet Action for Jobs provides all sorts of options.

Taxpayers should not be expected to support someone who is not prepared to help himself by taking up the option of training. Opposition Members talk about availability for work. I suppose they have all heard of the black market. The black market means that someone is claiming benefit and working at the same time. They are

[Mr. Geoffrey Dickens]

squeezing the taxpayer in two ways. First, they are not paying taxes and, secondly, they are drawing benefit that the taxpayers are paying for.

We are putting forward sensible and helpful solutions. We hear all this nonsense about pouring in money in order to motivate people to go on training schemes, and we hear nonsense about the level of benefit paid during the time spent on those schemes. The motivation that people under training need is the prospect that their new and extra skills may lead to a permanent job. That is what the Conservative Government stand for, and that is what they are doing.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) obviously approaches these matters in a deeply philosophical way, which leads me on to the few comments I want to make.

Part II uproots and mutilates the MSC. I do not think that that is an excessive way of putting it. It takes 11,000 officials from the MSC and puts them in the Department of Employment. It also takes considerably more than £500 million from the MSC and transfers it to the Department of Employment. Therefore, it is not excessive to say that the MSC is being uprooted and mutilated. That must be the result of the new philosophy and new approach to these matters.

The Secretary of State referred to the debate in 1973. The other evening I could not sleep very well so I read the *Hansard* for 1973 which contains the debate in which the MSC was set up. I find a completely different atmosphere in the Chamber now. The Secretary of State was then Maurice Macmillan. He explained the new idea of a labour market organisation that would not be controlled by the Government. He said that it would be independent. It would be an organisation of the partners in the labour market — the employers, the trade unions, the local authorities and the education authorities. The Government were to have a hands-off approach. That was the novel concept adumbrated by Maurice Macmillan.

If hon. Members read that debate — I recommend them to do so — they will see that there was one Conservative Back Bencher, the present Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and a predecessor of the current Secretary of State for Employment, who could not understand the new concept. He could not understand how we could set up a body that was not controlled by the Government. It was not an easy concept, but Maurice Macmillan sought to explain how it would be possible. My right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Mr. Walker), now a Deputy Speaker, spoke from the Labour Front Bench. I will not mention the other Labour Front Bench spokesman of the time.

There was a consensus in the House. It was a bipartisan issue. Everybody agreed with what we were trying to do in those days. How different it is today. Look at the atmosphere in the House today. This is the new approach, the new Conservative party. It is completely different.

We are adding six extra employers to the MSC. I am all in favour of the employers, but no one has explained to me why there will be six extra employers and not six extra trade unionists. After all, as the MSC has explained, it does not proceed by voting. If we have to decide by voting, we might as well not have an MSC. It does not do things that way.

The only time I know that the MSC had a vote was when the skill centres were axed. The proposition was carried by one vote. The representative of the education interests who originally supported it was a Scotsman. He later said he had made a mistake and wanted to change his vote. However, it was too late. The MSC does not proceed by voting. Perhaps it is like the Cabinet. There are bodies that do not proceed by means of votes, because if they did the whole thing would break down.

8.15 pm

Since then, the Government have increasingly changed the nature of the MSC and leaned on it in a way that is pushing it to destruction and into something completely different. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) talked about the agonies of some trade unionists on the MSC. They have been put under great stress. The Government have been giving instructions to the MSC. For example, the youth training scheme was set up after an instruction from the Government. They did not consult the MSC and ask whether it thought that the scheme would be a good idea. I do not blame the present Secretary of State for that, but that is how it happened.

The MSC do not like what the Government are doing to it. As the Secretary of State knows, the MSC wrote to him on 23 July. I have seen the letter and I hope that I will receive a copy of his reply to the MSC, which said:

"We are saddened by your intention and you would not expect us to be otherwise."

The letter was written by Sir Bryan Nicholson. He has gone now. He went rather sadly and is now doing something else. The letter went on:

"From the very earliest days of the Commission we have set great store on establishing and maintaining an attractive public Employment Service".

It has tried to set up an "attractive" service, not a compulsory one. It has not said, "If you do not go on this scheme or take this job, you will not receive any benefit."

The letter goes on to say that the MSC wants to offer a service that

"provides employers, not least small firms, with an efficient service offering them the best value for money. . . treats individual job seekers and job changers"—

that is good—

"in a way they have a right to expect in a modern society."

They are not to be treated as criminals, convicts, recalcitrants, spongers or scoundrels, but, to use the words of the MSC, as

"they have a right to expect in a modern society."

The letter also mentions the disabled and says that the MSC wants to provide

"an attractive gateway to other opportunities."

The sense of that letter is that the MSC does not trust the Government to do that. It does not trust the Government to provide an "attractive" employment service. We will have to see. It may be a little coded, but that is what the MSC is saying. The letter says:

"we urge you to pay the closest possible attention to the following matters which could be at risk in what will inevitably be a protracted and difficult organsiational transition."

I will not read too much of the letter, but I shall mention two things. The MSC says that it is worried that, if the service is too closely identified with benefit payments

and benefit claimants, employers might not wish to use the service in the future. The employers might not like it if it is based on benefits, compulsion and other such aspects.

The letter states:

"Management and staff of the functions you propose to transfer will need to be reassured that the move is not a prelude to privatisation, to further staff cuts, or to changes in their terms and conditions".

I do not know whether they have received those assurances. The Secretary of State said that he had received a unanimous response. I think that that was so. What was said in that unanimous response? The MSC says that participation in the new scheme should be voluntary and that unions should have a significant say in whether individual schemes receive approval.

Every community programme must have union approval, but will that still be the case? If not, there will be trouble with that programme. We saw what happened to the job training scheme. The TUC did not approve of that and it was a complete flop because there was no consensus. That is likely to happen again, if we rush at things in a headstrong way and if we do not have any consensus and ignore the TUC.

The MSC report to the Government states that existing schemes have failed to live up to expectations. A few days ago, I received a copy of the February issue of *Personnel Management*. I do not know whether other hon. Members have read it, but it is a good publication. It refers to the MSC report to the Government, which stated:

"All the commission's research and experience show that many of the unemployed are sceptical and hostile towards Government programmes.

All of the present and past programmes have had their value and continue to do so. But, taken together or taken separately, they leave gaps or fail, in different ways, to measure up to the needs of the time or the hopes and aspirations of the long-term unemployed."

The Secretary of State must not spoil the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar by skimping on the money involved. Extra people will go on to the scheme without extra money.

We do not have the same level of training as other countries, not because the Government do not put in the same amount of money as West Germany, France or the United States, but because British companies do not put in sufficient money. Every Secretary of State for Employment that I have known has lamented that fact. If the present Secretary of State needs to be convinced, he should talk to his new Parliamentary Secretary, who is an expert on this subject.

How can we encourage British employers to invest in people? Foreign companies recognise the benefits of doing that. They invest up to 5 per cent. of turnover, yet the average input in British industry is 0·3 per cent. The Government are financing schemes, but I urge them not to skimp and ruin the schemes.

The commission proposes that, in addition to the £10 a week premium, participants should be paid travel costs of over £5 a week. They should also be given any lodging expenses, as well as assistance with other necessary items, such as special clothing and tools. There would also be a payment of up to £50 per week to meet the child care costs of single parents. I accept that the Secretary of State cannot give the precise figures today, but even £10 is more than the Department was wanting to pay. The unemployed are now allowed to earn up to £4 a week.

Mr. Clay: Does my hon. Friend agree that even that is a little deceptive? Most people's travelling costs will be above £5 and will therefore have to come off the £10. The trainee will have to pay those costs himself so, in reality, the sum is not even £10.

Mr. Leighton: I do not understand how this will be done but, at present, the unemployed are allowed to earn £4 a week without losing benefit, so £10 is really £6. The Department of Health and Social Security estimated about £7 for the costs of travel, clothing and food. That should be added. Instead of driving this sum down, the Government would be well advised to be generous and to obtain full consent for these programmes. The value of the training is most important, but it will be a great mistake to screw down this payment and affront everybody.

We are all in favour of a high-quality YTS scheme. An article in the October edition of the *Employment Gazette* dealt with the economic effects of YTS schemes. It referred to the deadweight effect of YTS places, that replace the jobs for young people which would have existed without YTS. It also referred to jobs for older workers which were replaced by YTS trainees. It then referred to output—in other words, value added—by trainees on YTS schemes. They go to work and they produce. What is the value of what they produce?

The output of service industries—repair of consumer goods and vehicles, retail, distribution and personal services—is above the YTS rate of pay of £27·30, and the trainee produces more than £27·30. According to the article, the output of retail assistants is measured at £39 a week. If one produced £39 a week of added value and was paid only £27·30, one could describe that as cheap labour. A trainee could be brought in as a substitute for a worker who had been sacked. That is not a good aspect of the scheme.

According to the article, some YTS trainees are being trained for skills that are not in short supply and could be met without YTS training. That applies particularly to YTS trainees in retailing, which has 25 per cent. of all trainees. Hotels have 7 per cent. of trainees and personal services, such as hairdressing, have 6 per cent. of trainees. Clerical trainees in all sectors account for 10 per cent. of YTS trainees. Those categories account for almost 50 per cent. of YTS trainees. Fifty per cent. of those trainees are in valuable schemes, but 50 per cent. are in schemes where they are not getting proper training, or in areas which are not in short supply.

The quality of training in retail schemes is less than satisfactory. Several managers in those trades admitted that there would be little to teach second-year YTS trainees. Training for general shop assistants could be provided in a few weeks—for example, just by filling up shelves.

We want a first-class YTS scheme. We want better quality training. The training allowance should be higher. It is not right to say that we have got everything perfect. We do not want a cheapskate scheme. If we could get a decent, high-quality scheme without cheap labour, we could have a bipartisan policy. Unfortunately, we do not appear to have one at the moment.

8.30 pm

Mrs. Golding: The Bill represents yet more centralisation of power, yet more power for the Minister, and the transfer of yet more power to the Ministry. At the moment, in the MSC, employers, trade unions, local authorities and educationists work together in a practical

[Mrs. Golding]

way. They talk about things, people and places that they know. To them, they are real places, not just bits of paper in Ministry files.

For many years, I sat as a trade union member on the old North Staffordshire district manpower services committee. I had a great deal of first-hand experience and knowledge of local training and employment needs. The committee dealt with matters by bringing together employers, trade unions, local authorities and educationists. They were not civil servants. Indeed, civil servants and people from the Ministry would not have had the kind of expertise that members of the Committee had. We knew north Staffordshire's needs.

The former Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme was the Minister in the Department at that time. Many people in his Department were sceptical about the work of district manpower committees. Never one to duck an issue, the then Minister, the former Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme, said, "Right. We shall have a detailed survey of an area. We shall choose north Staffordshire." Departmental officials had relevant details. They went to all employers in the area. They went to schools and every other place that they could think of. They collected a great deal of material. When they had collated the material, they produced a little book and took it along to the committee.

All that the 20 committee members had said were north Staffordshire's needs were stated in that book. With their survey and expertise, they did not find one matter that the committee, as local people, did not know. We in north Staffordshire talk to each other, we know each other and, furthermore, we like and trust each other. That is the best way in which to deal with training and employment. We know that training and employment go hand in hand, and that they should not be isolated from each other.

Most certainly, the Department of Employment was responsible for some schemes, but look at what happened to them. The Department let them slip through its fingers. I refer to the job release scheme. Another scheme was put forward by the former hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme. It was thought of by an ordinary working man who had practical experience. Perhaps the Minister should talk to more ordinary working people who have practical experience and get some better ideas for schemes. That scheme was scrapped because it was practical. It was a humane way in which to solve a problem, but it was scrapped because the Ministry is the Treasury's lapdog. It was far too practical and expensive for it.

In the MSC, employers and unions have acted together to try to solve problems. The Ministry has now decided to change the balance of trade union and employer representation on the new committee. The strength of the MSC has always been that trade unions and the Confederation of British Industry have nominated people with a fierce pride in their areas and a determination to fight for their industries, services and workers. The Minister does not want fighters; he wants lapdogs. In future, he will choose people to sit on boards. That choice will not be for unions or the CBI. Oh, no—they are not to be trusted.

The Bill will give the Minister yet more control, which is what he wants. So much for the Tory idea of local consultation. The clauses have nothing do do with good sense or industry and training needs. The Minister should withdraw them and think again.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): The hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) spoke of how the Government have debased the term "training". I thought of my first job. I worked—I stress the word "work"—in a borstal, where I heard the governors's pep talk to new trainees. It was an interesting choice of words. He said, "You are not here for punishment, you are here for training." There was the loudest suppressed raspberry that I have ever heard. When we talk to youngsters, as many hon. Members and I did during the general election campaign, we use the word "training" and we know that we are using a word that has been debased.

There is great concern about the consequences of the changes. I shall talk about the changes as they affect the adult training programme. There is probably much agreement among hon. Members about the present community programme. We are not happy that it is an overwhelmingly part-time scheme.

Ms. Short: The Secretary of State would not give way on this point. My hon. Friend will remember that, when the Government introduced the community programme, which replaced the old community enterprise programme, they deliberately introduced much part-time work to keep the wage rate down to an average of £67. They are now using the excuse that, because part-time work produces low wages and therefore cannot attract people with dependants to the benefit-plus system, the solution is to provide full-time places within the scheme. They have manufactured a problem which they have solved by giving people, in effect, £5 on top of their benefit.

Mr. Worthington: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for covering the next two pages of my speech. Her point should be made many times.

Due to its design, the scheme became overwhelmingly part-time. Due to its design, older workers find the present scheme unattractive. There are faults in the scheme. Frequently, the community programme relates to work that is more properly done by local social and health services people. We would all agree that it was a major folly to introduce the community programme without an adequate training component. The Government now realise that fact, but they are not putting matters right in the way they should.

Opposition Members agree that a major fault of the scheme is that wages started too low and, over time, have become proportionately lower. What do the Government do about the faults? They lower wages even further and convert the programme into a full-time programme by using DHSS money, rather than facing up to the inadequacy of funding. They then say that training should come from the same inadequate budget as before.

I particularly refer to the Government's complete indifference to the consequence of their policy changes on present users of the community programme, those who sponsor the community programme, and its clients. Frequently, its clients are among the most disadvantaged people in our society, for whom the community programme, whatever its faults, has been used by voluntary organisations and local authorities to give services to the elderly, mentally ill and handicapped. I find the Government's indifference to the consequences of these changes disturbing.

It is all very well to say that, in future, the adult training programme, the community programme with a future,

should be private-sector led. Where is the private sector in my constituency? The Minister must return and tell us where these training places will come from. At present, more than 90 per cent. of the community programme places in Scotland are local authority or voluntary organisation-led. Who will come forward from the private sector in areas in which unemployment is 20 per cent. and higher, and in which there is no local economy?

Where is the private sector that will employ—that word is not a term to be used any more—people and provide these training places? I have corresponded with the Minister about this. Will supermarkets and the retail sector be the leaders, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) mentioned in connection with the youth training scheme? Will supermarkets and other large stores provide training places?

We already know that the Government pay the wages of much of the private sector through job substitution on the youth training scheme. The people of this country subsidise private industry by paying the wages of those firms. That will happen under the adult training programme, too. The workers in retailing, the members of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, are alarmed that, in an industry in which jobs are increasingly low-paid and part-time, they will be squeezed out by the adult training programme.

The private sector does not exist in my area. The combination of job scarcity and social deprivation in my constituency means that community benefit projects are especially valuable.

I come now to the consequences of the Bill for the clients of community programmes. In the Clydebank part of my constituency, the MSC has, unbelievably, been the largest single employer. At one stage more than 1,000 workers were employed on community programme schemes in that area. I shall quickly list some of them. The first is a security project, sponsored by the local authorities and voluntary organisations in the area, which greatly improves the quality of life for the elderly and disabled by giving them security in their homes. Crucial to the success of that scheme is the quality of its management and the motivation of its workers, as people are being allowed into private homes. What will the proposals do to the quality of such a scheme?

What about the care of gardens schemes which are mounted by local councils for the elderly and the disabled, who take pride in their gardens but cannot manage them themselves? For there to be an adequate contract between the people who receive and the people who run that service, the people on the scheme must be well motivated so that the project is well managed. In my area there is a small converted doctor's surgery, which local people have run as a day centre. It is called "The Wee Hub" and it has been established by local people with MSC funds as a day centre for the elderly. They struggle to make it run—they have to keep on changing the staff—but the staff that they find are well motivated and are not induced to be there by the pittance that comes in.

What about the link schemes in the Glasgow area, where 35 workers provide a service for literally thousands of people who have been mentally ill? Once again, the quality of the scheme is crucial. If I had had my way the community programme would never have been allowed near such schemes. It is fundamentally unsuited to them, lacking, as it does, trained workers, and receiving annual funding, but the voluntary organisations have made the scheme work.

Above all, what about the Crossroads care attendance scheme — 23 MSC-funded projects that provide assistance to those who care for the elderly and the handicapped? The scheme brings in £1·5 million from the MSC each year. Workers go into homes and look after people's nearest and dearest. What will happen to the quality of that scheme? The Government's response is one of total indifference.

8.45 pm

The impact of MSC expenditure in Scotland is considerable—£140 million a year. That compares with the Scottish Development Agency budget of £95 million a year. What is done with that money matters a great deal to the economy. The voluntary sector in Scotland is underpinned by £48 million-worth of MSC funds. Those resources are on a scale that the voluntary sector has never had before. That sector has enormously assisted the Government to make their community programme work; now, under these proposals, it will be kicked in the teeth for its co-operation.

Mr. Clay: Before my hon. Friend moves on, does he agree that there is another angle to his important point about the effect on existing community programme schemes? It reveals the key to the Government's deception over this matter.

I listened with interest to the list of projects that my hon. Friend gave; I can think of very similar ones in my area, where thousands of people are on such schemes. Some of those schemes—this is not to their detriment—now have nothing to do with training. Dial-a-ride and services for the disabled are two such schemes. The Government are trying to deceive us that the new schemes are about training—that is their excuse for workfare-plus and for cutting the rates of pay. The Government are telling the truth to the extent that the existing community programme schemes will go altogether. They have nothing to do with training. So it is not only a matter of the disappearance of the quality of some of the present schemes: they will disappear altogether if the Government stick to their pretence that they will all be about training from now on.

Mr. Worthington: I am grateful for that point, and I shall take it further. The Government lack even-handedness about training. A massive amount of training is needed in the caring industry, in which there would be employment in the Health Service, the social services and in social work. But that sort of work is ignored for training purposes. I emphasise that on the end of these valuable schemes are exceedingly vulnerable groups of people who have come to value their day centres and the people who visit their homes. The schemes have been introduced with no idea of caring for such people.

I could understand it if the Department of Employment agreed that it needed to change the direction of the community programme and give it another focus in future, saying that it would safeguard people who are benefiting from the present schemes. Such schemes may not make sense as employment training, but as health and social work they make good sense.

These schemes may or not survive, but even if they do, it will be with a chain gang of pressed personnel—

[Mr. Worthington]

people whose motivation may not be of the highest. They will not be paid properly for the job and they will not be given the status of workers undergoing training. The Government have shown a total lack of credibility on the quality of that training and that means that the sensitivity of the schemes is attacked.

Many of the schemes will not survive. The voluntary organisations will pull out, sometimes causing the collapse of the voluntary organisation itself. As is already occurring, civil servants from the Department of Employment will be obliged to write sick letters to the schemes, regretting that the schemes no longer meet the criteria and telling them that they should seek alternative funding from the NHS—they must be joking—or the local social work department, which suffers from the clawback arrangement whereby if it spends £1 it loses £3, or from the urban aid scheme, and when a scheme does so it is told it is not eligible because it is not a new project.

Is the Minister aware of the sheer misery which the changes will cause? Even if the Department of Employment should not be picking up the schemes the Government have a collective responsibility. In Scotland, if the schemes do not survive, we are talking about £48 million in social services cuts.

Where will the money come from to fund projects that are of immense value to the local community? I am pleased to speak in support of the Opposition's amendment which seeks to delete these clauses because of the damage that they will cause to these particular schemes.

Ms. Short: We have had a useful debate and some important points have been made about the effects of part II. A number of contributions from the Opposition Benches have shown what a dishonest—I use the word advisedly—account of the changes the Secretary of State gave the House today.

The Secretary of State pretended that there would be some great improvement in the employment services. He went on to describe changes that have already been made — the Department of Employment has taken direct responsibility for the jobcentres and so on, and restart and the rules on availability for work have been introduced—and then suggested that somehow the Bill was necessary to authorise those changes. That is false. The changes that the right hon. Gentleman has described have already taken place, so that is not a true account of part II.

Let us look at what part II really does. It centralises power and control over training schemes in the hands of the Secretary of State and it takes away the power to be consulted that the Manpower Services Commission — the tripartite body that has been described — had. Secondly, it deliberately takes new powers to compel unemployed people to participate in low-paid schemes and then the Bill dishonestly calls work experience schemes "training". That is what part II is all about, and that is why we reject it.

The Secretary of State is taking the power to appoint six extra commissioners. At the moment, three commissioners are appointed after consultation with the trade union movement, three after consultation with employers, two after consultation with local education authorities, and the chair is the personal appointment of the Secretary of State.

That will no longer do. That must be changed. The Secretary of State wants power, so he takes the power to appoint six extra people and they will be appointed to stuff the commission and ensure that it will be his lapdog.

In Committee, at the request of several organisations representing disabled people, we asked that at least one of those six extra people should be a representative of disabled people. But no, that was not acceptable and the Secretary of State threw out our request.

Not content with having taken control of the commission by stuffing it with his personal appointees, the Secretary of State has to take away powers that the Commission previously had. Under the Employment and Training Act 1973, the commission was asked to submit proposals to the Secretary of State on training and assistance for the unemployed. It was asked to submit the proposals to ensure that the activities of the commission were in accordance with proposals approved by the Secretary of State and to give effect to the Secretary of State's directions as repeated in this legislation. Therefore, under the 1973 Act, the Secretary of State had considerable powers. The commission could submit proposals, but he had to approve them, and if he wanted to, he could give directions.

But the Secretary of State was not content with that. Having stuffed the commission, he takes all these powers to himself and away from the commission so that he holds the powers and can give directions to the commission about what it must do, or he can use some other body.

The House should ask why we should have a commission at all. We know that when the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) was Secretary of State for Employment he made it clear that he did not like the MSC. It was widely thought that that might be because trade unions were represented on the commission and his intolerance and dislike of trade unions is clear to everyone. That is reflected in the earlier part of the Bill. He wanted to abolish the commission.

My view is that the Government are, in effect, abolishing the commission and are retaining a fig leaf for as long as the trade unions will go along with that so that they can force through any scheme or structures that they want. As I said earlier, the trade union representatives on the commission are now constantly agonising about whether they should go because by staying they give legitimacy to schemes that are destructive and unhelpful to the unemployed, which encourage the use of the unemployed as cheap labour, substitution for other workers and the dragging down of wage levels, or whether it is better to stay and negotiate to make things a little better than would otherwise be the case.

My personal view — I stress that — is that the Secretary of State is now seeking to humiliate the trade union representatives on the MSC with the changes in the Bill. It is time for them to leave the commission to seek to represent the interests of the unemployed and those who seek training through traditional trade union measures. I stress that that is my view. It is my serious view and it is no good the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), saying that that is a disgraceful view. Trade unions exist to seek to represent the interests of working people and to get the best for them.

Mr. Fowler *rose*——

Ms. Short: If the Secretary of State will wait a minute—as he always requests everyone else to do whenever they seek to intervene—I shall give way.

The long-term unemployed are to be compelled to take part in schemes by threats that their benefit will be removed for six months if they refuse. They have to pay the first £5 of their expenses in getting to work. Therefore, they can be forced to work full-time for £5 a week. The dominant scheme will be work experience, based so that it will inevitably displace other other workers in a way that is described in the YTS statistics that have been put before the House. I do not believe that those proposals are in the interests of the unemployed or of other workers. The trade union movement should not support such things. It is better for them to get out of the commission and seek to defend the interests of working people in other ways.

9 pm

Mr. Fowler: The hon. Lady has made a serious suggestion. When she speaks from the Dispatch Box, for whom is she speaking? Is she speaking for the Labour party? Surely that is the purpose of speaking from the Dispatch Box. What is the status of her speech?

Ms. Short: Perhaps the Secretary of State was not listening. He often does not listen to those who seek to work for the unemployed. I have made it clear that in this matter, this is a personal view. Everything else that I shall say will reflect the position of the Labour party from the Front Bench. I said before that this was my personal view, and I am entitled to put forward that view.

Mr. Fowler: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Short: I do not have to give way to the Secretary of State. He refused to give way to me.

Mr. Fowler *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The hon. Lady has made it quite clear that she is refusing to give way. I must ask the Secretary of State to resume his seat. The hon. Lady has twice made it clear that she is not giving way.

Ms. Short: The Secretary of State refused to give way to me. He has such arrogance that he thinks that it is all right for him to stand at the Dispatch Box and refuse to give way but that somehow he is entitled to intervene whenever he wishes.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): The House should have an answer. If the hon. Lady was speaking from the Back Benches, the House would happily accept that her words are her own personal opinion. However, I find it difficult to listen to the hon. Lady speaking from the Dispatch Box, dismissing her party responsibilities and saying, "This is my personal opionion." We want to know from the Front Bench what is the Labour party's opinion.

Ms. Short: The hon. Gentleman has just repeated the Secretary of State's question to which I gave a clear answer. On the question whether the trade union movement continues to have representatives on the commission, I said that that is a matter for the trade union movement.

Mr. Nicholls: What is the Labour party's view?

Ms. Short: If the Under-Secretary would allow me to answer the question, everyone might be clear about it. I have already answered it once, but Conservative Members were not listening, so I will answer it a second time, and then perhaps I can move on.

Ministers and Conservative Members should understand that the representation of the trade union movement on the commission is fragile. Those in the trade union movement who sit on the commission agonise over whether they should continue to do so. I have had discussions with a number of people who hold those places. The representatives of the trade union movement have to decide whether to remain on the commission. My personal view is that the humiliation involved in part II of the Bill makes it no longer worth staying. Part II——

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: What does the Labour party say?

Ms. Short: The hon. Gentleman should stop being silly.

Part II of the Bill takes power to pay a bridging allowance of £15 a week for only eight weeks to participants on the youth training scheme. That is necessary only because the Government have removed the right to supplementary benefit from 16 to 17-year-olds and have thus made the youth training scheme compulsory. We consider that a disgraceful move.

Young people have participated voluntarily in the youth training scheme in enormous numbers. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) made it clear that only very small numbers have been penalised for refusing a place on a scheme. One of the effects of that is to remove from young people the choice about which scheme to enter and what kind of training best suits them. It removes from young people with families on low incomes the choice to remain on supplementary benefit and to study for up to 21 hours a week. Indeed, 30,000 young people a year have been doing that. They have achieved O-levels and A-levels, and some even went on to university. That option is to be wiped out. If young people need an income, they will be forced onto the youth training scheme. That is a complete outrage.

Clause 26 takes powers to make the refusal of offers of places on low-paid training schemes—which under the new proposal, will pay £5 a week on top of benefits—equivalent to the refusal of a job and to make it possible for the Department to refuse benefit for six months to people who refuse places on those schemes.

We have heard a lot of equivocation from the Secretary of State about when he expects to use those powers. The report from the Manpower Services Commission about the adult training scheme said that the scheme must be voluntary, or those who proposed it would not support it. The Secretary of State says that he broadly accepts their proposals, but he refuses to withdraw clause 26. He keeps saying that he has no plans at present to designate the new scheme as a compulsory scheme under clause 26. No one would expect him to want to designate it at the present time. One would expect him to hope to get the scheme up and running to provide enough places and then designate it. His words imply that that is his plan.

In Committee, we asked the Secretary of State to give an undertaking that he would never designate the scheme under clause 26. If the right hon. Gentleman is to respond to the recommendation of the Manpower Services Commission that the scheme must be voluntary, he should be able to give that undertaking. He has refused to do so. All he will tell us is that he has no plans, for the present

[Ms. Short]

time, to designate the scheme. It seems a fair assumption that he will wait until the scheme is up and running—if he ever gets it—and then designate it.

Long-term unemployed people will be forced to work for £5 a week on schemes that are basically work experience. The recommendation is merely that 40 per cent. of their time should be on directed training, but 60 per cent. of their training will be spent working, for which they will get £5 a week and no guarantee of any job at the end of it. They will have no guarantee that they will be given any skills to enhance their employment opportunities.

The whole package of proposals in part II is deeply unacceptable. It means a serious diminution in the incomes and freedom of choice of the unemployed and in the MSC's powers. It means centralisation of power in the hands of the Secretary of State. That is why I invite my hon. Friends to vote that part II be deleted.

Mr. Cope: I shall do my best to respond briefly to some of the points raised, but I make it clear that many of them concerned the new training programme for the unemployed—which is soon to be the subject of a White Paper and statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—rather than the Bill.

Some hon. Members, but not all, have understood that the Bill carries forward, and to a degree rearranges, the powers under which existing schemes as well as proposed schemes such as the new training programme can be carried out. The Bill specifically provides for the MSC to carry on those programmes that it operates at the moment. It makes some changes to the commission, the aim being to raise the profile of training. There was considerable support on both sides of the House for that, although I understand that not everyone agrees with the methods that we propose. Employers are the major providers of training and the major customers for it. Employers create jobs, and they need to have a greater say in, and make a greater contribution to, training.

Of course I do not agree with everything that the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) said in this connection, but I do agree about the fundamental importance of improving training. That must be at the top of our industrial agenda and employers must do more to invest in their work force. That is precisely why we are renaming the MSC the Training Commission and seeking greater employer involvement with the commission and its aims.

The Bill does not transfer the jobcentres, as the hon. Member for Newham, North-East seemed to suggest. That was done in October, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear. It follows that the transfer is a separate arrangement and not a part of the Bill. I think that both sides of the House are united in wanting quality training schemes. That is extremely important. Unemployment is undergoing the largest sustained fall on record. Over the past six years, 1·5 million new jobs have been created, which gives us the opportunity, which we are anxious to seize, to help the unemployed find new jobs.

The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) made an interesting contribution, but he was wrong to say that we are indifferent to the type of schemes under the community programme about which he was talking. On the contrary, there will be project places in the new scheme, but I must ask the hon. Gentleman to await the White Paper for more details. We are responding to many of the hon. Gentleman's criticisms of the community programme. It is said that much of the work is part-time, that it is unattractive to older workers and married people with dependants and so on.

We are responding to those criticisms and to the lack of training in the community programme to which the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) drew attention. I thought that the hon. Gentleman came near to saying at one stage that some of the unemployed were incapable of being trained, although I would not wish to attribute that assertion to him if he does not agree with it. We certainly do not agree with that; on the contrary, we believe in making every effort to assist all the unemployed people that we can back into work.

Mr. Worthington: I am at a loss to know which part of my speech the hon. Gentleman is referring to. I would never ever come anywhere near to saying that.

Mr. Cope: I apologise if I am misrepresenting the hon. Gentleman. He argued for the community programme, which has to a considerable extent made work for people to fill in their time, and does not supply enough training.

Other criticisms have been made of the community programme. Much attention has been devoted to the rate for the job and so on. The changes that we propose to the community programme and the benefit-plus scheme are no new ideas. I draw the attention of the House to the Youthaid report published in 1982 on what was then called the community enterprise programme, which was the precursor of the community programme:

> "Consideration should also be given to the possibility of payment on CEP calculated on a 'Benefit plus' basis. The CEP allowance would be topped up by Social Security or Unemployment benefit. This would have the advantage of ensuring that the CEP paid each worker the same amount while those with dependants would get more as a result of the variations in the benefits."

That is an important criticism, made as long ago as 1982 when, I am informed, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) was director of studies for Youthaid. I do not know whether she agreed with what Youthaid said in its report on CEP. If she did, she has obviously changed her mind.

Ms. Short: The research on the old community enterprise programme was funded by the Department of Employment. I was the director of studies and not one of the researchers. The recommendation came from the researchers. We discussed it at the time and, although it was not my view, the researchers had done the work and they were entitled to put the view forward.

Mr. Cope: There has been some confusion tonight about which are the hon. Lady's views and which are other people's, and it helps to get matters clear.

We believe that training should have a higher profile. We need to get employers more involved in training, and that is central to our proposals. We shall all learn more about the new programme from the White Paper and from my right hon. Friend's statement.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 206, Noes 258.

Division No. 177] **[9.15 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, J.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alastair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, James
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Samuel
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Douglas
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, James
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Tom
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
McCusker, Harold
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McTaggart, Bob
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, John
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerald
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon A. J.
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Anthony
Wray, James
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bigge-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Rydale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael

Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Timothy
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Miss E. *(Devon W)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.

Amendment accordingly negatived.

Clause 29

CROWN EMPLOYEES AND CONTRACTS ETC.

Amendment made: No. 21, in page 32, line 1, leave out 'and 10 above and any other enactment which'
and insert
', 3(3) and 10 above and any enactment which is contained in any other Act and'.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

9.26 pm

Mr. Fowler: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I shall be brief. This is an important Bill, which makes changes in both industrial relations law and in training arrangements for unemployed people. In November when I spoke on Second Reading, I said that the Bill was set against a background in which unemployment had fallen for 15 months in succession by more than 400,000 in the 12 months to that date. We have debated the Bill for 70 hours since Second Reading and three months later it is interesting to see that unemployment has fallen, not for 15 but for 18 months in succession, and not by 400,000 but by more than 500,000 in the past 12 months.

The provisions give effect to three key proposals on employment and training which we set out in our manifesto. First, the manifesto outlined our plans to consult on a major restructuring of our employment and training services. Secondly, it foreshadowed a change in the role of the MSC. Thirdly, it guaranteed a place on YTS to every school leaver under 18 not going directly into a job.

Our plans for reforming the training available to long-term unemployed people underlie these proposals. It is now our major training priority to give the long-term unemployed the skills necessary to bring them back to work. I shall announce the details of this new programme shortly, but I can say that it will make it possible for us to retrain up to 600,000 a year and it represents a massive investment in training unemployed people in skills that they and our economy will need in future.

The Bill also takes the process of industrial relations law reform a step further. The essence of this step-by-step process of change and reform is a determination to see that the framework of law is appropriate to match the needs of the day and to respond to any omissions that have been apparent. In that spirit, the Government published our Green Paper last February, which put forward issues and suggestions. During the general election, we made it entirely clear and gave full details of what issues we intended to legislate on. No one can claim that we have in any way hidden our intentions. The Bill basically puts into effect the promises we have made.

The Bill is not—I repeat, not—an attack on trade unions or trade unionists. Many of its provisions simply build upon the examples which some unions have given us of how the rights of their members can be assured. It is concerned with the right framework of law for trade union affairs—the framework necessary above all to protect and ensure the rights which ordinary trade union members want and need. It puts the interests of trade union members first and foremost. That is the essence of our approach.

The Employment Act 1980 adjusted the balance of power between employers and trade unions. The Employment Act 1982 set out new responsibilities for unions and employees and the Trade Union Act 1984 promoted democratic practices in trade union affairs. The Bill is concerned with giving new rights to trade union members and setting out new ways by which those rights can be enforced.

Trade union members must have protection from abuses of power by their unions and the rights in respect of their unions that they are entitled to expect in a free society. The Bill gives members the right not to be called out by their union without a properly held secret ballot which produces a majority; the right not to be disciplined by their union if they choose to work rather than to take industrial action; the right of access to their unions' accounting records and to have professional advice when inspecting them; and the right to stop their unions applying funds for unlawful purposes or handing out indemnities to those found guilty of criminal offences. It sets out other rights which will be available to all trade union members.

Many trade unionists have some of those rights under their contracts of membership with their union, and to that extent the Bill merely confirms them, but there are examples of union rule books and practices which do not guarantee the fundamental rights. All the evidence is that trade union members and the public support the law guaranteeing those rights.

The Bill has two strands. First, it develops further the training strategy of the Government, builds on the success of YTS and marks out our next priority, which is to provide better training for the long-term unemployed so that they can obtain skills to help them back to jobs. Secondly, on the industrial relations side, the Bill sets out a number of further reforms of the law which will ensure that excessive union power is held in check. But, above all, it gives new rights to trade union members. I commend the Bill to the House.

9.32 pm

Mr. Meacher: The Government are good, as we have learnt, at redefining problems they cannot solve so as to pretend they do not exist, and then they give them a new and wholly bogus name. To call the Bill an Employment Bill really does take the biscuit. It is not about employment, it is about keeping the anti-trade union vitriol on the boil. It is not even one Bill, it is two quite separate Bills, one about anti-trade union legislation and one about training programmes for the unemployed.

It is a Bill that no one wants. The CBI, the Institute of Personnel Management, the Engineering Employers Federation and even the Freedom Association have expressed hostility to main parts of the Bill, none of which the Secretary of State has paid the slightest attention to. The hostility is scarcely surprising, for what responsible person in industry would ever call for a ballot when those who lost were encouraged to disobey the majority verdict, or for a Bill in which the Government took action to prevent a union from disciplining a minority who broke the majority decision? It is official, in clause 3 of the Bill.

The Bill is the fourth in the Government's string of anti-trade union legislation. For a Government who like to claim respect for the law, the Bill totally undermines the deep respect held by the people for majority decisions democratically reached. Taken to its logical conclusion, it will boomerang against the Government. If clause 3 discredits ballots to strike, it also discredits a ballot to return to work. It could lead to protracted disputes even after a negotiated settlement. Is that the kind of industrial relations that the Government believe in?

What hypocrisy for the Prime Minister, having secured only 43 per cent. of the electorate's vote, to demand unswerving compliance with her laws while at the same time denying trade unions which secure more than 50 per cent. of their votes the power to carry through an overwhelming democratic decision without hindrance. Indeed, in recent weeks we have seen the Transport and General Workers Union receive 88 per cent. of the votes at Ford and the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers receive 90 per cent. of the pit vote.

The Government are so psyched up by their third election victory that they have gone even further over the top in their vendetta against the unions. Not only are minorities protected if they opt out of majority decisions, but clause 16 requires ballots to be won overall and at each workplace with exceptions that will constitute a field day for lawyers. Clause 16 is designed to break up industry-wide collective bargaining and undermine the whole idea of collective rights.

We may conclude that the Bill is not simply anti-union; it is also profoundly anti-democratic. So it is. The Bill requires every ballot to be carried out by post rather than at the workplace even though the evidence shows overwhelmingly that workplace ballot produce much higher turnouts—in many cases twice as high. I would have thought that a much higher turnout at the workplace, plus the uncertain targeting by post, would have clinched the matter in favour of the former on democratic grounds.

No doubt the Government believe that exposure to *Sun* editorials for the postal ballot is considerably more conducive to the right result than exposure to industrial activists at the workplace. It is such a pity that the Government's eagerness to constrain every minute detail of balloting for unions, even to the extent of forcing less democratic methods on them, does not extend to requiring any democratic procedures from employers, the City or the Tory party.

However, amid all this bad news it is fair to state that there is something in the Bill that looks like a bit of silver lining. The Government are proposing to establish a commissioner for the rights of trade union members. That might appear surprising as not one union member has sought a declaration or enforcement order from the courts in the past four years. That is rather a small area of rights requiring attention when by comparison 30,000 complaints a year are made against the employer for unfair dismissal, of which one tenth are upheld by tribunals.

That is precisely the problem for the Government, as the Green Paper admits. Trade union members are simply not using the courts. This new agent provocateur, this new commissar for the harassment of trade unions, is being wheeled out to make union members use the courts. That is the first example of nationalisation under this Government of a purely privatised undertaking, the destructive role of David Hart and other industrial malcontents that we saw during the strike by the National Union of Mineworkers. That, writ large, is what the new trade union harassment officer is all about.

We might have thought that the commissioner would be ideally suited to stand up for the rights of trade union

[Mr. Meacher]

members in the GCHQ affair, as that involved the Government as employer trying to remove the basic right to belong to a trade union. However, the commissioner is expressly precluded from taking up such cases. He can act only against trade unions. However, if the Government are genuinely solicitous about the rights of union members, why not extend the commissioner's power to help union members enforce their rights against the employer over health and safety, training, equal pay for work of equal value and redress against unfair dismissal? If the Government are so keen, as they have claimed to be, to "give the unions back to their members" why not let union members elect the commissioner so that they get the person they want?

What confidence can union members have that the official appointed by the Government — not unknown for their partisan exercise of patronage in sensitive posts — will be impartial, or is the post being kept for industrial wallflowers like Ian MacGregor or as a bolthole for disgraced courtiers like the Secretary of State for Social Services?

Part 2 deals with training programmes for the unemployed which, as we have already made clear, fail to meet the fundamental requirements which we have outlined. First, the Government's proposal to abolish wages based on the rate for the job and to restrict payment to benefit plus allowance is highly damaging. It will mean that two people doing the same job may get vastly different rates of payment.

The change to benefit plus allowance would also rule out topping up by managing agents since any income over an additional £5 a week would be deducted pound for pound from the allowance. Paying the rate for the job is the only way to organise temporary employment or work experience for adults. It is essential to help prevent job substitution and undercutting of wages. This principle must remain the basic building block of any new programme. It is not in the Bill.

Secondly, the scheme must be voluntary. I do not wish to call the credibility of the Secretary of State into question, but I find it difficult to believe him when he says that the new scheme will be voluntary. People should join the scheme because they want to, not because they fear that they will lose all or part of their benefit if they do not join. Compulsion is a recipe for lower standards, resentment and disruption. It could drive the unemployed into the shadow economy or into even greater poverty. Neither employers nor trade unions want reluctant conscripts in workplaces or special projects. Compulsion, together with the reduction to benefit plus allowance, would effectively convert the community programme into the worst kind of workfare, as we have seen in the United States. That is what we believe would happen.

Thirdly, the only way to guarantee protection for participants is to ensure that they continue to have employee status, which will give them legal protection on anti-discrimination rights, health and safety, industrial injuries and other employment rights. The Government's proposals in the Bill will remove employee status from participants and deny them the right to legal protection.

Fourthly, trade unions are an essential way of maintaining proper terms and conditions for participants, for ensuring health and safety standards, for preventing abuse of commission rules, for representing participants and working to improve training schemes. The co-operation of trade unionists is essential to the success of such schemes. Therefore, trade union approval and monitoring, and endorsement by area manpower boards, should continue to be part of a properly financed scheme based on these four principles. None of the four principles is in the Bill.

The Bill is not about improving industrial relations; it is about poisoning attitudes to trade unions. It is not about creating employment; it is about undermining collective rights. It is not about enhancing training; it is about removing people from unemployment registers and providing cheap labour for employers. It is not wanted by either side of industry. It is a Bill too far, even by the anti-trade union prejudices of the Government. It will be unremembered and unlamented when the next Labour Government consign it to the dustbin of history.

9.43 pm

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): This excellent Bill has my wholehearted support. One of the most important and essential ingredients of the Bill is clause 3 which defends the right of an individual to follow his conscience on whether he joins an industrial dispute, and removes from him the fear of having to live under the threat of a jumped-up little Hitler of a shop steward who will bang him over the head if he dares go against the wishes of the union.

Opposition Members have rightly pointed out that people have to consider what the reaction of their colleagues will be when a dispute is over and they return to work. They are absolutely right about that. It is useful to see Opposition Members at last recognising that one cannot legislate to change human nature. That is a factor which individuals have to weigh up when considering whether to join a dispute.

However, it is wholly unacceptable when unions such as the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers, can expel 500 teachers, as it recently did, because those individuals put the needs of their customers — in this case, their pupils — before other matters that their conscience said were less important. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) had experience of that sort of travesty when he was expelled from the NAS-UWT in 1979.

Unions are unique. There is no parallel between a trade union and an employer and there is certainly no parallel between a trade union and a golf club, as we heard suggested by Opposition Members in Committee. It is interesting to note the reaction of Opposition Members who are saying that there is a degree of state interference coming into trade unionism. They are always the first to stand up and defend state interference in the way in which an employer conducts his business. If we look at the amount of legislation and the regulations that employers have to put up with, we see that it is still far more than anything that is happening in this Bill with regard to trade unions.

The way in which Opposition Members have ranted and raved about the Bill would lead one to think that we were giving the minority the right to veto the majority. Clearly, we are not. Clause 3 merely gives the individual the right to follow his conscience, and rightly so. It is a good clause and I support it, as I am sure do most of my hon. Friends.

Other major elements of the Bill are the two clauses relating to the closed shop — clauses 10 and 11. Much

was made by Opposition Members of the Freedom Association's rather woolly thinking on clause 3 but they did not mention the essential caveat made by the Freedom Association, which was the ending of the closed shop.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) and I said in Committee that we remain sceptical about the ability of clauses 10 and 11 to have any effect on the pre-entry closed shop. We welcome the commitment from the Minister in Committee that if clauses 10 and 11 do not have the desired effect, the Government will come back to legislate further to ensure that the closed shop — an odious concept, totally incompatible with a free society or free labour markets —is completely removed from our way of life.

I should like to make two quick points on clauses 12 and 13. First, I hope that the Government will carry out the commitment made in Committee to introduce a clause in the Lords for election addresses to be made a requirement of postal ballot elections. I hope that the Government will consider bringing forward a code of conduct for the nomination procedure for people who are to be nominated for the posts of general secretary and president, which are non-voting posts on the executive.

Clause 7 does not go anywhere near far enough. It is a travesty that millions of people in this country are being coerced into paying money to a political party that they neither support nor vote for. We have heard much from the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) about democracy in all sorts of organisations, including the Conservative party. However, I am sure that there is no organisation as foolish as the Labour party, which allows block votes which include millions of people who do not vote for the party or support it.

I know that the Government will not do anything in this Bill, but I hope that one day we will bite the bullet of contract-in and contract-out and that we will legislate to say that if somebody wishes to pay the political levy, they have to volunteer to do so. At present millions of people are conscripts in the army of the Labour party.

I support the Bill, as do the vast majority of my hon. Friends. It will enhance democracy, freedom and accountability of trade unions and their leadership.

9.48 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) is as tolerant of trade unions as he is of ethnic minorities. His views on this matter are listened to as little as his views on racial issues.

The Government's approach to trade union measures is just like their approach to many other measures which they are pushing through the House. They have discovered that the step-by-step approach, in which one measure follows another in rapid succession, begins to have an effect if they take action, not by dealing with unemployment, but by encouraging developments whereby unions and others find themselves in a weak position to negotiate. We can learn some lessons from the Government's techniques in respect of trade unions and put them into practice when we come to office and reverse those measures to regain sanity in trade union matters.

There is a double tactic in the Bill, as there is in the local government legislation. Theoretically, the Government are pushing for a free and open market and arguing about a correct balance of power between capital and labour. Anyone can see that the balance which the Government have been trying to correct—they see it as an imbalance —has gone to such a ridiculous extreme that trade union organised labour is in such a poor position that it cannot defend the interests of its members. This is a further measure in that direction. Paradoxically, when the Government push such measures in the name of a sacred free market and of a balance of power, they do so by enhancing central control, as with local government legislation.

The role of the MSC and the commissioner is presented by the Government as a sea change. There is the almost obligatory change of name from the Manpower Services Commission to the Training Commission. The Government appear to believe that, by changing its name, they can make people forget their original criticisms of an organisation. It is like using new language to describe Sellafield, but people learn about organisations from the way they operate and changes of name do not alter people's attitudes towards organisations.

This change of name fits into a general pattern of a Tory version of newspeak. We all know about George Orwell and about Ingsoc. The Government have developed their own form of "ingcon" whereby words are changed to soften public images. For example, the poll tax is called a community charge and cuts are renamed efficiency savings. The measure has nothing to do with unemployment. People will be expected to forget their experiences of the MSC because it is to be called a Training Commission.

Let us examine the record of the MSC since the Government came to power in 1979. Since then, the number of unemployed has doubled and the Government have put millions of pounds into the MSC and its various schemes. During that time, the MSC was transformed from a benign, consensual, bipartisan, independent body, which role was assigned to it by the right hon. Member for Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) and the last Labour Government, into the image of the market place.

Education and training are now targeted at the employer as customer rather than at the individual. The Government are supposed to be concerned about the individual. As an employee and citizen, the individual is not considered in the Education Reform Bill or this measure. Under the Tories, the MSC's aim has been to deliver a cowed, cheap work force to the lowest bidder. Its aim has been to reduce the expectations and attitudes of a generation who have been denied real jobs and given poor training. As the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in one of his franker moments, said, training is not so much low-tech as no-tech. We should remember the comments of the chairman of the MSC in 1981:

"the young should be the source of cheap labour."

Yesterday, in a programme entitled "File on Four", the monetarist guru, Patrick Minford, frankly admitted that which politicians cannot admit; the new adult training scheme is about reducing wages. That is the Government's hidden agenda. We know that the NHS is not safe in their hands. We now know that rights, pay and conditions at work are equally unsafe. The Bill worsens an already bad situation and inevitably moves us towards more compulsory labour schemes and workfare.

The Government cures unemployment for 16 to 18-year-olds by coercing them into cheap labour schemes or low-paid jobs. They introduced a new adult training scheme, on which claimants will work for benefit-plus. That is as near to workfare as the Tories can get at the moment. That it is getting closer to workfare was

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

demonstrated in Committee by the Tories' argument during the debate on clause 26. That clause expands the reasons for which unemployment benefit can be withdrawn. It used to be for six weeks. It is now to be increased from its current level of 13 weeks to 26 weeks. Under the Social Security Act 1975, unemployment benefit can be confiscated if a claimant

"has without good cause refused or failed to avail himself of a reasonable opportunity of receiving training approved by the Secretary of State . . . for the purpose of becoming or keeping fit for entry into, or return to, regular employment."

Those words have been withdrawn from this legislation.

In this legislation, those 19 words will make a crucial difference. No longer will training have any relevance or purpose for the individual. An individual can be coerced into cheapjack training schemes or face the prospect of living even further below the poverty line than he does at present. The training measure demonstrates the depth of the legislation, and I urge hon. Members to vote against it.

9.58 pm

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): On Second Reading, as vice-president of the Conservative Trade Unionists organisation, I wholeheartedly welcomed the legislation for the dramatic improvement that it will make in the lot of rank and file trade unionists. Time is short, so I shall not deal with all clauses, but simply say that the organisation again welcomes the Bill. It has already had its first notable success, even before it has become law, by forcing the National Union of Mineworkers to have an election for its presidency. I expect that, when the Bill becomes law, there will be many more notable successes in the years to come. I warmly commend it to the House and wish it well in its further passage.

9.59 pm

Mr. Strang: We are fundamentally opposed to the Bill, which is anti-trade union, centralist and authoritarian. It seeks to concentrate more power over training in the hands of the Secretary of State. The Government are suppressing organisations in our society that seek to dissent, which is why they have abolished the GLC and the metropolitan counties, and why they attack our trade unions.

The Bill was brought out, and the decisions about it were taken, in the hope that the Conservative party could make political capital in the run-up to the general election. All the evidence shows that, day by day, more and more people are coming to recognise that, far from the legislation helping to solve industrial disputes, it will make it harder to do so. They are beginning to understand that the Bill will not enhance democracy in the workplace: it will diminish it. Above all, more and more people are beginning to recognise that it is in their interests that trade unionists should have more power in the workplace——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Employment Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour. — *[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

Employment Bill

Question again proposed, That the Bill be read the Third time.

Mr. Strang: We support a constructive role for trade unionists in our society; that is why we shall vote against the Bill tonight.

10 pm

Mr. Cope: I arranged with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to respond to any new points that were raised by the Opposition on Third Reading, but there were none, so I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 290, Noes 219.

Division No. 178] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bigge-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Rydale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael

Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Timothy
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Miss E. *(Devon W)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Alan Howarth.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, J.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, James
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Samuel
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Douglas
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, James
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Tom
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
McCusker, Harold
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McTaggart, Bob
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric

Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, John
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerald
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A. J.
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Anthony
Wray, James
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Frank Cook.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Inner London Education Authority

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): A large number of hon. Members wish to take part in this short debate. I hope that speeches will be relatively brief.

10.15 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I beg to move,

That the draft Precept Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Inner London Education Authority) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

I shall try to follow your injunction, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by being reasonably brief, because I understand that many hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate. I am sorry that my opposite number, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), has been ill for the past few days. I hope that he can soon return to the House and to Committee upstairs.

Last Thursday, I announced the Government's intention to wind up the Inner London education authority and to secure the transfer of education responsibilities to local councils from 1 April 1990. Today's debate concerns the financing of the authority in the forthcoming year. This order limits the precept which may be made by ILEA for the financial year 1988-89.

The precept maximum set out in the draft order has been arrived at after careful consideration. It is the product of a six-month process during which I have taken full account of the representations put to me by the authority, both in writing and in person. In a moment I shall briefly summarise that process, but before I do so I think it may assist the House if I set the order before hon. Members in its wider context.

ILEA is the largest education authority in the country. Like other inner-city authorities, it caters for communities which face a wide range of social and economic problems. However, the Government's assessment of need to spend takes account of such factors as concentrations of ethnic minorities, one-parent families, poor housing conditions and low family income, yet ILEA's budgeted spending in 1987-88 is a massive 75 per cent. above its grant-related expenditure assessment.

A comparison of ILEA's unit costs with those of other city authorities highlights its inefficiency. According to the latest figures from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, the outer London boroughs are spending on average £1,100 per primary pupil. So are Manchester, Newcastle and Liverpool. Birmingham is spending just £900 per pupil. ILEA is spending £1,700 per pupil. The outer London boroughs are spending £1,700 per secondary pupil. Liverpool, Newcastle and Manchester are spending between £1,750 and £1,950 per pupil. ILEA is spending £2,600 per pupil. No other authority has unit costs which approach those of ILEA.

ILEA secondary schools on average have five more support staff than schools in outer London boroughs. They have nine more than schools in metropolitan areas as a whole. ILEA spends four times as much per pupil on school meals as the outer London boroughs on average and more than three times as much as metropolitan districts. It employs twice as many administrators and inspectors per head of population than the outer London boroughs and more than three times as many as the metropolitan districts. This shows that ILEA is a massive bureaucracy.

ILEA has become a by-word for high spending. It is by no means a by-word for high performance. Survey research suggests that ILEA ranks 86th among LEAs—practically at the bottom — in terms of the straight percentage of school leavers achieving five or more O-levels at grades A to C or CSE grade 1, but is at the top of the league for spending per pupil. How best to allow in the assessment of performance for socio-economic factors is acknowledged to be a thorny issue, but the point is that however one does it ILEA's performance is disappointing. In other words, London's ratepayers are not getting good value for money.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): The Secretary of State has made a number of extremely contentious points. Will he tell us about the exam results? What proportion of ILEA pupils spend all their time from the age of five up to the age at which they take the exams in ILEA schools? Is it not true that London has a large turnover of population and many of those children spend only part of their time in ILEA schools? It is extremely difficult to judge the performance of an authority on exam results when pupils move in and out of the area.

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman is not right about that. He specifically mentioned pre-five schooling. ILEA has some very good nursery schooling of which it is proud. But however one looks at the results—whether one tries to put a gloss on them or doctor them—the plain fact is that the results from ILEA are very disappointing by any standard.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baker: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I shall continue, because I know that several hon. Members wish to speak.

Since taking powers to limit precepts for selected authorities in the Rates Act 1984, the Government have sought to protect the inner London ratepayer from the high rate levels which are a result of ILEA's overspending. But ILEA has made precious little attempt to get control of its cost base. It has eroded its reserves and resorted to measures that impose further burdens on ratepayers in the longer term rather than tackle the root causes of its overspending. The authority spent £55 million more than its expenditure level set by the Government in 1986-87. Its budget for the current year is £80 million more than the implied expenditure level for the year — that is more than 8 per cent. So in the last two years alone, overspend has reached some £135 million.

ILEA is automatically designated for precept limitation in 1988-89 under section 68 of the Local Government Act 1985, as it has been for the past two years. But even if designation had not been automatic, ILEA's continued high spending would have brought it well within the criteria for selective designation. *[Interruption.]* If hon. Members who do not represent ILEA areas wish to speak on ILEA matters, we should welcome it. I am glad that —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is a short debate and there is too much comment from a sedentary position from both sides of the House.

Mr. Baker: It is a short debate. Most of the interruptions seem to be coming from the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). As I was saying, against the background of overspending that I have outlined, the Government are clear that a firm approach is needed to limit the burden that ILEA is placing on London householders and businesses alike.

Members should note that I have been prepared to listen and respond to the representations that ILEA has made to me. I have been prepared to—[HON. MEMBERS: "You have not."] I say to hon. Members who say that I have not listened that I have listened. I have listened carefully to representations. I increased the expenditure level——

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): What about parents?

Mr. Baker: It is a pity that Opposition Members follow in this House the customs that they learnt in some of the town halls of London. I would say only that I have listened. I have increased the expenditure level by £15 million, from £955 million to £970 million. Since October——

Mr. Corbyn: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baker: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I think I should pursue my speech. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."]

Mr. Baker: I shall be delighted to give way — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I realise that the House feels strongly about this matter. However, it is a short debate, and it will be very much better if we have short speeches without interruptions.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baker: I shall be delighted to give way.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Secretary of State tell the House how many parents of ILEA children he consulted before introducing this monstrous order and why he feels that he has the power to impose an undemocratic diktat on the children and parents of all inner London schools?

Mr. Baker: The diktat was enshrined in statute in 1985 in the Act that abolished the Greater London council, and the rate precept and expenditure level principles have operated for the past four years.

Mr. Bernie Grant: How many parents?

Mr. Baker: I can tell the hon. Gentleman, who keeps shouting from a sedentary position, that I have consulted ILEA representatives and the chairman of ILEA as I am obliged to do. I have listened to their representations and have met them on several occasions. They put their views to me and I listened most carefully. Having listened to those representations, I decided to increase the expenditure level by about £15 million.

In December, I announced a redetermined expenditure level of £970 million with a requirement that the additional £15 million should be used only in connection with the one-off costs to which ILEA had drawn my attention. It said that it would put forward proposals, and I acknowledged the point made by the authority that in order to secure substantial savings from reductions in staffing levels it would need to incur one-off redundancy costs. It asked, would I please help with them? I increased the expenditure level by £15 million because, being a reasonable person, I listened to reason and responded.

At the same time I proposed a precept maximum of 80·56p to enable the authority to raise the £970 million. In so doing I assumed that the authority would end the current year with revenue balances of about £30 million. I made no allowances for the drawing down of balances to relieve the precept.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras) *rose*——

Mr. Baker: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would allow me to continue.

In January the authority rejected the proposed precept maximum. It sought to raise an additional £73·5 million. That is £100 million less than its original demand. It made the demand and said that unless I agreed to the higher figure education in London would be ruined. Next time round the authority's demand had been reduced by £100 million, and that in itself is interesting. Nevertheless, as a result of its reduced demand, it required a precept increase that was 6p higher than my proposal.

I again considered carefully all that the authority had to say, including arguments about upward pressures on spending and the difficulty of securing savings in the first year of a programme of reductions. I decided to add to the precept maximum that I had originally proposed to allow the authority to raise another £15 million, or £985 million in total. The revised precept maximum is 81·8p, and that is 2p or 2·5 per cent. higher than the current year's precept.

Mr. Dobson *rose*——

Mr. Baker: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue.

Then I laid before the House a draft order which would, if approved, enable me to prescribe a precept maximum of 81·8p. I did so because I am concerned to have the final outcome fixed by 15 February, the date set out in the Rates Act 1984 to avoid the uncertainty associated with the use of interim procedures, and so that there is no cause for ILEA to delay in implementing the measures necessary to live within the precept income that the maximum would raise. I made it clear that I was prepared to withdraw the order if agreement on the precept could be reached. However, the authority has rejected my revised figure.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey) *rose*——

Mr. Baker: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way.

As a result of the moves that I have made, the precept maximum in the draft order will allow the authority to raise £30 million more than the original expenditure level and £42 million more than the current year's expenditure level. The authority has said that this precept maximum will damage the education service in inner London. I do not accept that. In absolute terms, the redetermined expenditure level is over 50 per cent. above ILEA's GREA for 1988-89. The authority should be more than able to provide an adequate education service within that sum.

I recognise that the scale of reductions implied by the precept maximum—involving a cash cut of £40 million compared with the authority's budget for 1987-88—represents a tough challenge.

Mr. Dobson *rose*——

Mr. Baker: I shall give way in a moment.

The effect on the service will depend on how the authority responds to that challenge, on whether it acts

quickly to implement a savings package and manages that package effectively. I am satisfied that the precept maximum is reasonable and achievable, given responsible action by the authority.

Mr. Dobson: In view of the Secretary of State's announcement of the intended abolition of ILEA, does he think that ILEA will incur any expenditure in the next financial year because of the break-up of the authority? If so, what allowance has he made?

Mr. Baker: I do not think that in the next financial year ILEA will incur any expense in its break-up. I shall invite ILEA and the different London boroughs, whether Conservative, Labour or Liberal-controlled, to come and speak to my Department. I have set up a unit to do that so that there can be a proper, controlled transfer of education responsibilities. Costs will be incurred in the second year and the year of transfer.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Secretary of State said that he consulted colleagues and officers. Can he tell the House why his colleagues on ILEA did not endorse yesterday the precept rate that he brings to the House today?

Mr. Baker: I have spoken to virtually all groups, although not to the Liberal group. Conservatives came to make representations to me. *[Interruption.]* They must make up their own minds. They made their view clear to me when I saw them that substantial savings could be made in ILEA without any reduction in the service in inner London. They all strongly supported my statement last week to abolish the ILEA within two years.

I have given thought to the effect of the precept on ratepayers in inner London. The maximum is 2·5 per cent. higher than the current year's precept, and it will add about 1 per cent. to the average rate bill. The authority's original estimate of its needs would have added 18 per cent. to the current precept and nearly 8 per cent. to rate bills. That would have meant £75 more in rates for the owner of a three-bedroomed, semi-detached house in Camden and £300 more for the average shop. Its subsequent proposal for the precept would have added nearly 9 per cent. to the precept and an extra 4 per cent. to rate bills. It would not be right to impose those increases on ratepayers who are already overburdened as a result of ILEA's past overspending.

For those reasons, the draft order has been laid before the House and I ask the House to approve it. It is now up to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) to make the case for ILEA and increased spending. That case rests on the need for extravagance, the importance of waste and the virtue of incompetence. I leave it to him.

10.32 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): First, I apologise on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) who is ill; he would have liked to be here to make this case.

Last Thursday the Secretary of State came to the House as the messenger from the knackers' men to announce the slaughter of ILEA. He has returned tonight to announce that not content with slaughter, he wants to torture it. Will he come next week to inflict some further punishment to please his masters in the Tory party who seem to have a paranoid hatred of ILEA? It would be worrying enough if it was a hatred of a democratically elected body, but it is worse, because it is an attack on the education of 280,000 London children. His proposals to abolish ILEA and to penalise it financially this year will have a devastating effect on the education of those children. When he claims, as he did in the general election, that the Conservative party is anxious to raise standards, he should think hard about how he will lower standards of education in ILEA over the next two years.

I shall be brief because many of my hon. Friends feel angry and wish to speak. Can the Government guarantee that all those ILEA schoolchildren will not suffer over the next two years as a result of these cuts? What did the Secretary of State's professional advisers tell him about the practicality of imposing the cuts, not over 12 months but over six months? We must always remember that a school's financial year starts part way through the year, and commitments cannot be varied until the following September. The Secretary of State is imposing the cuts on schools from September. The professional advice from Mr. Rigg, the director of finance, and Mr. Stubbs of ILEA is that it will be impossible to do it.

The least that the Secretary of State could have done would be to say that he had received professional advice which suggested that the cuts were possible. But he has insisted that his officials keep quiet, because they cannot come up with advice on how to impose the cuts in the time scale envisaged.

About 75 per cent. of ILEA's expenditure is on staffing, and it will be extremely difficult to impose such cuts without harming the curriculum for pupils in ILEA schools.

The Secretary of State claimed that ILEA was profligate. He criticised its school meals expenditure, but he should remember that almost 50 per cent. of ILEA pupils take free meals. That shows the deprivation in the ILEA area. The Secretary of State should be proud of the fact that the authority wants to ensure that children get enough to eat and can benefit from their education. He should remember that the free school meals service was introduced because children could not benefit from their education. It looks as though he wants to return to the days when children could not learn properly because they were not properly fed.

The Secretary of State mentioned the expenditure on secondary school places. But through the assisted places scheme he is happy to pay sums that are far in excess of the money that ILEA spends on places such as those at Westminster school. If it is good enough to spend money on the assisted places scheme, why is it not good enough to spend money on all secondary pupils in ILEA? Why should they be penalised so that the Government can confer a privilege on the small group of children who obtain assisted places?

Since 1981, ILEA's expenditure has increased by about 45 per cent. The expenditure of the outer boroughs has increased by about 40 per cent., so ILEA has not done well compared with them. But the shire counties' expenditure has increased by 46 per cent. Let us consider the model of someone who should have shown financial propriety—the Secretary of State and his Department. During the same period, the Department's expenditure increased by 51 per cent. If it is so bad that ILEA's expenditure has increased by 45 per cent., is it not appalling that the Department's has increased by 51 per cent.? No doubt the right hon. Gentleman can justify his expenditure. I suggest that ILEA can justify its expenditure.

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

The Secretary of State has had clear warnings from his professional advisers that if the cuts are imposed standards will fall. The Minister of State who will reply to the debate must prove to the House that standards in ILEA will not fall. Instead of continually running down ILEA, the Secretary of State should have recognised that ILEA has good nursery education and that it was involved in curriculum innovation long before the Government thought that it was fashionable. The Hargreaves report and the Thomas report not only discuss curriculum innovation, but demonstrate that many ILEA schools have been doing that for many years.

The Secretary of State should recognise ILEA's record on access by mature students to higher education. The White Paper on higher education pays lip service to the importance of attracting back mature students, but the Government do little about it. ILEA has a record second to none in attracting back mature students from working-class and ethnic minority backgrounds, and the Secretary of State should have paid tribute to it. It has an extremely good record on special education. The right hon. Gentleman has given us no evidence that the cuts are practical.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said that the cuts were announced two weeks ago. Since then, the Government have completely reversed their policy on ILEA and decided to abolish it. It will be almost impossible to impose the cuts. Even if there was a smooth running organisation to carry out the cuts, there would be great difficulties and hardship. However, the Secretary of State will not have that smooth organisation. He has thrown the organisation into complete turmoil. As ILEA is broken up, almost all the middle ranking officers in the authority will be considering their futures. They will not be sure that they will get jobs with the new borough authorities and they will be tempted to move out of ILEA. There will be great uncertainty. The Secretary of State is imposing two problems on ILEA—the problem of the abolition of the authority and the massive cuts in the first period.

Why on earth did the Secretary of State not take the order back to the Department and say that the Government have created a completely new situation with the proposal to abolish ILEA and that they would have to revise the order? That would have been the only honest thing for the Government to do. However, he is ploughing on with his paranoid hatred of the authority.

We have still not discovered what the Conservatives have against ILEA except that, on the whole, ILEA has been a beacon for good education standards — *[Interruption.]* It is all very well Conservative Members laughing, but if they visited the schools, they would find high-quality education in the vast majority. Perhaps ILEA should have proceeded with some of its reorganisation of the secondary schools to take account of falling rolls, but on many occasions it was the Government who delayed those logical reorganisations. The Government interfered when ILEA tried to go ahead with proposals for tertiary education. If there is any blame for ILEA being slow to take account of falling rolls, the Secretary of State and his predecessors must share some of the blame.

I ask my hon. Friends to express their anger at the Government's behaviour towards ILEA and to vote against the order.

10.41 pm

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams (Kensington): I think that Opposition Members who are very wound up about this order tonight and about the Government's decision to end the inner London education authority rather imagine that something very sudden has developed and that this is the result of a new initiative which is quite unfounded and rather too hasty.

I would like to remind the House of the debate and the questions and answers that took place as long ago as 1981 when the Secretary of State for Education and Science at that time — Mr. Mark Carlisle as he was — after an extremely careful review, decided that the Inner London education authority should be permitted to continue. It was a very difficult balance of argument at that time. But I would like to remind the House of one of the things that he said in his statement on 4 February 1981:

"It is up to ILEA to put its house in order. It must recognise that the right to precept entails the obligation to spend responsibly. If ILEA systematically abuses the rating system by unchecked extravagance, additional financial controls will be needed. The Government are now considering what further measures they would take to meet that situation."

There could not have been a more sincere or clear warning from my then right hon. and learned Friend. I think that in retrospect he was being too trusting and too optimistic as things have turned out.

I spoke in the questions after the statement and among the things that I said was:

"will he proceed at once to place an upper limit on ILEA's expenditure in the coming year and not merely to rest on threats that if it overspends the Government may reconsider their position at some future date?" — [*Official Report*, 4 February 1981; Vol. 998, c. 297-300.]

I cannot say that I received from my right hon. and learned Friend a very satisfactory reply. So a few weeks later I and a number of other hon. Friends representing areas within the Inner London education authority brought in a Bill — the Inner London Education Authority (Expenditure Control) Bill — on 13 April 1981. It was signed by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), my hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott), my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Shelton), Martin Stevens, the former Member for Fulham, my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler) and myself. The Bill's long title said:

"The Bill provides that the expenditure limit of the Authority shall be calculated by reference to the average cost of education per child in the remainder of England and Wales plus an element for London weighting to be determined by the Secretary of State."

I want to take the opportunity of the debate to pay tribute to many of the people in ILEA who are extremely dedicated, high quality educationists who do their utmost for the children. But we must recognise that ILEA is an enormously expensive authority for the results that it is achieving. I believe that is because its whole structure was misconceived from the start. It was always too large and unmanageable, bound to become a heavily bureaucratic organisation and bound to be an oppressive weight on the ratepayers.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) asked what the Conservatives have got against ILEA. What we have against ILEA is the hundreds and hundreds of pounds per ratepayer that have to be paid

because of the precept, when we believe that the results we are getting for our money are not sufficient to justify the expease. This is why there is such an outcry for reform.

There is another side to the question. It is not simply a question of providing lavish and wonderful education for London. We have to think of where the money is coming from. In the case of my borough it is coming often from people who can ill afford the rates that they have to pay and who are building up a bitter resentment against ILEA because they feel that their money is being taken from them and wasted. This is not a situation that my right hon. Friend can allow to continue.

I entirely support my right hon. Friend's move to place an upper limit on ILEA's expenditure. I do not think that ILEA will be handicapped if it has these millions to spend. I think that my right hon. Friend has got the balance right. On behalf of my ratepayers, I hope that the order will be well received and will be passed by a substantial majority.

10.46 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): I have been telling the Secretary of State in Committee that he is a very special person. Indeed, he seems to me to come into that category which *The Times* was referring to in an editorial in 1967 when it said:

"High politics are unsuitable for the ordinary man. Great Prime Ministers Winston Churchill and William Pitt were sociable drinkers; Lloyd George and Palmerston could not be trusted with women; Chatham, perhaps the greatest of all, was actually mad."

Having heard the Secretary of State talk about the precept tonight, and having listened to his proposals on the abolition of ILEA, I confidently predict that the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) will be even madder than Chatham.

To describe the Secretary of State's attitude towards ILEA as vindictive would be to utter a pathetic euphemism and to fail to invest in the richness of the English language which would allow us to pour hatred, scorn, venom, ridicule, derision and loathing on his many absurdities.

The first part of the right hon. Gentleman's plan is to create financial and administrative chaos, and in the process to ignore the advice of the two people who have statutory responsibilities in this sphere, that of the director of finance, whose responsibility comes under section 73 of the Rates Act 1984, and that of Mr. William Stubbs, the education officer, whose responsibility comes under the Education Act 1944. I am slightly surprised that the Secretary of State is prepared to ignore the advice of Mr. Stubbs since he is about to give him a prestigious post as head of the funding council for the polytechnics. If he thinks that Mr. Stubbs is such a brilliant man, perhaps the Secretary of State can explain why, when Mr. Stubbs presents such an honest view of the ILEA budget, he utterly ignores that view.

The Secretary of State's problem is that he moves from false premises to false conclusions by a logic that is not merely faulty but positively mystifying. Therefore, I am led to believe that the argument is not about logic but that we are talking about a brute political batte. Unfortunately, the firepower is not evenly distributed. Indeed, it reminds me of the battle which took place between the Rawalpindi and the Scharnhorst in November 1939. I know about that battle because my father died aboard the Rawalpindi. The Rawalpindi was a little merchant ship with a bit of tinplate and peashooters which masqueraded as guns. The Scharnhorst was the pride of the German fleet, a massive battleship which blew this little boat out of the water. I liken the Secretary of State to the captain of the Scharnhorst and Neil Fletcher, the leader of the ILEA, to Ludovic Kennedy's father, who was the captain of the Rawalpindi.

The force that the Secretary of State has is the political force of an arrogant majority in the House. It is the votes in the Lobby, the right of all Secretaries of State not to answer awkward questions in the House; it is the ability, if necessary, to produce guillotines in the House to get their measures through. Poor Neil Fletcher has one thing only. The only thing he has on his side is the moral authority that ILEA exercises and which is backed up by parents, children and teachers. Unfortunately, in this world, moral authority does not carry one very far and I suspect that Neil Fletcher will end up like Ludovic Kennedy's father—dead.

I have seen the papers that ILEA has presented to the Secretary of State and, in my view, it has argued a powerful case. However, the Secretary of State's response illustrates the substantial disadvantages in according to the Secretary of State centralised powers over local matters and powers that he is exercising without responsibility. The power to fix the precept rests with the Secretary of State but the responsibility rests with the two chief officers in ILEA. Effectively, the Secretary of State is telling David Riggs and William Stubbs that he is going to usurp and arrogate to himself executive powers that ILEA's officers should hold.

I have spoken to the officers at ILEA and they said that they have been talking not to the Secretary of State but to civil servants at the Department of Education and Science. When those civil servants have been pressed by ILEA's officers to say where the extra cuts can come from, they said, "The Secretary of State has looked at this"—I use their words—"in the round." Of course, the phrase "in the round" is a euphemism for the fact that the Secretary of State does not know what the hell is going on in ILEA.

The Secretary of State seems to think that one can close down schools rather as one can close down a factory at British Leyland or a British Coal pit. I do not pretend that it is easy to close down a British Leyland factory or a British Coal pit. However, if one starts to close down schools, which is inherent in the proposed huge cutback, the Secretary of State has to ask himself about the processes involved in dealing with 1,000 schools and colleges. How is ILEA supposed to offer a core curriculum to 1,000 separate institutions and then start to close some of them down without extraordinary rearrangements? First, there has to be lengthy negotiation with the staff of those institutions; by statute, there have to be extraordinary negotiations with the Department of Education and Science, there has to be a reorganisation of the remaining schools, one has to rejig the pupil-teacher relationship and reorganise the core curriculum. The Secretary of State has ignored every practical problem. Therefore, ILEA wins the argument and tonight the Secretary of State wins the votes.

However, things will get worse. I shall end on this point because many people want to speak. Phase two of the awful mechanism that the Secretary of State is putting into effect comes next Wednesday when we shall witness one of the constitutional outrages of the post-war years.—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) can tell me when this last happened.

[Mr. Brian Sedgemore]

We are to have a Second Reading debate next Wednesday and we do not have available any of the new clauses that will be debated. There will be a debate on new clauses that will be produced on a subsequent day, probably Friday week, and they cannot be amended. My question to the hon. Member for Harrow, West is, when did the House last have a Second Reading debate on a major political issue without having any clauses before it and when the Bill could not be amended? I am not the one who is caught praying in aid the House of Lords, but if the House of Lords wishes to consider a constitutional issue, it is that we shall not be able to debate the Bill next Wednesday, and we shall not be able to amend clauses. That is an outrage and something of which a basically liberal, decent Secretary of State should be thoroughly ashamed.

11 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): The hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) is a little confusing. One moment, he predicts that we shall have a Chatham on the Government Front Bench, and the next minute he tries to close pits. We have enjoyed and been edified by the hon. Gentleman's membership of our Standing Committee. We have grown used to his predictions for the future of hon. Members and, indeed, members of ILEA and so on. I am amazed that the hon. Gentleman, who had such a distinguished career at the Bar and in the Civil Service, and had wealth and influence, should while away his evening years on Opposition Benches. We welcome him and enjoy his contributions. [HON. MEMBERS: "Get on with it."] I should like to extend the courtesy to other Opposition Members.

It is said that the best form of defence is attack. I do not suggest that the Opposition's defence is attack. There is no question of the Government attacking inner London education. The Government and Parliament are defending ratepayers and, ultimately, the education of children and students in inner London. That is what the measure is about. The Labour party knows that it cannot defend the indefensible—ILEA's expensive bureaucracy—so it tries to attack the modest restriction on overspending by that education authority.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The hon. Gentleman referred to the modest measure. Does he agree that it represents an 8 per cent. cut in ILEA's expenditure for next year? Will he address the logistical problem that the Secretary of State did not mention, which is that roughly five twelfths of the cut will apply to the school year that will finish in August? Therefore, the effective cut will be around 14 to 15 per cent. for the next school year. Does that not pose a threat to children and ratepayers, for whom he expressed concern?

Mr. Bowis: I entirely accept that there is a cut. It will come as a great relief to the ratepayers of inner London, who would otherwise have had to pick up the tab. I agree also with the hon. Gentleman's implied criticism of ILEA for, over the years, getting itself into this position, having had the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir B. Rhys Williams). The only explanation for overspending that the Opposition have given is that there is a degree of deprivation in inner London. If there is deprivation, and if it justifies ILEA's double spending on education, why, why are ILEA's results so poor?

I represent a constituency in division 10 of ILEA. That division covers the Wandsworth borough. By all the criteria of deprivation, Wandsworth is not as badly off as its neighbouring boroughs. One would expect the results in the boroughs to be better. There is less deprivation than is to be found in other boroughs, but unfortunately the results are worse than in many other areas. That does not add up, even in ILEA's terms.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Will the hon. Gentleman apply precisely the same argument to the expenditure of the Metropolitan police? Even if we remove the national functions of the force from our consideration, it still costs twice as much per head of population as any other force in the country. Furthermore, it has a worse success record than other forces. "Why, why", to quote the hon. Gentleman, does that occur?

Mr. Bowis: A national force with diplomatic and other special responsibilities cannot be compared with other forces. The hon. Gentleman should not knock the Metropolitan police, because in the area which I represent its result are getting better year by year. Let us defend the police as well as the education service.

In inner London there is twice the spending on education that is to be found in the rest of the country. The number of young people in inner London leaving school with five O-levels or more, or CSEs grade 1, has reached the dizzy height of 10 per cent. Only 10 per cent. reach that standard or level before they are sent out into the job market, and the national average is 20 per cent.

Let us take the other side of the coin. In inner London, 20 per cent. of school leavers have no qualifications, which is twice the national average. At the same time, twice the national funding goes into ILEA schools. It is unfortunate that the results of school leavers within the area are only half as good as the national average.

Money alone is not the criterion by which we should judge ILEA. The key factor is the way in which money is spent. Funds must be redirected with a view to maximising the help that is given to ILEA schoolchildren. That will be done only if we enable the boroughs to spend on behalf of the children in their own areas. Money must be targeted to where it can be used most effectively.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: In which and how many of the schools in the hon. Gentleman's constituency does he foresee staff being lost?

Mr. Bowis: We are discussing the results of ILEA, not its administration. In the division which I represent there is only one secondary school that achieves results that are above par for ILEA, and that is a voluntary-aided Catholic school.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bowis: I shall continue because I know that many hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate.

There are many ways in which money that is directed to ILEA is misspent or badly spent. If we are to get the right education in inner London, we must get the funding and the ethos right. I read stories in the press about schoolboys being encouraged to dress in girls' clothes as part of a scheme to eradicate sexism. I read that boys aged up to seven years dress in skirts and petticoats and carry handbags. It seems that they are taught embroidery and play with dolls while girls play with engineering sets and toy cars as part of ILEA's scheme to combat sexism and

stereotyping. This is happening — [HON. MEMBERS: "What is wrong with it?"] Presumably money is being paid to people to go to the ILEA schools to tell the staff to follow this course. That is an example of the way in which moneys are being wasted and misdirected. I accept that that may have been done a year or two ago.

Mr. Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman obviously did not hear the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). Will he now tell us which schools, and how many teachers in his constituency, he proposes to axe, so that they can know what he is voting for tonight?

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman did not listen to the answer I gave before. I spoke of raising standards by directing funds into the schools and away from bureaucracy. That does not necessarily mean teachers. It means getting rid of the bureaucratic nonsense that I have been talking about.

As another example, I shall quote from a letter I received this week from the department of environmental design at the North London polytechnic, in the school of architecture, Holloway road:

"I confirm that the above named student is at present engaged in the preparation of a major design project for the final year of the diploma in architecture (Hons.) course. Therefore any appropriate assistance you will be willing to render to this student will be very greatly appreciated by the school of architecture"—

and so on. The letter from the student reads:

"I am a student in my final year at the polytechnic of North London, studying for a postgraduate diploma in architecture. For my final comprehensive design, I have chosen to design a brothel. Although it is a hypothetical exercise the aim is to make our projects as realistic as possible in preparation for the real world after college. I therefore need to collect as much information as I can on my subject in order to form a thesis to support my scheme."

That is ILEA—[HON. MEMBERS: "Tell us another."] No doubt there are many others.

Not only does ILEA vastly overspend in the wrong ways, its children and schools—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House wants to hear how this is going to develop.

Mr. Bowis: The answer is clear. In the long run—I hope it will not be too long—we must remove our children and students from ILEA's care. In the meantime, we must certainly pass this modest measure to ensure that costs to inner London are reduced, and to direct spending on education to the chalk face—to the children and students—because that is where it belongs.

11.8 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) complained about education to avoid stereotypes; he might have benefited from that himself.

We should not approach this subject by giving silly examples, such as those that the hon. Gentleman produced. Even if the letter he read out was serious, which is highly unlikely, the hon. Gentleman should have addressed the real issue. ILEA is an education authority in inner London, with the most deprived concentration of population in the country. It is the largest education authority in Europe, and everyone in it accepts that improvements can be made. No one is uncritical of it. But what will be the effect of this financial order?

Although there is certainly room for improvement in ILEA, the Secretary of State cannot say that it is the worst authority in the country. Some Tory education authorities have academic standards below those of ILEA. The Secretary of State says ILEA costs a great deal. As the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) told him, the Metropolitan police, with the lowest clear-up rate in London, costs relatively more. Inner London's health services, with the longest waiting lists, cost more. They are run by political appointees of the Government, not of the Opposition. Personal social services in inner London cost much more than those of any other local authority.

The authority, with a budget of £1,000 million, is being asked to lop off about £100 million. With no argument to back up his case, the Secretary of State is saying that that can be easily accepted. Even the right hon. Gentleman's party colleagues yesterday, in the building across the river, did not vote for his proposal. They abstained when it came to it because the people at the chalk face, as the hon. Member for Battersea described them, Tories elected to run education in London, elected directly by the people of London—the parents and ratepayers—know that ILEA cannot cope with that cut and properly survive.

The reality is that £120 million must be lost. Seventy per cent. of costs are staff and 14 per cent. are fixed. ILEA is already committed to sums for this school year. Many savings could not begin until next year. Cuts take time to work through. It is an impossible requirement. Last year the Secretary of State said that a 7 per cent. cut would be a tough target to meet, yet this year, on top of that, there is this further cut.

ILEA has not said that it will not talk or is not willing to make savings. It has said that it accepts that the Conservatives, with their 41 per cent., won a general election, even though in inner London they won hardly any seats. It has said that it accepts that it must reduce its budget. *[Interruption.]* The Conservatives may have won one seat, but the majority of ILEA members are not Tories. As hon. Members well know, the vast majority belong to the Opposition. The electors of inner London, who voted specifically for this education authority, by an overwhelming majority gave that trust to members of a party other than the Secretary of State's.

The reality is that there will be cuts not just in administrators but in people at the chalk face. That is why the hon. Member for Battersea should begin facing up to where the cuts will fall. They will fall on the children of the families whom he represents. They will fall on the students who hope to continue their education after 16. They will fall on people who have trained to be teachers and will no longer to be able to be teachers in the part of Britain that most needs qualified and competent teachers. They will fall on people who at the moment benefit from what is recognised as one of the best special education local authorities, not just in Britain but in the western world. The cuts will fall on the mentally and physically handicapped, who will not be able to have the resources they need and on the nursery schools for single-parent families that will not be opened. The hon. Member for Battersea deceives himself if he thinks that the people of inner London do not value education more than that.

Worse than that is the fact that the Secretary of State proposes that education should go to the boroughs—the same boroughs that he, when he was Secretary of State for the Environment, regularly condemned. He will be

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

handing on to them a rundown education service, starved of funds, with a lack of repair, staff and commitment. He knows what happened when the GLC was abolished. Long before it went, senior officers left. Long before it went, many people jumped ship for the sake of their careers. At the end, the GLC no longer had key officers.

As has been made clear, the rate has been set by the Government with no suggestion from the Secretary of State of where the cuts should be made. He has suggested no budget but has simply said that ILEA must accept this cut.

The esimates do not even agree with the estimates from officials of ILEA of what is required and committed. There has been no proper consultation, in spite of what the Secretary of State would say.

Matters are even worse in London — for three reasons. First, in London three quarters of the money comes from the business rate, none of it from the taxpayer. The ratepayers have paid for the lot.

The domestic rate in London for ILEA has gone up only 78p per week in the past seven years. That is not a massive increase charged to the ratepayers. That is not vast additional expenditure. I wonder whether the ratepayers in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) or in my constituency would consider that that was too much to pay for the education service in inner London.

In ILEA there has been a 45·1 per cent. increase in spending between 1981-82 and 1987-88. In the whole of England, including ILEA, spending has increased by 45·3 per cent. Spending in ILEA has increased less than the average for the whole country, in spite of the need and the deprivation and in spite of the fact that some primary schools in my constituency have 28 different mother tongues. Comparatively, ILEA spends less than other services.

ILEA has been funded by the ratepayers. The Secretary of State is determined not to listen to the facts. That is why he received no support in county hall yesterday. Perhaps the red sky on the south bank, sadly because of the fire at St. Thomas's hospital, symbolises Baker's delight at the demise of education in London.

The Secretary of State once was committed to education. Now he is committed to undermining it for the people who most need it. It is disgraceful. The order will be resisted even if we cannot win the vote.

11.16 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I wish to do something that has been almost unprecedented in the Chamber recently and base my comments on some of the remarks made by Opposition Members. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) stressed that ILEA is a democratically elected authority. The hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) considered that Mr. Neil Fletcher has a one-man moral majority—I believe that the hon. Gentleman said that he had moral force. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) stressed that the funding of ILEA and its abolition were inseparable. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) asked whether there would be any extra expenditure by ILEA in the next year—*[Interruption.]* I am trying to help hon. Members by summarising their cases.

I shall draw together those points. We must remember that the Government, Conservative Members and Opposition Members share one fundamental problem about London — parental apathy. That is linked with what has been said by Opposition Members. The hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch spoke about the moral force of Mr. Neil Fletcher. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the turnout in those direct elections was 44·04 per cent. of the population. In the hon. Gentleman's own constituency the turnout was 33·89 per cent. What sort of representation, moral force and democracy can be based on a turnout which, in my opinion, is not even a quorum of the electorate? What does that mean? It means that coupled with the degeneration of the Labour party —some obvious examples of that are present—ILEA is run by a doubly unrepresentative clique of people. That is not the fault of the Labour party——

Mr. Dobson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Walden: No, I shall finish my point. It is the fault of parental apathy. Over the next few years, ILEA, because it is an unscrupulous organisation, will need extra money to spend on campaigning to perpetuate itself in the face of the Government's decision to abolish it. The Government must use every legitimate means at their disposal to communicate directly with parents in inner London and explain to them not the points that will be better explained by *The Sun* and other newspapers, or spending details, but the facts about education standards.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should let parents know about the relative underachievement of ILEA compared with the rest of the country. He should also let them know how disgruntled London employers are about school leavers who are not fit to hold down jobs. He should also let London parents know, in simple, understandable language, that comparisons can be made between the underachievement of ILEA, after account has been taken of all the social problems with which it has to deal, and comparable European countries that provide a better education service.

Unless the Government show imagination during the wind-up period, the people of London will not agree with the Government's decision. They have been conditioned to accept low education standards. Unless the Government do their best to win the propaganda war, they will have a difficult political dispute on their hands. The Opposition will do their best to draw attention away from the central point of low education standards. That has already happened. Mr. Neil Fletcher is no longer speaking as he did two months ago. He no longer talks about the inadequacies of ILEA schools; he talks about how wonderful they are. I advise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science to recognise that that will be the key to the winding up of ILEA.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): The hon. Gentleman lectured us a few moments ago about the need to put the Government's case to London parents. There is to be a survey of the opinion of those parents. If their opinion is massively in favour of the retention of ILEA, would the hon. Gentleman recommend the Government to scrap this measure, or would he advise them to override the opinion of London parents?

Mr. Walden: I have already answered the hon. Gentleman's question. I made it clear that the

Government will have a political problem on their hands in trying to convince some London parents. There is educational apathy in London, which is reflected in the figures that I have given. I could give more. This is not necessarily a party political point. An analysis of the turnout in the different boroughs shows that the opinion of London parents is not related directly to prosperity. It is a social problem that is caused by educational apathy. If the hon. Gentleman will listen for a moment, he will be completely convinced by what I have to say.

I am suggesting that the Government ought to try to overcome that apathy. There are people who live in this capital city who are culturally accustomed to low expectations and whose attitude has been hardened by ILEA's policies. I thought that the hon. Gentleman would have understood, from what I said earlier, that that was my point.

11.24 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I suppose that I should declare an interest, in that I went to a London county council school, my children went to an ILEA comprehensive school, my wife works for an ILEA school and I have been the governor of several ILEA schools. I wish that Conservative Members, especially Ministers, would declare their interests in these matters. If they were to declare the kind of schools which they attended and to which most want to send their children, we would understand the gulf between the thinking of the people who impose this order on ILEA and that of those who have to suffer its effects.

The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) was asked about the design of a brothel. I do not know why the letter was written in those terms, but if such a letter were addressed to the Secretary of State, it would invite his opinion on the design of a slaughterhouse. He should hang his head in shame. He comes to the House with a view to decimating ILEA, which is what he is doing in the order by taking away one tenth of its resources, and next week he will propose to the House ILEA's destruction.

The Secretary of State came to the House with no enthusiasm for ways in which ILEA could be reorganised to accept the 10 per cent. cut, but with a vicious enthusiasm for the cut without any constructive suggestions on the way in which it should be imposed. There will be a cut across the board. We have heard how difficult it is to impose a 10 per cent. cut in expenditure in the middle of the school year. It will mean a cut of 4,400 in the number of teachers. It will mean the closing of 100 schools and the cutting of 4,800 support staff or, put another way, the abolition of every second nursery school place in inner London. That is the nature of what the Secretary of State asks us to approve.

The Secretary of State is not asking ILEA to slim down. He is asking it to amputate a limb, because he is asking for cuts that are so sudden and deep in their surgery that they are bound to cause irreparable harm to ILEA through shedding staff, depleting the number of teachers and causing redundancies. The only thing in which the right hon. Gentleman took pride was the £15 million allocated not for employing staff but for sacking them.

The order represents an act of class warfare. It is an act of class warfare in the punning sense of the word, in that it attacks the child in the class. It is also an attack by the privileged, the affluent and those who, on the whole, have no experience in ILEA against those who have to struggle against the drudgery of poor, unskilled jobs and the even worse drudgery of unemployment. The Secretary of State is asking my constituency in the borough of Lambeth not only for cuts in ILEA but for cuts by the local authority.

What have the Government done to us? They have given us 25 per cent. male unemployment—I use the expression "male unemployment" because it is an effective measure of unemployment across the board—and taken away tax revenue by increasing rates, VAT and insurance contributions. The Government have taken away our jobs, homes and housing benefits. Act after Act of this Government has increased the deprivation and despondency in and instability of the inner city area that I represent.

Many children in the outer London boroughs who are leaving school face a 4 or 5 per cent. possibility of unemployment. In inner city areas such as mine, because of the background and tradition of housing, deprivation and poverty, the risk of unemployment for youngsters is probably sometimes as high as 50 per cent. There is only one way to climb the ladder and escape from the cage of the inner city—usually through the chance of education. Conservative Members, from the Secretary of State downwards, try to convince us that the way to improve the chances for those children to escape is to cut resources, not increase them.

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fraser: No, I am not giving way. This is a bitter attack——

Mr. Bowden: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fraser: If the hon. Gentleman can defend Dulwich, I shall defend Brixton. This is a bitter attack by the privileged on the deprived, which we shall vote down tonight.

Mr. Bowden *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It seems clear that the hon. Gentleman is not giving way.

Mr. Bowden: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) giving way?

Mr. Fraser: I have finished, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has finished. Mr. Gerald Bowden.

11.31 pm

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): Opposition Members should recognise that for the past 10 years the Conservative group on ILEA has presented an alternative budget, costed by the finance staff of ILEA, which showed a rational reduction in expenditure. If that had been accepted, ILEA would not now have to face these rather harmful cuts. The suggestions would have reduced the support staff and the extravagant and cost-inefficient services that back up ILEA—but not to the benefit of children—and would not have reduced the efficient delivery of an education service. Whenever a Socialist authority is faced with the need to make a cut it looks at the broom and cuts the bristles—the working edge—when it could take two inches off the handle.

11.32 pm

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): The Inner London education authority has been accused of being a high-spending authority. As hon. Members have already pointed out, London is a special case. The Metropolitan police spends double the amount that other police authorities spend to less effect. The social services too spend more. But I want to ask Conservative Members how much per child they pay for their children's education in private schools. The most grubby little private school with unqualified teachers is charging £2,000 per head, and public schools charge double that. The other day I telephoned a tutorial college to which people from all over the country—and, indeed, from other countries—send their children for intensive coaching if they fail their O and A-levels. That costs £8,000 to £10,000 a year. Therefore, I reckon that we are getting very good value from ILEA.

ILEA has been attacked over its examination results. A recent survey by Sheffield university showed that ILEA's examination results are on a par with those of many other authorities. And examinations are only one side of the picture. We get a high-quality comprehensive service from ILEA. Adult education and education for special needs are used and much appreciated by adults and children living within a wide radius of London. I get letters from constituents who have never had the chance of further education who want to know what is to happen to Morley college. I would like the Minister to answer that, because people are very worried about that centre of excellence.

Mr. Walden: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Gordon: The hon. Gentleman has had his say.

Mr. Walden: Will the hon. Lady give way? [HON. MEMBERS: "Sit down."]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) has made his speech. It is clear that the hon. Lady does not intend to give way and time is now getting very short.

Ms. Gordon: The research and development carried out by ILEA has been used all over the country. Its initiatives include the Hargreaves report on secondary education, the Thomas report on primary education and the Fish report on special needs. Those reports were all valuable additions to educational knowledge and are useful to educationists throughout the country.

When we talk about standards of education we cannot ignore social conditions. The ILEA serves seven out of the 10 most deprived areas in Britain. I was a teacher and I know about children who live in overcrowded conditions and who sleep, sometimes six to a room, head to feet on the floor. They do not get a decent night's sleep and however well money is spent, however good the teachers and the standard of education, it is hard for children to learn when they are tired. Many children have no quiet place in which to do their homework. That is another disadvantage that the Secretary of State is not taking into account.

Many children have no books at home and do not get a head start. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members should listen to this because it is important. Children often come to school in the morning without food having been put in their mouths. Government policies mean that for many families the money runs out halfway through the week. Thousands of teachers in London and in other parts of the country keep a packet of biscuits in the cupboard. When the children come to school in the morning the teachers give them milk and a couple of biscuits because they know that the children are hungry.

ILEA should be given more than the amount of money needed to keep up with inflation. The money should not be cut. More should be provided and school breakfasts should be given to children who need them. That is what we should have in a civilised society. The Government will please their friends in the City of Westminster by keeping down rates at the expense of London's underprivileged children. They are using the same shameful tactics on ILEA as they are using on the Health Service. They are using the tactic of starving an organisation of resources in order to reduce services with which the public have been more than satisfied. If they reduce those services to a standstill, it will pave the way for the destruction of the Health Service and the abolition of ILEA.

11.38 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): Year after year the Inner London education authority has claimed that the sky will fall as a result of precept limitation. I should like to quote from an ILEA committee paper that gives advice from ILEA's finance director and its education director about the prospects for balancing the budget given the precept maximum that my right hon. Friend was about to set. It says:

> "Although on paper such a budget might balance, in practice it would rely on such a combination of financially favourable factors as to be incapable of achievement."

That paper is dated 9 January 1987. The budget in 1987-88 was balanced. The issue of overspending was barely tackled by ILEA. Its spending is outstandingly high relative both to the grant-related expenditure and in comparison to any other authority.

However, in determining the expenditure level and the precept maximum my right hon. Friend took into account all the factors relevant to the authority's circumstances. He listened to oral and written representations by ILEA on both matters and on each occasion made a positive response. Opposition Members have accused him of being vindictive, but that is not the action of a vindictive man.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) took issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) because my hon. Friend quoted from a letter which he had received from a young lady studying at the North London polytechnic and designing a brothel. Today I went to the polytechnic to make a speech to the students and this young woman showed me her design for a brothel. My only sadness was that I was not competent to advise her on whether it was a good or bad design.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Rumbold: ILEA's assessment of the reduction in spending required in 1988-89——

Mr. Bennett: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Rumbold: —has come down from——

Mr. Bennett: Give way.

Mrs. Rumbold: No, I will not.

Mr. Bennett *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Mrs. Rumbold.

Mrs. Rumbold: ILEA——

Mr. Bennett: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House expects the Front Benches to set a good example. Mrs. Rumbold.

Mrs. Rumbold *rose*——

Mr. Bennett *rose*——

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): On a point of order——

Mrs. Rumbold: I have an important point to make and I want to make it.

Mr. Bennett *rose*——

Mr. Soley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On several occasions recently members of the Government have made allegations which have turned out to be untrue. Is it in order for the Minister to make an allegation which is probably untrue and then not to give way to have it tested in the normal way of this House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a matter for argument, not a point of order for the Chair. I call Mrs. Rumbold.

Mrs. Rumbold *rose*——

Mr. Bennett *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is an important debate. There are strong feelings about the matter and we have only a few minutes left. I hope that hon. Members will give the Minister an opportunity to answer the debate properly.

Mr. Bennett: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of State has made a serious accusation against ILEA. She should answer this simple question: was that course financed by ILEA or was it financed by the Government?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is for the Minister to say what she wishes, and she has only two minutes in which to do it.

Mrs. Rumbold: Opposition Members should listen to the Government's arguments and the reasons why they set such a precept for the Inner London education authority. There is a justification for it. The authority's assessment of required spending has come down from 15 per cent. to about 11·4 per cent. as the process continued, partly as a response to my right hon. Friend's representations. The reduction for which we are asking need not be as steep as ILEA claims, but much will depend upon the way in which the authority controls its upward pressures on spending.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State took full account of the authority's estimate of its base line for spending in 1988-89 in reaching his decision on expenditure and on the precept maximum. Its estimates were among the matters in front of him when he increased the proposed precept to allow ILEA to raise an additional £15 million——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted Business).*

The House divided: Ayes 285, Noes 153.

Division No. 179] **[11.45 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Rydale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Timothy
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter

Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, David
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

Buckley, George
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, J.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Samuel
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Douglas
Hinchliffe, David
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, James
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Tom
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McLeish, Henry
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerald
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Warsing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Anthony
Wray, James
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Ray Powell.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Battle, John
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Precept Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Inner London Education Authority) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

PETITION

Rating Reform

11.56 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): I wish to present a petition which prays that this honourable House should repeal the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987.

The petition comes from Tayside regional council. It has been signed by all the members of the Labour administration, including the convenor of the council, Mr. Ron Tosh, and the leader of the administration, Mr. Chris Ward. It has also been signed by the members of the Scottish National party group. Together with the Labour group, they make up a clear majority on Tayside regional council.

Both groups represent a clear majority of the people in Tayside. They reject the poll tax in Scotland for a number of reasons. It is unjust and unfair. It favours the rich. The tax will be costly to collect. Most people in Scotland believe it will be unworkable. It is also a serious infringement of the civil liberties of the Scottish people. It is the sincere wish of the Tayside regional council that the House repeal the Act.

To lie on the Table.

Opencast Mining (Deeside)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ryder.]*

11.58 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I apologise for the state of my voice. I am glad to see the Minister in his place. I hope he will help my constituents by decisive intervention. The subject is opencast mining, understandably an emotive issue. There is much public interest in opencast mining. It greatly affects the quality of life of local people and it is assuming increasing importance for the public, for local councils and for British Coal.

I have interviewed my constituents at Cheapside. They are deeply concerned, but they are full of fight, resource and determination. In my constituency there is widespread apprehension because the Opencast Executive wants to mine in areas apart from Cheapside and Ewloe.

The Minister probably knows that I have corresponded with Sir Robert Haslam of British Coal on this issue. The Minister knows that I have tabled written questions and posed oral questions to the Secretary of State. I have also written to Ministers and they have replied courteously. I have invited Ministers to visit the Cheapside site and to meet the action committee in that area. Last week there was a large and successful public meeting. It took place in Ewloe and it backed the protesters.

My aim in this debate is to persuade the Under-Secretary of State to move heaven and earth to persuade the Opencast Executive not to mine coal at the Cheapside site. Better still, I want him, in conjunction with the Department of Energy, to instruct British Coal to cease planning to extract coal from an attractive area such as Cheapside.

Nationally, I think it is time that the Government drew up a plan for opencast coal production. Additionally, I believe that the Government should begin a phased reduction of opencast coal production. Moreover, I urge the Government to revise their planning guidelines for opencast coal workings as currently set out in the circulars of the Department of the Environment and the Scottish and Welsh Offices.

The public inquiry opened on Tuesday at Queensferry leisure centre just days after hearing of the closure proposals for two deep mine pits in south Wales where a total of 2,000 jobs are to go. My constituents, who oppose the Opencast Executive, are bewildered. They know of the harrowing unemployment figures in the south Wales valleys, where more than one in four men are frequently out of work and they know that Cheapside is an attractive area environmentally. They say, "Keep the work for the south Wales valleys and save the Cheapside community from the impact of explosions, earth movement and many forms of stress."

I support the action committee of the residents of Liverpool road and Smithy lane who oppose the Cheapside British Coal proposals. I can tell the House that the local community is united. It is very well led. I pay tribute to Mr. John Iball of Four Winds, Liverpool road who has organised so well. Mr. Iball and his committee have had the loyal support of local councillors such as Mr. Ivor Roberts JP, Mr. Tom Middlehurst and Mr. Glen McIver. Indeed, there has been all-party support for the committee.

[Mr. Barry Jones]

When I visited the residents of Liverpool road I talked not only to Mr. and Mrs. Iball in their home but to Mr. Gary Feather and his son Timothy. Mr. Feather lives in Smithy lane at Gwelfryn and, arguably, he faces the greatest difficulty. I have also discussed matters with Mr. E. Jackson JP of Millbank and Mr. K. Morris of Halmore, Liverpool road, to name but a few.

Nobody should have an earth barrier 6 ft from their garden wall. Happily, Clwyd county council opposes the Opencast Executive and supports my constituents. The district council of Alyn and Deeside supports my constituents at Cheapside. Indeed, it has formed an opencast coal sub-committee to support the residents. It has supported the community by submitting a planning statement. The Hawarden community council objects to the Opencast Executive's proposals. The Buckley town council opposes the proposals. It is already an important consideration that all local government units, of whatever size, have come out strongly against the proposals. I urge the Government to bear that in mind when they make their decision and when they receive the planning inspector's proposals.

It is important to note that every unit of local government is supportive of the community that now resists the Opencast Executive's proposals. They are elected bodies, and they are important units in the local government of Clwyd. Indeed, Clwyd county council is taking the lead in protecting residents who live near the Cheapside site.

I want the Minister to give considerable weight to the fact that the county, district, town and community councils are all on the residents' side. The site is close to the rear of some delightful homes. Fine families live in them. If a large earth wall is built, an attractive part of the countryside will be torn apart. The Minister is a fair man. He and his colleague the Secretary of State will want to bear in mind the important statements that the local authorities have made.

Although people in the Cheapside area are worried, they are not the only ones in my constituency who are worried. The residents of Buckley are also apprehensive. We have even heard rumours about proposals for the Connah's Quay area in the locality of Wepre.

Cheapside has attractive field patterns. The hedgerows are important. They are an integral part of the countryside. There are numerous mature trees and an important wildlife habitat. It is a pleasing scene. The wild flowers, grasses and mosses are valued. From residents' homes facing the Cheapside site, views of the countryside are good—too good to rip apart. I know the area well. I was born in my constituency—indeed, two miles from the Cheapside site. As a youngster, I was familiar with the area.

My constituents are apprehensive on environmental grounds. It is not an exaggeration to say that they dread the prospect of great noise in general and the prospect of periodic sustained blasting in particular. No hon. Member would wish to live adjacent to such noise and potential persistent disruption of domestic life. My constituents can see difficulties in respect of the Opencast Executive's heavy lorries and traffic flows on the busy A494 trunk road. There is a road safety aspect. Local people believe that heavy lorries leaving and entering the site will make things difficult. Being high powered, the lorries are bound to make a contribution to noise levels.

My constituents of Cheapside dispute the need for the Opencast Executive's initiative. It is interesting that the adjacent town council of Buckley, a large authority which meets regularly, has donated £100 to the action group. It is throwing its not inconsiderable weight behind the Cheapside campaign. The Alyn and Deeside district council is considering authorising a virement to meet costs. The Alyn and Deeside council is a large and important local authority. As I have said, it is unanimously throwing its weight behind the protesters. The Hawarden community council has retained a solicitor to ensure that its views are made known in support of the residents at the public inquiry that is taking place this week.

The opposition to this 100-acre proposal is well briefed and formidable. My constituents know that excavations would go 160 ft deep. That depth would be reached by the use of the most modern and large machinery and equipment, which would imply persistent noise from engines and movements. To achieve a depth of 160 ft, there would be a requirement to blast through several layers of sandstone. We know that 25 lorries will operate daily on the site and on the roads leading in and out. This is too much.

I prevail upon the Minister to meet the residents. Can I persuade him to visit Cheapside? If the executive has its way, my constituents will endure an agony, and one which I should like them to be spared.

If a line is drawn from the Severn to the Wash, the shallow coal measures are to the north. They are on the east and west coasts of Scotland, the north and south of Wales, in Cumbria, the north-east of England, south Yorkshire, parts of Lancashire and Nottingham and Leicester, for example. This was ordained millions of years ago. I submit that the north is taking the strain, and I want the Government to lessen it and to intervene to the satisfaction of my constituents.

The superbly organised Coalfield Communities Campaign has published its valuable report on opencast coal and I urge the Minister to undertake to read it. I hope that he will urge the Secretary of State to do so as well. Previously, the right hon. Gentleman was Secretary of State for Energy, which means that he has many insights into the energy industry. I can assure the Under-Secretary of State that, if he brings this important document to the notice of his right hon. Friend, he will be thanked, and perhaps rewarded. I want Ministers to study it. With my own insight of the Welsh Office, I hope that a departmental meeting will be called. I hope also that Ministers will ensure that their officials or advisers will note the document and its conclusions.

The Coalfield Communities Campaign is a non-political body. It is drawn, organised, researched and led by local authorities throughout Britain which are based on the existing coalfields. It is careful to be non-political and non-partisan in that sense. It has at heart the best interests of the citizens living in the coalfields. It has been drawn inexorably in its several years of existence led by its chairman to consider the impact of opencast mining upon communities.

This document, published only last week, is important. I have a high regard for those who lead the Coalfield Communities Campaign. The Minister should know that a number of local authorities in Wales are attached to the

campaign, and he could do worse than to seek to meet its Welsh arm. He will learn only positive things from it. It has a first-class reputation.

I make a plea on behalf of my constituents, a beleaguered community of ordinary men and women who are up against the big, bureaucratic power of British Coal and its subsidiary, the Opencast Executive. I am trying now to link my locality and constituents to national policy. A strategic choice needs to be made between closing down mine capacity and restricting opencast working. The choice is as basic as that. The countryside can be shattered by opencast working. Wildlife, wild flowers, grasses, hedgerows, mature trees and saplings and field patterns of hundreds of years' standing will be hugely affected.

This is the case for the Cheapside community. Everyday, family life in the area will be affected by noise, dust and blasting. Traffic conditions will deteriorate, and citizens who have invested their all in their homes, and in their improvement and alteration — at the cost of all their time, money and efforts over a long period — will be blighted. Youngsters will be brought up in these conditions, if the Opencast Executive has its way.

I make a plea to the Minister to take action that will be of service and help to my constituents. I offer the following positive proposals, as outlined by the Coalfield Communities Campaign. First, the Government should draw up a national plan for opencast coal production. They should consult widely in the industry and with the local and planning authorities.

Secondly, the Government should begin a phased reduction of opencast coal production, with immediate effect. Thirdly, they should revise their planning guidelines for opencast working, as set out in their circulars for the Department of the Environment, and the Welsh and Scottish Offices. The aim should be a tougher environmental criterion for the Opencast Executive.

Finally, I refer to the report of the Coalfield Communities Campaign opencast coal working party, entitled, "Ewloe Opencast Coal". It is wrong to claim that opencast mining is necessarily cheaper than deep mining, for which demand is falling. So, the campaign says, opencast working may not enjoy the financial advantages claimed for it by British Coal, which are based on average rather than marginal costs. The signs are that the marginal costs of opencast and deep mining are broadly comparable. In that context, the wider social and environmental costs involved assume an increased importance. Profits from opencast coal mining do not subsidise losses in the deep mining sector. That is the assertion of the Coalfield Communities Campaign.

In the short term British Coal aims to eliminate such losses, which are in any case covered by profits within the deep-mine sector. In the long term — this is of crucial importance — British Coal's costs per annum for new deep-mined capacity are such that cross-subsidisation would be unnecessary and may in certain circumstances be impossible.

The Minister is a good listener and I hope that he will very much take to heart the points that I have made for a splendid community, fighting hard to retain its environment and avoid an awful impact upon its living conditions. Again, I urge him to study carefully the Coalfield Communities Campaign document and to take action urgently to help my constituents.

12.20 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ian Grist): I thank the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) for his kind and polite words. I commiserate with him on his sad, but I hope not painful, voice this evening.

I do, of course, appreciate that he and many of his constituents are concerned about the implications of British Coal's proposals for the land at Ewloe. Indeed he wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales about them in October last so that even before tonight we were in no doubt about where he stood. He has, as always, stated most persuasively the doubts and fears of his constituents, and the House fully appreciates the support that he has given them.

Opencast development is always contentious and no one knows better than we in Wales the strong feelings that new proposals so often give rise to both among prospective neighbours of the development and among people and organisations who feel strongly about conservation of the environment.

However, I am sure that he will recognise that I can say nothing about the planning merits of the proposals or about the likely outcome of the planning appeal and the associated orders. Ministers of successive Administrations of all political colours have made it a firm practice never to comment on appeals under consideration by them because of the paramount need that they remain objective at all times and to ensure that their decisions on such matters are given in accordance with the highest standards of openness and impartiality.

The hon. Gentleman's remarks will of course be taken into account by my right hon. Friend when he comes to consider the proposals in due course. I shall also ensure that they are conveyed to the inspector who is presently holding the local inquiry in this case and I shall ask him to distribute copies to the parties to the appeal when the inquiry resumes.

The hon. Gentleman's choice of subject for tonight's debate gives me the opportunity to put the Ewloe proposal in the context of planning appeals generally. Many planning applications which come to my right hon. Friend on appeal after being refused by the local planning authority are controversial and one would certainly include opencast working in that category.

I should like to begin my remarks with a brief description of the appeal process which the British Coal proposal at Ewloe is now undergoing. The right of appeal goes back to the legislation of 1947. Although many refinements of procedure have been introduced over the years, the basic right of appeal remains unaltered. Any applicant for planning permission who is refused permission or who fails to receive a decision within a prescribed time can appeal to my right hon. Friend. This basic right is available just as much to massive organisations such as British Coal as to the private individual, upset because his house extension cannot be approved. Similarly, the rules which govern consideration of an appeal apply to both big and small alike.

An appeal under section 36 of the Coal Industry Act 1971 serves three main purposes. First, it allows anyone whose application is refused by a local planning authority to seek a second opinion on the planning merits of the proposal. Secondly, it allows planning Ministers to supervise the development control process and on

[Mr. Ian Grist]

occasion to reassert or to clarify national policy, something which is in fact happening as regards opencast coal at the moment. Thirdly, it gives the public a say, allowing it to question the assumptions and arguments of the main protagonists in a planning dispute and to put forward alternative points of view.

Throughout the last 40 years the main components of the appeals process have been openness, fairness, impartiality, the opportunity to state a case in writing or appeal before an appointed person and the statutory right of appeal to the High Court against the decision on a point of law or of procedure. Those five components represent the judicial elements of the process. The decisions themselves are discretionary and this is what gives the appeal process its administrative character and of course that leaves the decision itself to the judgment of either the inspector or, in a recovered case, of the Secretary of State.

Most decisions are taken by inspectors. In Wales we now have a full-time force of 12 inspectors and we can also call on the services of a number of part-time officers. They are all experienced, both in the planning process and in matters of policy that are applicable generally or are particularly applicable to Wales.

The transfer to inspectors of the responsibility for decision-making has taken place gradually over a number of years and about 95 per cent. of appeals are now handled in this way, but the Secretary of State reserves the right to recover jurisdiction in selected cases and the Ewloe case is clearly one where that is appropriate. The inspector's role here is to obtain the facts, to conduct an impartial inquiry and to make a report to the Secretary of State. Of course the inspector is not a maker of planning policy. In that matter he takes the lead from my right hon. Friend, who works on the basis that appeal decision letters are not the right place for making such policy. It is, after all, a basic principle of the appeals system that no part of the decision should come as a surprise to the parties.

Every appellant has the right to a local inquiry, though most people choose to have their appeals decided by the written representations method. The appellant must be told in advance of the facts and arguments which will be deployed against him at the inquiry. The conduct of the inquiry is primarily a matter falling within the discretion of the inspector, but there are certain prescribed rules which have to be followed. Those rules are at present under review and the revised version will be laid before the House later this year. The various improvements which are proposed should assist the process of preparing for the inquiry, make the proceedings shorter and generally result in the giving of earlier decisions.

In particular, we hope to make more effective use of the period before the inquiry opens. Early exchanges of information, for example, proofs of evidence, at that stage, will help the inspector and the parties to identify the principal issues and to avoid discussion of matters which are not relevant to the appeal. We take the view that the inquiry should be no place for surprise tactics.

People other than the main parties are, of course, allowed to attend the inquiry and, at the discretion of the inspector, present their views in person or through a representative. That is most important in the kind of case that the hon. Member has raised tonight. For here it is not only matters of local and central policy that may be important, nor indeed general issues about conservation of the environment. The inspector will also want to listen to and consider very carefully how the lives of people in the neighbourhood of the proposal are likely to be affected by the development and to weigh those considerations with all the others.

When everyone has been heard the inspector closes the proceedings and goes away to write his report. In recovered cases this is considered within the Welsh Office and my right hon. Friend takes his decision. Great care must be taken to see that as far as possible the decision is legally correct. The 1971 Act provides that an appeal decision is open to challenge in the High Court from any "aggrieved person" who believes he can show that the decision is defective on a point of procedure or law. The minds of officials and of Ministers must, therefore, be addressed to each case in a proper manner. This all takes time but is absolutely essential.

In February 1984, circular 13/84 called "Opencast Coal Mining" was published jointly by the Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office. That circular contained a number of observations on the subject in general and a set of guidelines against which planning decisions should be taken.

As I have said, local planning authorities or the Secretary of State on appeal have to consider both the development plan and other material considerations. The circular indicated that structure plan policies and general proposals for opencast working are expected to indicate in general terms the areas in which there are presumptions for and against opencast working. Local plans should define these areas in detai——

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-eight minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 11 February 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT BILL *(By Order)*

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on consideration [10 December]. That the Bill be now considered.

Debate further adjourned till Thursday 18 February.

TEIGNMOUTH QUAY COMPANY BILL *(By Order)*

YORK CITY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

HAMPSHIRE (LYNDHURST BYPASS) BILL *[Lords]*

(By Order)

ASSOCIATED BRITISH PORTS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

CARDIFF BAY BARRAGE BILL *(By Order)*

CITY OF LONDON (SPITALFIELDS MARKET) BILL

(By Order)

FALMOUTH CONTAINER TERMINAL BILL *(By Order)*

NORTH KILLINGHOLME CARGO TERMINAL BILL

(By Order)

ST. GEORGE'S HILL, WEYBRIDGE, ESTATE BILL

(By Order)

SOUTHERN WATER AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Government Shareholdings

1. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy on the disposal of Government-held shareholdings in the light of the National Audit Office report on the sale of the Government's shareholding in Rolls-Royce plc.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Norman Lamont): The Government will clearly take NAO's observations into account as they press ahead with the privatisation programme.

Mr. Garrett: Will the Minister give the House his opinion on the statement of the National Audit Office about the £63 million put into the company prior to privatisation? Does he agree that, in the Government's besotted efforts to achieve privatisation, business ethics are at stake? Normally, when one takes the assets of a company, one takes its liabilities. That no longer seems to be the fashion. Should we not revert to ethics?

Mr. Lamont: I certainly do not agree with what the hon. Gentleman implies. The capital injection into the company was a decision made as a result of negotiation and on the basis of professional advice. However, we shall be giving evidence to the Public Accounts Committee very shortly and we shall reply to those points in detail.

Mr. Tim Smith: Is my right hon. Friend aware that last night Rolls-Royce shares closed at 126p, against an issue price of 170p? In the intervening period the price has fluctuated between 96p and 240p. Does my right hon. Friend agree that in those circumstances the conclusion of the National Audit Office, that it is now hard to say whether the share price was set at a level that maximised the proceeds from the sale, is not unreasonable?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. I only wish that Opposition Members, who are so quick to say that issues are under-priced, would sometimes notice when shares fall to prices below the issue price.

As regards the points made by the National Audit Office, I cannot anticipate what will be in the evidence, but we shall be replying to the points in detail.

Mr. Millan: When may we expect a statement about the Government's intentions on another very important Government shareholding—the golden share in Britoil?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Not on this question.

Mr. Greg Knight: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many thousands of employees at Rolls-Royce were delighted to buy shares in the company in which they work? In Derby, it is even rumoured that a few Socialists bought shares when the company was sold off. If there is any message to the Government arising from the sale of Rolls-Royce, should it not be, "Carry on the good work."?

Mr. Lamont: I am sure that my hon. Friend's opinion is shared by workers at Rolls-Royce. I cannot comment on whether Socialists bought shares in Rolls-Royce, although perhaps that is what Paul Foot meant when he said:

"I hope bloody Bryan Gould bought millions of shares."

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Given that the Government have decided that there should be no specific requirement to deepen or widen share ownership in the Rolls-Royce privatisation, what considerations of the public interest led the Chancellor to disregard the views of the Government's advisers, Samuel Montagu and Co., and concede the £63 million debt write-off? Is it true that the Government were effectively blackmailed by the Rolls-Royce chairman's threat not to support privatisation if he did not get the extra money?

Mr. Lamont: As I have already said, in reaching a decision on the capital structure and the capital injection we took into account the views of our advisers and the company, and we shall be detailing why we did that in our reply to the Public Accounts Committee.

Privatisation

2. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the extent of the state-owned commercial sector which has been transferred to the private sector since 1979.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): Since 1979 we have privatised getting on for 40 per cent. of the state-owned sector of industry.

Mr. Gill: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the history of the state as an employer in the commercial and industrial sectors of the economy has been wholly unprofitable for the state and for its employees? The long-term prospects and prosperity of those enterprises would be enhanced if they were returned to the private sector as quickly as possible.

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is certainly right in saying that privatisation benefits the company, its employees and the economy as a whole. The employees of the companies concerned see this very clearly, as is evidenced by the fact that they are very anxious to acquire shares in the company for which they work as soon as it is privatised, and the great majority of them hold on to them.

Mr. Chris Smith: Will the Chancellor confirm, or deny, that on 27 January, at a meeting with merchant bankers from the underwriting houses, Treasury Ministers said that public sector corporations were being sold and must be sold at

"20 per cent. less than their real worth to attract investors"?

Did that take place? Was that good husbandry on behalf of taxpayers? Will water, electricity and other forms of public commercial assets be sold in the same way at bargain-basement prices?

Mr. Lawson: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has asked me that question, because it gives me the opportunity categorically to deny that absurd story. No such statement was made. It is not the Government's policy, and, as usual, *The Observer* got it wrong. I am surprised that Labour Members believe it.

Mr. Thurnham: Is not the success of the Government's privatisation policy evident in the way in which productivity has improved? In some cases profits have doubled or trebled, and in the case of the National Freight Corporation they have increased ninefold.

Mr. Lawson: Almost every company that has been privatised has done signally better since privatisation than it did before. Many chairmen of the companies have made that point at their annual meetings. The National Freight Corporation, to which my hon. Friend rightly alluded, has been an outstanding success.

NHS Expenditure

4. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, in view of recent representations, he will increase planned public expenditure for 1988-89 on *(a)* National Health Service provision and *(b)* education and training.

8. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received in relation to his published expenditure plans for *(a)* the National Health Service and *(b)* Government expenditure generally.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Major): The White Paper plans for next year already include increased provision for the Health Service, education and training, as part of the £4·6 billion increase in the total for programmes.

Mr. Boyes: The Government's attacks on the National Health Service and on the education service are nothing short of political vandalism. Is the Minister aware that in a recent poll 86 per cent. of the people questioned suggested that it would be better to give money to the National Health Service, even if that meant increasing taxation? If cash is available on Budget day, it should be given to improve the National Health Service and the education system, rather than to line the pockets of the Minister's friends in the City.

Mr. Major: The Government are as concerned as the hon. Gentleman about the National Health Service. The public expenditure plans for next year and for the two subsequent years show an increase of over £1 billion for the Health Service. It is the most substantial cash increase over a period that the Health Service has ever received.

Mr. Grant: Does the Minister agree that, instead of fiddling around with this large sum of money, it would be better to spend some of it, not only on the Health Service, but on increasing rate support grant for local authorities such as ILEA, which will probably have to make 3,000 teachers redundant? My authority will have to make cuts amounting to £45 million this year. Would it not be better for him to use some of the available money to alleviate the suffering and poverty that the Government have caused?

Mr. Major: As to the Health Service, I reiterate the point that I made a moment ago: there will be substantial increases in programme expenditure next year amounting to £4½ billion. ILEA, for all the expenditure that it has lavished, has failed to provide a decent education service in London, and I shall be glad to see the end of it.

Sir William Clark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the one subject on which Opposition Members are expert is spending other people's money? Does he also agree that throwing public money—taxpayers' money—at, for example, ILEA, with its poor academic record, would be a complete and utter waste of money, just as lavishing taxpayers' money on the National Health Service without cuts — [HON MEMBERS: "Cuts?"] — without improvements in efficiency would be a derogation of the Government's duty?

Mr. Major: The Government are certainly keen to see increased efficiency in the National Health Service, and

the cost-improvement programmes have provided that to a certain extent. We hope to see more efficiency in the future.

ILEA is a uniquely high-spending authority. Moreover, I doubt whether it gives value for money. It employs two and a half times as many administrators per pupil as the average; twice as many non-teaching staff per pupil as the average; and its spending on the youth service is two and a half times that of even the most generous inner-city partnership. Clearly, it spends far more than it ought, and in the wrong way.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of us have noted that in real terms the Government have spent a lot more on the National Health Service, but, all the same, many of us believe that the problems of the NHS are much more complex and cannot be solved just by throwing more taxpayers' money at it? A radical review of the whole service 40 years on would be better than spending extra money willy-nilly.

Mr. Major: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend and hope that we shall have such a radical review. I take my hon. Friend's point about the increase over retail prices. The increase in expenditure is well over 30 per cent. since 1979, which far outstrips that provided by any previous Government.

Mr. Beith: Does the Chief Secretary not recognise that, in real terms, taking the level of price increases in the economy as a whole, the increase for the Health Service this year is only 1·2 per cent., that it is likely to be less than that when the generally higher costs of the Health Service are taken into account, and that it will be nothing at all if the health authorities are expected to fund any part of the nurses' pay review? Why does he not respond to the massive public concern on that matter?

Mr. Major: I take the hon. Gentleman's underlying point that "real terms" can be defined in more than one way. We are both aware of that. However, in terms of the normal definition of "real terms", with the income-generation schemes and the cost-improvement schemes, the National Health Service will receive a real terms increase of about 3 per cent. next year.

On the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, we will, as usual, consider that matter when we have the report of the Nurses Pay Review Body, and we shall then decide whether we can accept it. Other matters will follow from there.

Mr. Sayeed: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government's expenditure plans show that spending on social security, health and education alone account for 60 per cent. of total Government expenditure—the highest proportion ever? Does he agree that those areas of massive public expenditure show rises even after the application of the overall GDP deflator?

Mr. Major: The figures may be even larger than my hon. Friend suggests, but his underlying premise is entirely correct.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Does the Chief Secretary not find it surprising that no one — the British Medical Association, the National Association of Health Authorities in England and Wales or the Royal College of Nursing — agrees with him that the Health Service is properly funded? Given that he has had to concede that he has a Contingency Fund of £3·5 billion, will he now allay the fears of health authorities throughout the country which are faced with having to budget for cuts and closures? Will he state today that he can and will fully fund the nurses' and health workers' pay settlements?

Mr. Major: We have not — *[Interruption.]* If hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister has been asked a question.

Mr. Major: The provision for the National Health Service for next year has been substantially increased. Those who question the size of the increase simply have not taken into account the enormously increased provisions that have been made. It would be more helpful if the hon. Gentleman would concern himself with reality rather than with fiction.

Cider

5. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he anticipates will be the yield from taxation on cider in the year 1987-88.

The Paymaster General (Mr. Peter Brooke): About £55 million excluding VAT.

Mr. Shepherd: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware that since the tax heights of 1984 to 1985 tax revenue has failed to come up to expectation? Since then more than 500 jobs in the cider industry have been lost in Hereford alone and sales are stagnant across the industry despite massively increased promotional efforts. Will my right hon. Friend bear that point in mind in formulating his Budget proposals?

Mr. Brooke: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget, but he is fully aware of the views and the circumstances of the cider makers and will take them into account when he makes his Budget decisions.

Forestry

6. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received over the present taxation status of forestry development.

Mr. Norman Lamont: As is customary at this time of the year, my right hon. Friend has received a number of representations on a wide range of subjects.

Mr. Bennett: I thank the Minister for such a full and helpful answer. Does he accept that there has been widespread criticism of that relief from the Nature Conservancy Council, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Council for the Protection of Rural England and many others? It is rumoured that Prince Charles is to make a speech in the other place that will be critical of that relief——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not to be called in aid in this place.

Mr. Bennett: Many others have argued strongly that we should not destroy the natural environment of Britain by the indiscriminate planting of trees. If the Government are not prepared to take away that tax relief and use the money more usefully in the Health Service, will they consider using it for the planting of hedgerows, which would be much more useful environmentally?

Mr. Lamont: The points that the hon. Gentleman has made have been among the representations that we have

received. However, the encouragement of forestry is extremely important to the rural economy and it has been Government policy for many years.

Mr. Chapman: I commend the Government for encouraging tree-planting schemes, not least because I am president of the Arboricultural Association. Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that it is not the tax regime that needs changing to promote forestry development? It is necessary to ensure that trees are planted in the right places, and not in environmentally sensitive areas.

Mr. Lamont: I have noted my hon. Friend's suggestion. There has been some recent criticism along those lines.

Mr. Henderson: Does the Minister accept that the tax regime on trees has not led to any significant increase in planting? Instead, it has provided a tax haven for pop stars and film stars. Does the Minister accept that he has allowed the taxpayer to be ripped off?

Mr. Lamont: I note what the hon. Gentleman has said. I cannot accept that there has been no increase in planting. Indeed, the environmental concern is that there has been too much planting of conifers.

Manufacturing Investment

7. **Mr. Burt:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest projections for the growth of manufacturing investment in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Major: Manufacturing investment is projected to increase by 11 per cent. in real terms in 1988, according to the Department of Trade and Industry's latest investment intentions survey.

Mr. Burt: Those figures are just the tonic for those concerned about the growth of manufacturing industry. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the significant increase in industrial productivity since 1981 means that investors should hold their nerve and that their confidence should remain high? Confidence is threatened only by the Jeremiahs on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Major: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Since 1979 manufacturing productivity growth has continued at a substantial level, and for the past year at a rate of 6½ per cent.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: Has the right hon. Gentleman seen today's quarterly survey from the Manchester chamber of commerce and industry, which represents by far the largest part of industry in the Greater Manchester area? Will he note that expected manufacturing investments are less than they were previously? They all seem to want reductions in interest rates to reverse that trend. As the report was published only after the increase in interest rates, what does the Minister intend to do to restore the expectation of manufacturing investment?

Mr. Major: I cannot agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the survey is as pessimistic as he painted it. It paints an optimistic picture, and rightly so. Manufacturing investment is growing strongly. The right hon. Gentleman will recall that the CBI's January quarterly trend survey showed that investment intentions still remain strong. Manufacturing investment is doing exceedingly well at present, and I share the right hon. Gentleman's wish that it should continue to do so.

Mr. Budgen: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Ford pay dispute is unfortunate because it inhibits investment and is a clear sign of overheating in the economy?

Mr. Major: With great respect to my hon. Friend, it would be unwise to read overheating into every indicator. Improvements on the supply side since 1979 mean that firms can operate at a much higher rate of capacity utilisation than before, and my hon. Friend's concern may be a little overdone. In any event, if overheating were to appear, there is no doubt that the Government would not hesitate to take action against inflationary pressures.

Mr. Holland: When will the Chief Secretary realise that he cannot fool all the people all the time on manufacturing investment? The reality is that, in real terms 1980 prices, manufacturing investment now is 10 per cent. below what it was in 1979. Even if the CBI forecast of an 8 per cent. increase this year were achieved, the 1979 level would still not be reached, and this is at a time when the world economy is slowing down. When will the right hon. Gentleman pursue policies which, in the long term, will ensure that savings go into manufacturing investment so that we can rebuild the competitive economy?

Mr. Major: The end product of investment is productivity and profitability, and the quality of investment, as well as its quantum, are extremely important, and those have improved. The evidence of higher profitability and better productivity suggests that investment has been running at a high level and that it has been quality investment.

Business Starts

9. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much business starts have exceeded stops between 1979 and 1986.

Mr. Brooke: Over the seven years from January 1980 to December 1986 the net increase in the number of businesses registered for VAT averaged 500 a week.

Mr. Key: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on creating the economic framework that has led to the successful figures that he has announced, and will he join me in congratulating those who create the wealth — mostly the self-employed, small business men and the enterprise agencies — on achieving that magnificent figure?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's enthusiasm. Since 1979 the number of self-employed is estimated to have increased by more than a third to 2·7 million up to the end of 1986. Of those companies registered for VAT, a majority have a turnover of less than £250,000 and constitute 20 per cent. of the nation's turnover, and enterprise agencies now number 350. I agree with my hon. Friend on the contribution that all three have made to the creation of jobs.

Mr. Skinner: Does not the right hon. Gentleman's original answer, that 500 extra businesses per week register for VAT, hide the real fact that there were more than 100,000 bankruptcies and insolvencies in the business sector between 1979 and 1986—the highest record at any time in Britain's history? That is one reason why my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) was

able to point out that manufacturing investment is lower now than it was in 1979 when that lot on the Conservative Benches came into power.

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman is correct in thinking that I was quoting a net figure. There is always an element of risk in setting up any business, but that is what enterprise is all about. The hon. Gentleman will be encouraged to hear that bankruptcies last year were falling.

Mr. Devlin: Is my right hon. Friend aware that over 6,000 new firms come on to the market in the north-east of England every year and that about 10,000 people are self-employed on Teesside alone? Is that not convincing proof that the Government's policies in the north-east of England are working just as well as, if not better than, they are in other parts?

Mr. Brooke: I salute my hon. Friend for his constant championing of firms in the north-east.

Tax Relief

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what average income tax relief has been received by a taxpayer earning £50,000 each year since 1979 at 1987 prices.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) on 14 January 1988 at column *390* in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Home Robertson: I do not think that I have a direct interest in this question. However, how can the Minister possibly justify the giving of tax handouts of well over £10,000 a year to the richest 1 per cent. of people in the country at a time when the National Health Service, its patients and staff, are suffering the effect of a financial squeeze? Why should hospital patients in my constituency face the closure of their hospitals to subsidise the very rich?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to have noticed that cutting rates is quite compatible with increasing revenue. As all my hon. Friends behind me know, the top 5 per cent. of income groups now pay a larger proportion of income tax than they did before the Government's tax cuts. It could be said that as a result of those tax cuts there has been more, not less, money for the National Health Service.

Sir Ian Lloyd: Does not the deplorable term "tax handout" imply that the whole of an individual's income belongs in the first place to the state, and, that it is at the discretion of the state that he is allowed to enjoy some of it?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

Ms. Armstrong: I wonder whether the Minister will give us an assurance that his priority this year will be to ensure that those who have done well from his economy will be enabled to support the Health Service, and not to profit personally in the way that he has described them as being able to do in the past six years?

Mr. Lamont: The purpose of my right hon. Friend's Budgets in the past has certainly been to produce policies that benefit all the people in the country, and the result of our tax cutting has been that the take-home pay, or disposable income, of a person on average earnings has increased by more than 20 per cent. That is how the policies of this Government have been in the interests of all the people.

Mr. David Shaw: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, whereas the Labour Government attempted to squeeze until the pips squeaked and collected only about £800 million from the higher rates of tax, this Government, by increasing growth in the economy with the consequent increase in incomes, now collect some £3,800 million from the higher rates of tax? Does that not augur well for a Budget in which tax cuts among the higher rates might be considered?

Mr. Lamont: As my hon. Friend knows, I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget. However, I entirely agree with his point about the results of cuts in the top rates hitherto. The top 5 per cent. were previously paying some 24 per cent. of income tax revenues. That has now increased to nearly 30 per cent., amply illustrating my hon. Friend's point.

Dr. Marek: Does the Financial Secretary deny that those earning £50,000 a year or more have been gaining £10,000 a year under his regime? Does he deny that anyone earning £450 a week or less is now paying more tax—both in real, cash terms and as a proportion of income—than in 1978-79?

Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that that now produces a disincentive effect, with the top rate at 60 per cent., and that there is therefore a case for cutting it? Or does he believe that the rich are due for yet another handout? If he believes the former, what is his hard evidence, as opposed to hearsay? If he believes the latter, will he simply admit it?

Mr. Lamont: As I said, I shall not anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget. The only point that I was making about the cuts in higher rates was that, in my opinion, they have been in the overwhelming interest of the country, and the revenue figures show that. The figures also illustrate that those on half average earnings have done a great deal better under this Government than they did under the Labour Government.

Productivity

11. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the growth of productivity in the United Kingdom economy over the period since 1980.

19. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the growth of productivity in the United Kingdom economy over the period since 1980.

Mr. Brooke: From 1980 to the third quarter of 1987 output per head in the whole economy has grown at an average rate of 2¼ per cent. per year, similar to that of Japan, and faster than all other major industrialised countries.

Mr. Patnick: How does the figure that my right hon. Friend has just announced compare with figures in the 1970s?

Mr. Brooke: Productivity growth in the whole economy has averaged about 2 per cent. per annum since the cyclical peak of 1979. That is nearly twice as fast as the average annual growth between 1973 and 1979, when, as I recollect, another party was in power.

Mr. Mitchell: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the very low productivity which used to characterise our economy and which got to the heart of our national economic ills has now been replaced by increasing and increased productivity, which is why we shall compete so effectively and why we are the envy of our Western industrialised competitors?

Mr. Brooke: I totally concur with my hon. Friend's question. It is significant that United Kingdom manufacturing output per head has increased since 1979 at six times the rate it increased between 1973 and 1979.

Mr. McFall: Given the issue of investment, will the Chancellor reflect on exports and imports? Is the Chancellor proud of the fact that since 1979 manufactured imports have risen twice as fast as exports? Why has the Prime Minister broken the pledge she made in 1979 that the Tories would create conditions for our factories and workshops that would produce manufactured goods, so that the customers of the world would be scrambling over each other to buy them? Is it by design, or by sheer incompetence on the part of the Government, that such a disastrous imbalance in manufactured goods has been achieved?

Mr. Brooke: The question that I was asked related to productivity rather than to investment and exports, but manufacturing output and productivity have been increasing even more rapidly than the rest of the economy.

Mr. Barry Jones: How can the Minister concur so boastfully when, as recently as 1986, Britain imported cars, textiles and steel to the value of £8 billion? Is that not a ruinous rate of imports? What will he do about that?

Mr. Brooke: As I remarked a moment ago, the question related to productivity rather to than imports.

Mr. John Townend: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the increase in productivity has resulted in a significant increase in profitability and that the taxes from profits pouring into the Treasury will give the Chancellor the opportunity in the Budget to do what no Chancellor has been able to do in the past 50 years—to balance the budget, reduce taxation and increase public expenditure by the £4·6 billion laid down in the White Paper on public expenditure?

Mr. Brooke: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget, but the scenario my hon. Friend describes sounds attractive.

Mr. John Smith: If the Minister is correct in obtaining some satisfaction from productivity figures, why did Britain have a surplus in the balance of trade on manufactured goods of £5 million in 1979 and a deficit last year of £8 billion, which is deteriorating? What is the point of so-called increases in productivity if we cannot compete successfully with our competitors? What will the Government do about the balance of payments?

Mr. Brooke: The economy is competing successfully and we have maintained our share of manufactured exports in world trade in a manner unknown in recent generations.

Tax Changes

12. Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the distributional effects of the changes in direct and indirect taxation have been since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The effect has been that real take-home pay has increased by at least 18 per cent. at all multiples of average earnings.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does the Minister accept that most commentators now take the view that the burden of increased taxation since 1979 has fallen more heavily on the lower paid, part-time workers? Is he aware that if he takes the opportunity coming to him in the next few weeks to indulge in across-the-board cuts that will simply mean that the relative advantage will be given to those on higher levels of income? When will he take steps to redress the balance?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman may not have heard my answer, which was that all income groups have enjoyed increases in take-home pay of at least 18½ per cent. When one considers the proportion of tax and national insurance at all levels of income and compares that with the regime that we inherited in 1979, if that had been adjusted only for inflation, it will be seen that everybody is paying substantially less tax and national insurance at all levels of income.

Mr. Leigh: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the Social and Liberal Democrats are really concerned to help the lower paid they would be better advised to look beyond ideas such as putting VAT on children's clothes, and look instead to the example set by the Labour Government in New Zealand, where they are abolishing all higher rates of income tax, thus giving a real boost to productivity and growth, and to everybody's income?

Mr. Lamont: I note my hon. Friend's suggestion. I am sure that he will understand if we are extremely careful in responding when we are so near to the Budget.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Minister rule out now the destruction of jobs that will take place if VAT is put on newspapers?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman knows that I cannot anticipate the Budget.

Borrowing Requirement

13. Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he now anticipates a public sector surplus rather than a public sector borrowing requirement in 1987-88.

Mr. Lawson: I shall be publishing a new forecast in the Budget in the usual way.

Mr. Smith: Is it not clear that there is now every prospect of a balanced Budget, or a public sector lending requirement surplus? Will this not be the best performance since the early 1950s, with the exception of the year 1969-70? As my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townsend) said, does that not offer the prospect of a tax-cutting, expenditure-rising, balanced Budget on 15 March?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend will understand that there is no way in which I can anticipate my Budget today, but I can tell him and the House that public finances at present are fundamentally sounder than they have been at any time since the war, and I intend to keep them that way.

Mr. Salmond: Does the Chancellor remember that the last Chancellor to anticipate a public sector borrowing

surplus was Roy Jenkins, now Lord Jenkins? Does the Chancellor expect that his career will follow the same glittering progress?

Mr. Lawson: I have never before been compared to the noble Lord Jenkins. *[Interruption.]* I have long since given up drinking claret. He was, of course, Chancellor of the Exchequer for only a relatively short time.

Mr. Ralph Howell: Will my right hon. Friend give top priority to raising the tax thresholds in his forthcoming Budget, to help restore incentives to work and help the lower paid generally?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is quite right. He has been waging a campaign for a long time pointing out the importance of reductions in income tax to create incentives and to help the lower paid, and indeed all those in the economy, to make the economy stronger. I think he will agree that the economy is now very much stronger, and one of the reasons for that, although not by any means the only one, is that we have been pursuing a policy of reducing levels of income tax.

Mr. John Smith: If Britain's public finances are as sound as the Chancellor says, why are the Government not spending the money where it is desperately needed, in the National Health Service? Or does the Chancellor now tell us that enough is being spent on the Health Service? Will he give us a direct answer?

Mr. Lawson: I shall say two things to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. First, as my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said in answer to an earlier question, we have provided in this most recent public expenditure White Paper for the biggest ever increases in spending on the National Health Service in the next three years. Secondly, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has already made clear, health provision is currently under review by the Government. Finally, I make it clear to him that anybody who knows anything about provision of health care in the National Health Service in this country knows that the problems—and there are problems—go far beyond the simple question of funding.

Personal Disposable Income

4. **Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the growth of real personal disposable income since 1983.

Mr. Lawson: Real personal disposable income has grown by 13 per cent. since 1983.

Mr. Redwood: Does my right hon. Friend agree that that excellent figure shows that policies that promote enterprise, competition and fiscal prudence certainly deliver the goods?

Mr. Lawson: They do, and they will continue to do so.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Is the Chancellor aware that figures put forward by the Family Studies Institute suggest that, under this Chancellor, the rich have become richer and the poor have become poorer? Should we not have a strategy against poverty, beginning with the scrapping of the notorious social fund, which the Government are determined to introduce in April?

Mr. Lawson: The studies to which the hon. Gentleman referred were based on incorrect data and we are writing to the institute to point that out. The truth of the matter is that, at all income levels, the vast majority of the people of this country have seen a substantial increase in their living standards since the Government came to office.

Overseas Assets

15. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give his latest estimate of the United Kingdom's net assets overseas.

Mr. Major: At the end of 1986 the United Kingdom's net assets overseas were estimated at £114 billion.

Mr. Chapman: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that that is a huge increase in recent years? Does he agree that the net income from those assets is highly beneficial to our economy? Does not all this underline the success of the previous Chancellor's decision eight years ago to abolish exchange controls?

Mr. Major: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. He is right in both his propositions. The net income in the first three quarters of the present year amounted to £5·4 billion, and the abolition of exchange controls was wholly welcome and beneficial.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 11 February.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend is in Brussels for a meeting of the European Council.

Miss Lestor: Will the right hon. Gentleman take time today to put pressure on his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence to answer the criticisms of the Comptroller and Auditor General about the privatisation of the Royal Ordnance factories, one of which is in my constituency? The Minister refused to answer those criticisms, which point out that that privatisation cost this country tens of millions of pounds, that dividends were waived to make the company more attractive and that the delay in the transfer of pension rights and redundancy pay made this whole operation exceedingly expensive. Does the right hon. Gentleman not think that, before further privatisation takes place, some answers should be given to the complaints of the Auditor General?

Mr. Wakeham: I think that the hon. Lady misses the important point. The important point is that there were difficulties in the armaments procurement industry. That industry will do much better under privatisation than it ever would under state control.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Has my right hon. Friend seen the quite astonishing economic progress report, published by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which shows that the average British family is having to spend £11 per week more for food, simply because of the price support for the CAP? Does he agree that in no circumstances should the Government agree to extra resources going to the EEC as long as the Common Market is spending £233 million per week on dumping and destroying food and £50 million per week on financing fraud?

Mr. Wakeham: As my hon. Friend knows, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is in Brussels at the European Council dealing with some of those very difficult issues. I know that she goes with the best wishes and strong support of the vast majority of the British people.

Mr. Hattersley: Is the Lord President aware of the growing concern, both in this country and among our allies, over the Government's deplorable decision not to follow the Stalker-Sampson report with appropriate prosecutions? Does he realise that it is now essential that the affair — the shoot-to-kill RUC conspiracy and Special Branch involvement—be cleared up by a judicial inquiry? Are the Government prepared to set up such an inquiry?

Mr. Wakeham: The Government are not prepared to set up a judicial inquiry. The matter has been the subject of a very thorough and detailed investigation, at the end of which the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland reached his decision. A further inquiry would be unnecessary and inappropriate.

Mr. Hattersley: Does the Lord President not realise the damage that that answer does both to our reputation abroad and to the prospects of lasting peace in Northern Ireland? How can the Government hope to establish the rule of law in Northern Ireland if they manipulate the law themselves? How can they expect to end the domination, dominance and role of the IRA if they are prepared to allow criminal conspiracy to go ahead without taking appropriate action?

Mr. Wakeham: Those are disgraceful remarks. Surely if any damage is done, it is by allegations that the Director of Public Prosecutions in Northern Ireland did not act independently and properly in accordance with his duties.

Mr. Hattersley: The Lord President either deludes himself or seeks to deceive others. [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw".]

Mr. Speaker: Order. We do not deceive each other in this Chamber.

Mr. Hattersley: I withdraw that at once. The Lord President either deceives himself or seeks to delude others. The Attorney-General made it absolutely clear that there was a case to answer but that he chose not to answer it. The Lord President has to defend that, and not some other charge.

Mr. Wakeham: The Attorney-General made a clear statement in the House and indicated the reasons why, in the national interest, he had made his decision. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will make a statement in the House on the disciplinary matters and matters of control of the RUC that arise from that decision. The right hon. Gentleman will have to wait for that.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: When the Prime Minister in Brussels talks to the Taoiseach, with whom she got on very well on an earlier occasion, will she tell him that the British people are prepared to accept the interference of the Irish Republic in the internal affairs of the United Kingdom only to the extent that he is prepared to accept British interference in the affairs of the Irish Republic?

Mr. Wakeham: I am not privy to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will say to the Taoiseach in Brussels, but I know that she will seek to deal with the matter in the best way possible, that is, to recognise that the Anglo-Irish accord is something that we believe to be important, and hope to get over some of the difficulties.

Mr. Mallon: Will the Leader of the House confirm that since 1969 166 people who were not members of paramilitary organisations and were not involved in violence have been killed by the security forces in Northern Ireland? Will he further confirm that in those 166 cases there have been three convictions? What plans have the Government to ensure that the law will apply in Northern Ireland without fear or favour equally to every person?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot confirm the figures that the hon. Gentleman gave. He may well be right. I think that in anybody who atempts to deal with the difficult issues in Northern Ireland a recognition of some of the people who are the victims of terrorism would be appropriate.

Mr. Rowe: Does my right hon. Friend agree that among the many remarkable achievements of Comic Relief was the quality of the films used to educate the British public about events and about the handicapped at home and abroad? Will he therefore consult his right hon. Friends about the possibility of the BBC and ITV making available——

Mr. Speaker: Briefly, please.

Mr. Rowe: —to Departments these remarkable films for the use of voluntary organisations?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is right. Unfortunately, I was appearing on a rival channel while that was going on. I shall certainly pass the remarks of my hon. Friend to the appropriate quarters.

Q2. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 11 February.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bruce: In the light of the Appeal Court decision yesterday, will the Lord President of the Council acknowledge that the Government have brought confidence in the public security services in this country into disrepute by identifying the Conservative Government and party interest with the national and public interest? In the light of the judges' comments yesterday, would it not now be appropriate to set up a Committee of the House, composed of senior Privy Councillors, to help restore confidence in the objectivity of determining what is the national security interest?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not believe that by his question the hon. Gentleman meant to impugn the integrity of the judges who dealt with the case. The case remains before the courts, and I have no intention of commenting. The Government remain determined to uphold the principle of confidentiality, without which the security services could not function effectively to protect our freedom.

Mr. Sayeed: My right hon. Friend will be aware that, for solely demographic reasons, the number of 18-year-olds available to enter the nursing profession is likely to decline dramatically. Is it, therefore, not regrettable that so few health authorities encourage, retrain and consider

the special needs of young nurses who have young families and who wish to re-enter the profession after having been married?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend makes a valid point, and I am sure that all those who have responsibilies for the matter will take it on board.

Q3. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 11 February.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pike: Is the Lord President of the Council aware of a letter sent to hon. Members representing constituencies in the north-west by Dr. Thistlethwaite and other paediatricians in the north-west region about cutbacks and closures at St. Mary's hospital in Manchester? Does he realise that those paediatricians warn of the dire consequences if those closures and reductions in service take place, and that they may result in the deaths of babies? Will he recognise that there is a crisis in the Health Service and that the solution lies in the Government's hands? When will they adopt it?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not recognise the analysis that the hon. Gentleman gave. The Health Service is receiving this year the greatest increase in income it has every received. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister left me a note for the hon. Gentleman when she went away. She told me that I was to remind him that capital expenditure in his district increased by £16·5 million—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman did ask for figures.

Q4. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 11 February.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cash: Does my right hon. Friend share my deep concern about the organised violence—not merely the mindless hooliganism — at sporting events recently, including that at Bingley Hall in my constituency at the world title fight, and that reported today as having occurred in the Greater Manchester area? Will the Government consider taking improved powers to apprehend these thugs before they create havoc such as they created at those events?

Mr. Wakeham: I certainly share my hon. Friend's concern, and I believe that the House would wish to congratulate the police on their excellent work. The measures taken by the Government, the football authorities, the clubs and others have helped to tackle the menace of football hooliganism. There is still some way to go, and the disgraceful scenes on Sunday were deeply disturbing. I can assure my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will keep his suggestions—and others—in mind as possible ways of tackling the problem.

Q5. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 11 February.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McCartney: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Rachmanism is flourishing in Lambeth under a company called Toddingtons Ltd., in which the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) is the majority shareholder? This week it is evicting a Mr. Fisher, who has lived there with his sick mother for 14 years and who is unemployed. He is being evicted on the grounds that his mother has had to go into hospital.

Is it not outrageous that Rachmanism still abounds? Does the Leader of the House agree with the Labour party policy that people in the private sector should have the same right to buy from absentee landlords?

Mr. Wakeham: I am somewhat sceptical about what the hon. Gentleman said. He knows perfectly well that if he has anything of that sort to say he should deliver it to the police and not try to make party capital out of it. The fact of the matter is that no hon. Member would want anything to do with Rachmanism or anything like it. The Housing Bill brought in by my right hon. Friend and at present before Parliament will do a great deal more to improve the housing conditions of millions of people in this country than anything done by the Opposition.

Mr. Adley: Returning to things that are the responsibility of the Government, is my right hon. Friend aware that, following the Prime Minister's visit to the Channel tunnel, I have written to her asking whether she could obtain, for the benefit of the House, precise information as to the levels of investment and the criteria for that investment as between the French Government and SNCF on the one hand and the British Government and British Rail on the other? Will my right hon. Friend assist me and the House to obtain that information so that we may assess the relative actions of the two Governments in providing the necessary public infrastructure to maximise the advantage of the tunnel?

Mr. Wakeham: I will certainly refer that matter to my right hon. Friend. I cannot give my hon. Friend the answer that he wants here and now.

Q6. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 11 February.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Flannery: Will the Lord President turn his mind again to the question of Northern Ireland? Is there not a pervasive and growing stench about the refusal of the Attorney-General to engage in prosecutions in connection with the killing of those people, who were unarmed, especially the young man in the hay shed? Does he not realise that if there is not a judicial inquiry under the 1921 Act this will grow and grow? It will not go away, and it will sour relations with the Republic.

Mr. Wakeham: The first thing that the hon. Gentleman must get absolutely straight is that it was not the decision of the Attorney-General; it was the decision of the DPP not to prosecute.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): May I ask the Leader of the House to state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 15 FEBRUARY—Until seven o'clock private Members' motions.

Debate on agriculture on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. Details of the EC document relevant to the debate will be given in the *Official Report*.

TUESDAY 16 FEBRUARY — Remaining stages of the Immigration Bill.

Motion on the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order.

WEDNESDAY 17 FEBRUARY—Debate on a Government motion on the abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Supplemental timetable motion on the Education Reform Bill.

Motions on the Rate Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) (No. 3) 1986-87, (No. 4) 1983-84 and (No. 4) 1984-85.

THURSDAY 18 FEBRUARY—Until about seven o'clock motions relating to Social Fund regulations. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Motion on the Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order.

FRIDAY 19 FEBRUARY—Private Members' motions.

MONDAY 22 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the British Steel Bill.

[Debate on Monday 15 February

Relevant European Community Document:

4165/88 Agricultural Land: Set aside and extensification

Relevant MAFF Documents:

Unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum dated 27 January 1988

Agricultural Land: Set aside and extensification

Addendum dated 12 February 1988

Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee: HC 43-xiii (1987-88) para 1.

Debate on Thursday 18 February 1988

Social Fund (Application for Review) Regulations 1988 (S.I. 1988, No. 34).

Social Fund (Recovery by Deductions from Benefits) Regulations 1988 (S.I. 1988, No. 35).

Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses (General) Amendment Regulations 1988 (S.I. 1988, No. 36)].

Mr. Dobson: I thank the Leader of the House for his statement.

In view of his answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), when does the Leader of the House intend to find time to debate the Stalker-Sampson report, which raises fundamental issues affecting the rule of law? Will he give an undertaking that if any prosecutions following that report are to be announced, they will be announced in this House and not in some hole-and-corner manner?

While we welcome the extra time given to debate the Inner London education authority, surely the Leader of the House realises that what is needed is a new and separate Bill—that is, if he cannot persuade his right hon. and hon. Friends to abandon this vandalistic measure altogether.

Will the Leader of the House take steps to ensure that Thursday's debate on the rate-capping orders does not clash with the Committee stage of the poll tax Bill, because even the Secretary of State for the Environment cannot be in two places at once?

When will the House have the opportunity to debate the new packaging around the DTI, particularly as a debate on that is already scheduled for the House of Lords?

Can the Leader of the House tell us when there is likely to be a debate on the public expenditure White Paper, and also when there is likely to be a debate, in Government time, on the arts?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman has asked a number of questions. First, on the Stalker-Sampson report, I have already said to the House that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will make a statement to the House shortly. I believe that any other questions of debate and so on can be left until after that statement has been made.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the debate on ILEA next week. He suggested that it would be easier to proceed my means of a new Bill. I do not agree. Indeed, in last week's debate he suggested that the amendments to the current Bill would be out of order. If that is true, the hon. Gentleman will be proved right, but I believe that the amendments will be in order. I shall be arranging for the supplemental timetable motion to be tabled this afternoon. In addition to the day's debate that I have announced for next week, provision will be made for a further day on Report stage of the Education Reform Bill as well as additional time in the Standing Committee.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the debate on the rate limitation order and wondered whether the Committee should sit while that debate took place on the Floor of the House. That matter can be discussed through the usual channels.

I recognise the need for a debate on DTI matters in view of the number of initiatives that my right hon. Friend has taken. I shall certainly refer the matter to him, but I cannot promise a debate immediately.

There will be a debate fairly soon on public expenditure, but we are awaiting the report of the Select Committee.

I recognise that a debate on the arts is an extremely important matter and it is something I have in mind for the not too distant future.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): With reference to what is happening in Austria and the responsibility, in one aspect, of the British Government, is my right hon. Friend aware that the six British commandos, captured off Greece in 1944, were done to death under Hitler's infamous commando order? Everyone in the German Army at that time, whether their name was Waldheim or anything else, knew about that commando order. Indeed, two years previously six British Royal Marines—the Cockleshell heroes—were done to death under that order. In that case, however, there was a reckoning after the war and a war crimes trial. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that the action of those who destroyed the evidence

in the case of the commandos captured off Greece will be questioned and that there will be a thorough inquiry? Can the appropriate Minister make a statement to the House next week?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise my right hon. Friend's concern about these matters and I know that it is shared in many parts of the House. The British Government take seriously all allegations, especially when British service men are involved. We shall look at all the new information, but I cannot promise an early statement on the matter.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Has the Leader of the House seen the following early-day motions:

No. 653:

[That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve (Part-time) (Discipline and Disciplinary Appeals) Regulations 1988 (S.R.(N.I.), 1988, No. 8), dated 15th January 1988, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th February, be annulled.]

No. 654:

[That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Royal Ulster Constabulary (Complaints etc.) Regulations 1988 (S.R.(N.I.), 1988, No. 9), dated 15th January 1988, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th February, be annulled.]

No. 655:

[That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Royal Ulster Constabulary (Discipline and Disciplinary Appeals) Regulations 1988 (S.R. (N.I.), 1988, No. 10), dated 15th January 1988, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th February, be annulled.]

No. 656:

[That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Royal Ulster Constabulary (Complaints) (Informal Resolution) Regulations 1988 (S.R.(N.I.), 1988, No. 11), dated 15th January 1988, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th February, be annulled.]

The Leader of the House will note that they are in the form of prayers set down by myself and my hon. Friends relating to the Royal Ulster Constabulary. If the right hon. Gentleman provides time for those prayers to be debated, it will enable us to discuss the Stalker-Sampson inquiry in the light of the Attorney-General's statement and the forthcoming statement from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I hope that he will respond positively to that suggestion.

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that that might be a way out, but I think that I should best discuss it through the usual channels.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend again consider early-day motion 372:

[That this House believes that honourable and Right honourable Members should keep their speeches to 10 minutes or less when requested by Mr. Speaker in order to give more backbench Members of all parties an opportunity to speak, excepting only the four principal speakers in each debate.]

It is in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and concerns the limitation of speeches in the House. Perhaps my right hon. Friend will restore the experiment that was extremely successful in the previous Parliament. In view of the decision that was made this week about televising our proceedings, is it not even more important that there should be a better chance for hon. Members other than Front Bench spokesmen, Privy Councillors and wind-bags?

Mr. Wakeham: I shall not go down that road, but I recognise that there is a demand for such a change. There are a number of other procedural matters that I would like to bring before the House. I am having discussions through the usual channels and with other interested parties, and I hope to make progress as soon as possible.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Further to the answer that the Leader of the House gave his right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) about the Austrian question, is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Austria's many friends are deeply disturbed by the reports of the international historians' commission to the effect that, despite President Waldheim's denials, he was well aware of atrocities in the Balkans and in Greece? Will the Leader of the House ensure that we have either an early statement or a debate about this matter — particularly about the report in yesterday's edition of *The Daily Telegraph* that President Waldheim was aware of the torture and execution of six commandos in Salonica in Greece?

Mr. Wakeham: I know of the hon. Gentleman's interest in this matter and of his concern. As I understand it, the international commission of historians has delivered its report to the Austrian Government and the Austrian Government are now considering its report. The British Government will be prepared to consider any reports arising from that inquiry.

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): My right hon. Friend will be aware of my long-standing interest in this matter. I can only reinforce what my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) and the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) have said. The fate of those commandos is of genuine national interest. What happened so long ago is of interest to us as a nation and as a European power. The full truth must be revealed. May I ask my right hon. Friend to ask his colleagues what happened to those files in 1978 that were deliberately destroyed?

Mr. Wakeham: I shall certainly ensure that the contributions of my hon. Friend and of other right hon. and hon. Members are drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Bruce Millan (Glasgow, Govan): Will the Leader of the House assure us that there will be a statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer early next week on Britoil and the Government's intentions with regard to the use of the golden share? There have been discussions between the Treasury and BP on the one hand and the Treasury and Britoil on the other, but the House has not been informed of the line that the Government have taken in those discussions. In Scotland there is a keen interest in the question whether the Government are genuinely trying to protect Scottish interests in this very important matter or whether they are simply engaged in a sell-out to BP.

Mr. Wakeham: I do not think that I can add anything to what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said when he answered a private notice question on this subject at the beginning of the month. However, I shall refer the right

[Mr. Wakeham]

hon. Gentleman's points to him and, if he feels that it is necessary to make a further statement, I am sure that he will.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): As we have witnessed the signing of the INF agreement and passed the Arms Control and Disarmament (Privileges and Immunities) Bill to make arrangements for observers and inspectors, and as there is a need to harmonise all the European forces' weaponry, may we have a debate including a discussion of conventional weapons and chemical weapons reductions and, most important of all, the future of the Western European Union as the European pillar of NATO?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): There is a debate today.

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has taken the words out of my mouth. I was going to say that, with a little ingenuity—of course, this is a matter not for me, but for you, Mr. Speaker—my hon. Friend might well find that some of his points are relevant to today's debate.

Mr. Harold McCusker (Upper Bann): Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us the difference between "shortly" and "as soon as possible", which was how he described last week the timescale in which we might expect a statement from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland? Has he any concept of how the people of Northern Ireland feel after three weeks in which the Secretary of State has warned us of a renewed terrorist assault and told us about the new brigade organisation to defend the border and how they feel about the details of the Stalker affair? Can the Leader of the House imagine how the people of Northern Ireland feel about the fact that foreign politicians have been able informally and formally, at Prime Minister level, to discuss matters affecting their daily lives? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware how they feel about their elected representatives being ignored day after day? Two years ago I asked his predecessor whether the elected representatives of Northern Ireland were redundant. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that we are redundant?

Mr. Wakeham: How many times has the hon. Gentleman asked to see my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State but been refused? The hon. Gentleman asked what was the difference between "shortly" and "as soon as possible". "As soon as possible" cannot be shortened, but "shortly" could be shortened.

As to the substantial and serious matter that the hon. Gentleman raised—I do not treat these matters other than seriously—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has said that he will make a statement. I recognise the concern that the statement should be made as soon as possible. I am sure that the House will recognise that there are serious and weighty matters to be considered. Hon. Members would not want my right hon. Friend to make a statement without having considered all those matters extremely carefully.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): As to next week's debate on the revised guillotine motion on the Education Reform Bill, will my right hon. Friend ensure that that revised motion, and any subsequent motions relating to the Report stage, leave plenty of time for proper discussion of the role of universities, given the concern about the present drafting of the Bill?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is right. I said during my speech on the timetable motion that the purpose of introducing it was to ensure that all parts of the Bill were properly discussed. As the part of the Bill dealing with universities comes at the end of it, I had that in mind as much as any other matter.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 499.

[That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Electricity Generating Stations and Overhead Lines (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1987 (S.I., 1987, No. 2182), dated 16th December 1987, a copy of which was laid before this House on 18th December, be annulled.]

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the number of praying days allowed for it will be exhausted by next Friday? Will he confirm that there is no provision for it in next week's business anyway? When does he intend to make provision for it, and will he assure the House that that provision will be made on the Floor of the House rather than in Committee?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise the concern of a number of hon. Members about this matter. A Labour Member raised this matter with me last week. I said that any debate on the subject would have to be agreed through the usual channels. There is a lot of business that we need to get through, but we shall do our best to find time if that is the general wish.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Following the clear decision of the House on Tuesday regarding an experiment in the televised broadcasting of our proceedings, will my right hon. Friend say what he thinks the next step in this process will be and reaffirm, as he said with such alacrity after the debate, that the Government intend to introduce measures and proposals as soon as is reasonably possible?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot add anything to what I said in my speech earlier this week. The first step is to set up a Select Committee to look into the matters required of it by the House. Discussions are taking place to work out the best way forward.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the Leader of the House find time for us to debate the recent activities of the Economic League, which has been spying on innocent British citizens? Will he note that more than 100 hon. Members have signed my early-day motion on that subject? Will he find time for the Scottish Grand Committee to meet to discuss the needs of the Health Service in Scotland? I am sorry to raise two separate issues, but they are both important, and I hope that that is acceptable.

Mr. Wakeham: I advise the hon. Lady that I regard one of those subjects as especially important. Her earlier point was about the Economic League. I cannot promise the hon. Lady a debate on either subject in the immediate future.

Mr. W. Benyon (Milton Keynes): In view of the timetable motion that has been announced today for next week's business after the usual statutory virility period in

that Committee, would it not be sensible to reopen the report of the previous Procedure Committee and to reconsider this matter because it is becoming a farce?

Mr. Wakeham: I know that my hon. Friend has strong views on that matter. In my speech on the timetable motion, I said that I certainly do not accuse the Opposition of any filibustering on the Bill. I brought in the timetable motion to meet many of my hon. Friend's objectives—to see that there is an orderly discussion of the Bill, right the way through its stages, so that all parts of the Bill can be discussed which, I believe, is what the House would like to see.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate on the confectionery industry? I have a special interest because I like the product, but at the same time a massive inflow from abroad is affecting the balance of payments and jobs in the confectionery industry in this country. I should like in a debate to refer to Rowntrees and its Black Magic box. Rowntrees has stopped putting in the liquid cherries. I am not going to buy any more boxes and there will be other people like me. That is bound to affect jobs, so we need a debate to try to overcome the problem.

Mr. Wakeham: One gets all sorts of questions in this House. I am not sure that the confectionery industry would be much improved by a debate, but it seems to me that it would be much improved by taking on board some of the better economic conditions in this country and the opportunities for enterprise that have been created under the Government. Let us hope that there is more competition in the industry.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Notwithstanding the fact that next week the Prime Minister will presumably be making a statement on the European summit in Brussels, would it not be helpful to have a debate soon so that hon. Members of all parties can say clearly to our European partners that we are not prepared to see any increase in the European budget until or unless expenditure is brought under control, which it manifestly is not at the moment?

Mr. Wakeham: These are important issues on which there will have to be time for debate. Although I cannot promise a special debate next week, I draw my hon. Friend's attention to Monday's debate on agriculture to which some EC documents will be relevant. That seems an opportunity on which, with a little skill, my hon. Friend may be able to make points that he wants to make.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): Is the Leader of the House aware that allegations are circulating in the north-west of England that the recent liberal agreement reached with Turkey to allow tremendous imports of acrylic yarn into this country was a quid pro quo by the Prime Minister so that when she visits Turkey shortly she will be able triumphantly to announce that we have obtained a large civil engineering contract? Should not the right hon. Gentleman leave a note for the Prime Minister asking her to come here next week either to confirm or to deny those rumours?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot give any credence or substantiation to what the hon. Gentleman has said, but I will refer the matter to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend concede the demand from hon. Members of all parties for an early debate on Northern Ireland? That would give the Government the opportunity of explaining how it is right to give the Irish Republic the right to interfere in the affairs of Northern Ireland when the Minister of Justice for the Irish Republic appears to think that it would be normal and proper in this country for the Government to interfere in the workings and considerations of the Court of Appeal in respect of the Birmingham six case.

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that my hon. Friend speaks for a large number of hon. Members. We shall have to see what can be done. I stick to my point that we should first have the statement from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman please respond to the point made by the right hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) and the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) calling for a statement on the Waldheim affair? Meanwhile, will he ask the Foreign Secretary whether we have in our control any documents that have been removed from the Public Record Office referring to those commandos and seek an assurance from the Foreign Secretary that until the matter is sorted out no British diplomat will attend any function in Austria that is attended by President Waldheim?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise the hon. and learned Gentleman's strength of feeling. I take on board his point, but I cannot add to what I said to my right hon. Friend the Father of the House.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many hon. Members have sympathy with his difficulty in fitting the large amount of legislation into the parliamentary programme? In particular, he will know of my concern about the lack of debate on the proposals of the Select Committee on European Legislation that should be debated in the House before Ministers go to the Council of Ministers and make decisions on our behalf, particularly in regard to steel. He will be aware that the Prime Minister is in Brussels, but the House has not had the opportunity to discuss the European Economic Community budget since 1986.

Is it not time to look again at the way in which we deal with European legislation? Would it not be a good idea to set up the Procedure Committee and ask it to make recommendations to the House on how we should properly consider European legislation?

Mr. Wakeham: The way that my hon. Friend has suggested might be helpful. Certainly I recognise that some consideration of European matters has not been as good as it should have been. I apologise to my hon. Friend and to the House for that, but there were special circumstances. It would be right to set up the Procedure Committee. Discussions are taking place, and if a decision is made to discuss that topic, it will have my blessing.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): As the Prime Minister is away and we can all talk freely, may I assure the Leader of the House that I believe him to be a good loser and that he will not attempt to frustrate the decision taken by the House about televising our proceedings? I do not have similar faith in the right hon. Lady the Prime Minister. I am convinced, having watched her seethe, that

[Mr. Tony Banks]

she is probably planning at this very moment some hideous and bloody revenge. Will the Leader of the House give an assurance that the Select Committee will not be so packed as to thwart the decision of the House and that the Government will give a firm pledge that they accept that decision and that we will have a fair chance to consider the report of the Select Committee?

Mr. Wakeham: When the hon. Gentleman talks about good losers and congratulating losers, I bow to his greater knowledge and experience in such matters and take it as a compliment. The Prime Minister has always felt that television in the House would benefit her and the Government, and no doubt she will take advantage of the benefit that the House has bestowed upon her. However, she thought that television was not in the interests of Parliament, and that is why she voted as she did.

The House has made a decision. I accept that decision and feel that we should implement it as best we can. The Select Committee will be charged with that task, and I hope that it will represent all sections of the House. I do not believe that any hon. Member should go on that Select Committee and attempt to frustrate the will of the House. That is how we deal with such matters.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): As someone who voted in favour of the principle of televising the House but who does not want to be on the Select Committee, may I urge a cautious timetable on my right hon. Friend? When he spoke on Tuesday, he suggested a possible starting date of October. May I suggest that such a deadline is less important than giving the Select Committee plenty of time to examine the technical options? Perhaps it should not conclude its deliberations until the Government bring forward their proposals on the future of broadcasting which will mean more cable and satellite channels which would allow parliamentary programmes to be more generally spread across the spectrum without being squeezed into the duopoly channels that we presently have.

Mr. Wakeham: I do not think that I should add to what I said in the debate. However, I recognise that I put forward an ambitious timetable. We shall set out to do what we can, but I agree that we must have the right answers for a proper experiment. I am delighted to hear that my hon. Friend does not want to serve on the Select Committee. It might be easier if we were to reverse the normal process so that those who do not want to be on the Select Committee write to me and those who do not write I shall assume do. I shall receive fewer letters that way.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Did the Prime Minister leave the Leader of the House a note saying that she has had second thoughts about robbing many pensioners and others on low incomes of their full entitlement to compensation for the Government's mistake in calculating the retail prices index? The Prime Minister may be one of Britain's richest pensioners, who does not even need to draw her full parliamentary salary, but will the Leader of the House send her a note, while she is wining and dining her way round Europe, saying that many people, such as my constituent, Mr. Jackson, can ill afford to be robbed of £8? This is a matter of public confidence in good government. There is no excuse for the Government robbing pensioners and others on low incomes of their full entitlement.

Mr. Wakeham: The Prime Minister did leave me a note explaining how, when the Government had dealt with the problem of the computer error, which regrettably resulted in an under-payment in pensions, the matter would be put right in a way which was generally acceptable to most people.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): In framing the future business of the House, will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that early-day motion 275 on the abolition of the dock labour scheme now has 210 signatures?

[That this House believes that the National Dock Labour Scheme is an anachronism which both endangers the viability of jobs in the scheme areas and acts as a deterrent to job creation by new ventures; and calls on Her Majesty's Government to abolish the scheme, and open negotiations immediately with employers and unions to bring that about.]

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that, but I cannot add anything to what I said on that question some weeks ago.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Has the Leader of the House had an opportunity to consider further the contents of early-day motion 574?

[That this House notes the assurances given to the House on 31st March 1982 and 1st April 1982, Official Report, columns 333, 334 and 450, by both the present Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer and by Lord Gray of Contin, the then Minister of State for Energy, that the 'golden share' would offer effective safeguards for Britoil's independence; questions whether this has been shown to be the case; and calls for a full debate on the guidance given to the House by Mr. Chancellor and the noble Lord on the efficacy of the 'golden share' provisions when they were seeking honourable Members' approval for the privatisation of BNOC.]

Given the importance of an independent Britoil to the Scottish economy and the oil industry, and given the importance to the House of Commons of ensuring that promises made in 1982 are fully honoured in 1988, is there not the strongest case for a full debate on the matter, rather than a series thus far of ambiguous statements from the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

Mr. Wakeham: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was in the House when my right hon. Friend made his statement. I suggest that he re-reads it because it was an authoritative statement. As I told the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan), I shall refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and I am sure that he will make another statement should it be necessary.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for an early statement from the Secretary of State for the Environment on the dissemination of information? *[Interruption]*. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has made only one correct statement since I became a Member of the House 10 years ago, and that was this afternoon.

May we debate the dissemination of information by local authorities so that I can draw the Secretary of State's attention to a mendacious document, circulated by post at public expense to all council tenants in Ealing, telling them that their council homes could be removed from them under housing legislation currently going through Parliament? That has frightened many pensioners and others, yet the members of Ealing council and many others

know, or should know, that under that legislation no secure council tenant will be transferred to any other landlord against his or her wishes.

Mr. Tony Banks: That is not right. The hon. Gentleman should read the Bill. I am a member of the Committee that is considering it.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question was put to the Leader of the House.

Mr. Wakeham: One of the advantages of living in Ealing is that one is represented by my hon. Friend. He makes his point well, but I cannot arrange a debate on the subject next week.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Prison Officers Association has now started to refuse people on remand entrance to certain London prisons? Indeed, it now appears that the number of prisoners detained in London police stations is once again rising quickly and alarmingly. Bearing in mind the exorbitant cost of housing prisoners in police stations and the damage that that does to police efficiency and manpower resources, will the Leader of the House persuade the Home Secretary either to come to the Dispatch Box in the early part of next week, or arrange a short debate in the week following, so that we can once again try to tackle the problem which is becoming alarming in its frequency?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that it is a serious problem and I shall refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. He will be answering questions in the House next Thursday and that will provide an opportunity to question him if he does not feel it right to make a statement before that time.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the grossly inaccurate reports that have been circulated on the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster fund, that the trustees have been extremely successful in collecting £6 million which will be dispensed to the needy within one year, that the trustees are grateful to the Government for their contribution of £1 million, and that the trustees do not intend to see a large tax payment? In fact, the Government are unlikely to see much tax at all because the children and orphans will be paid their money out of interest and should be able to reclaim tax paid on that. In addition, can my right hon. Friend confirm to the great British public who contributed to the fund, for which the trustees are grateful, that they will not see any of their contributions going back to Exchequer in tax because the only substantive amount of tax that is likely to be paid is on the commercial sale of records, not on the public's contributions?

Mr. Wakeham: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. I have seen the statement issued by the chairman of the disaster fund in which he said that he had chosen to establish the fund as a discretionary trust rather than as a charity, knowing full well the consequences of doing so. The object was to give the trust more freedom to make payments as it saw fit. The trustees are grateful to the Government for their prompt donation of £1 million, as they are for the donations from everybody else.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In view of remarks that were made earlier, will the Leader of the House be a little more positive and ensure that we have a statement next week on the position of the commandos who, after being captured, were handed over to the Gestapo to be murdered in cold blood by an army unit which had first questioned them in which Waldheim was involved? Can the Austrians be forewarned, in the most diplomatic way possible, that the overwhelming majority of the British people, regardless of their political views or lack of them, find it difficult to understand how someone who, during the war, was an active accomplice of mass murderers can now be President of Austria? That stinks in the nostrils of ordinary people.

Mr. Wakeham: I am not in a position to comment on the substance of the points that the hon. Gentleman has made, but I recognise his strength of feeling and that of the House, and I shall certainly refer the matter to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Without wishing to associate myself with the rhetoric or the accusations of the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), may I ask my right hon. Friend to reconsider his reply? Will he acknowledge that there is confusion in the country about the £8? May we have a statement next week, if only in the form of an extended written answer, clarifying the position?

Mr. Wakeham: I shall look into the matter, and see if anything can be done to assist my hon. Friend.

Mr. Speaker: Order. As the House knows, I am always reluctant to curtail business questions, but there is an important debate to follow. I shall call those hon. Members who have been rising.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Leader of the House has already heard two different representations on the question of back payments to pensioners and those on invalidity and other benefits. The simple argument is that, if there are two recipients in the house with two order books, they receive two payments of £8; if there is only one with a dependent wife or children, that person will receive only £8, because there is only one book. The matter ought to be sorted out.

When the Leader of the House sends his message to the Prime Minister when she comes back, will he tell her that there is trouble at the mill as well? Some staff in the House —for instance, those working behind the tea bars—are threatening industrial action, for the simple reason that their back pay is being docked. Some people, instead of receiving £2,000 in back pay, have been offered £250, or, in some cases, £400. Will he look into the matter and get it sorted out? Otherwise he will have a strike on his hands.

Mr. Wakeham: I think that I shall also get into a spot of trouble if I do not look into it before I report it to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 652?

[That this House, in view of the widespread disquiet at the recent judgement by the Court of Appeal in the case of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings, calls upon the Home Secretary to establish an independent review tribunal, along the lines recommended by the Home Affairs Select Committee Report on Miscarriages of Justice, in particular to examine the claim by the honourable Member

[Mr. Chris Mullin]

for Sunderland South that he has traced and interviewed the four men responsible for the bombings and that they are all in Ireland.]

The motion has attracted 152 signatures in the space of 48 hours. It is signed by members of all parties and reflects widespread concern, not only in this place but in the country. It has implications not just for the six innocent men who have been in prison for 14 years, but for the judicial system, and the many issues arising from it. May I urge the right hon. Gentleman to find time for an early debate on the subject?

Mr. Wakeham: I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware of the terms of the motion, but I shall undertake to draw it to his attention. This is a matter of constitutional principle, and it should primarily be for the courts and the judical process to review convictions and the alleged miscarriages of justice.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): Has the Leader of the House seen early-day motion 647 about the Blue Circle bid for Birmid Qualcast?

[That this House expresses concern that the future of one of Britain's smallest companies is threatened by a current take-over attempt; notes that Birmid Qualcast is a Midlands based company which also has companies in the North West, that its management and workforce have overcome the severe problems facing the foundry industry and have achieved a very viable castings business and also have become a market leader in consumer durables with household names such as New World, Potterton, Atco and Qualcast; further notes that the company is faced with a take-over bid from Blue Circle Cement, which whilst it has finance available, has no expertise in the field in which Birmid Qualcast operates; and calls upon the Government to look at take-over bids which threaten the independence of companies such as Qualcast, with consequences for the national interest and for employment in the manufacturing sector.]

If not, will he read it?

An efficient small company has reorganised itself, as the Government have asked small companies to do, and is now a leader in consumer durables, with household names such as Potterton, New World, Atco and Qualcast. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is something wrong with the Government's interpretation of "national interest" as being about free competition when a company such as Blue Circle Cement, which has no expertise in the field, can make a bid for Birmid Qualcast, and can threaten employment and a small company that has seen off foreign competitors? Will he arrange for an early debate?

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced on 3 February his decision not to refer the proposed merger to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. That decision was in accordance with the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading. I do not therefore consider it necessary to devote further parliamentary time to the issue.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Does the Leader of the House accept that an opportunity to debate the Economic League would give hon. Members on both sides of the House the chance to agree that character assassination by blacklist is as unacceptable in Thatcher's Britain as it should have been in McCarthy's America?

Mr. Speaker: Order. We refer to each other by our constituencies or offices here.

Mr. Wilson: In that case, it is as unacceptable in the Prime Minister's Britain as in the senator from Wisconsin's America.

Does the Leader of the House recognise that it must be, and if it is not it should be, a matter of considerable importance to the House that prima facie evidence is very strong that a private enterprise secret police force is operating in this country, and that one of its leading lights is Lord Cayzer, whose companies are the leading financiers of the Conservative party? Does he agree that the existence of such a police force, apparently in connivance with the official police force, should be a matter of some interest to the House?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot promise Government time to debate the issue, but I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman might have a word with his hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench to see whether they could find some time for it.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): Has the leader of the House had an opportunity to consider early-day motion 677, together with newspaper reports circulating in Scotland today, concerning the effective use of NHS funds to subsidise those working in the private health industry?

[That this House condemns the proposal that some Scottish health boards use public funds to place National Health Service patients in private hospitals; notes the statement made by the Chairman of the Murrayfield plc, operators of the Murrayfield private hospitals in Edinburgh, in his annual report in 1987 that "To date occupancy and profit are below budget" and the most recently published accounts of the Glasgow Independent Hospitals Ltd. Trading as AMI Ross Hall; considers that, far from being a lifeline to the National Health Service, these funds are a subsidy and a much needed boost to the private health industry; and calls upon the Secretary of State and boards, which have been instructed by him that their decision must reflect his policies, to ensure that no public funds be paid directly or indirectly to the private health industry, but are instead devoted to the National Health Service.]

Will the right hon. Gentleman allow a debate to give the House an opportunity to deplore that practice? His brief may tell him that the decision was made by Scottish health boards. Is he aware that the Secretary of State for Scotland has informed all health boards that they are there to act as his agents and to do his bidding, and that the authorisation of the use of NHS funds in private hospitals must therefore have come from the highest level? Is it not time that we debated the issue?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot promise an early debate on the subject, but the additional resources of £7·6 million for the National Health Service in Scotland announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland on 16 December were allocated to health boards for a range of patient needs, including the specific policy aim of reducing waiting lists. Some boards considered that, in their circumstances, that would be best achieved by buying services from the private sector.

The Government very much welcome the reduction in waiting lists that the boards are achieving, and note that the resources made available are being devoted entirely to the care of National Health patients.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Is the Leader of the House aware that it has not gone unnoticed that the Government have managed to avoid a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee ever since the general election back in June last year? We recognise that it would be embarrassing for the Government to view the spectacle of a Committee containing only 10 Government supporters and 62 Opposition Members, but can the right hon. Gentleman begin to put that right by arranging for an early meeting of the Committee in Edinburgh to discuss the crisis affecting the National Health Service in Scotland?

Mr. Wakeham: I believe that last time we tried to organise a Committee meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee there were certain difficulties that were not entirely of the Government's making. However, if there are demands for a meeting, I think that they would be best discussed through the usual channels.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Is the Leader of the House aware that, since the general election, the Welsh Grand Committee has met on three separate occasions, and yet the Scottish Grand Committee has not met once? As my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) has suggested, we are becoming a wee bit suspicious that the Secretary of State for Scotland is afraid to appear, because he will have only nine supporters — that is, if the Secretary of State for Defence is able to come along, which is very unlikely — whereas there will be 62 Opposition Members ranged against him.

Will the Leader of the House follow the example of his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, go over the head of the Secretary of State for Scotland and arrange a number of meetings of the Committee so that we can discuss urgent matters, such as education, the Health Service, the postponement of the bypasses in south Ayrshire and all the other matters which are causing great concern in Scotland today and which we are not having an opportunity to discuss?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman puts his case with such force that I think that he is worried that I may concede it, and he may have to go there. However, I have nothing further to add.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): I rose only recently, and as usual reluctantly, because of a comment that the Leader of the House made a few moments ago. Would he care to rephrase and reconsider his response, in which he appeared to say that on the Select Committee on televising the House he would not want to have anybody who wanted to frustrate the will of the House? Does he not mean that he will keep off everybody who voted against the introduction of television cameras? Does he not think it wiser to have on the Committee knowledgeable, experienced hon. Members who know something about the dangers of the introduction and would want to ensure that very clever and subtle restraints are placed on the misuse and abuse of the televison cameras and to ensure that others external to the House do not choose the pictures, comment or selection? Does he not realise that there must be a large number of safeguards, because we do not want to put out to the public pictures of right hon. or hon. Members scratching their right buttock or picking their left nostril?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman has no need to write me a letter; I have got the message. I said that I do not believe that anybody should go on the Select Committee with the purpose of frustrating the will of the House. I certainly recognise the validity of the hon. Gentleman's argument. I think the Select Committee should have representatives of all points of view in the House who are prepared to work to put into practice what the House has resolved, so I accept the substance of what he has said.

Claire Wise

4.20 pm

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the urgent need for Claire Wise, from Kidsgrove, to be admitted to the Birmingham children's hospital for open-heart surgery as a matter of urgency."

The matter is urgent because Claire, aged seven, needs open-heart surgery and is one of over 100 children waiting to be admitted to the Birmingham children's hospital heart unit for her operation. At Christmas her parents were advised that she should have this operation within three months, before she has outgrown the shunt operation she had some time ago. Since then I have pressed for Claire to be given an admission date so that she can have her operation before she becomes an emergency.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I raised the matter in the Adjournment debate on 19 January, and I have written to the Minister since then but he has not yet bothered to reply. Meanwhile, Claire's parents were sent a letter on Tuesday of this week telling them that she was to be admitted on Monday next. Imagine their relief. Imagine their despair when they received a second letter the very next day—yesterday—saying that the operation has had to be cancelled until further notice. I ask the House: what should they do? What would any parent do? What will the Government do?

I know that all scheduled operations for this week and next week are cancelled at the Birmingham children's hospital heart unit, which means that those on the waiting list will have to wait even longer. Time is running out for them and for Claire. It is common sense that intolerable strain is placed on all other vital organs of the body if open-heart surgery which is urgently needed is delayed. I know also that the intensive care unit is full. Those children who become emergencies will have to depend upon the good will of the nurses or being able to survive a journey to London.

I appeal to you, Mr. Speaker, to agree to adjourn the House so that we may debate the matter. How else can Government Ministers tell me what urgent steps they are taking to allocate extra money to designate intensive care unit beds for heart patients in the west midlands, to recruit and train nurses for intensive care beds locally and nationally, and to ensure that Claire gets her operation before it is too late? Without an Adjournment, I appeal to every person in the west midlands health region who cares about Claire and others like her to write to me expressing their concern so that the Government can be made to face up to their failure to provide health care for those who need it. Time is running out for Claire.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Lady asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that she believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the cancellation of the operation on Claire Wise at the Birmingham children's hospital heart unit."

I have listened with concern to what the hon. Lady has said about her constituent. As she knows, the decision I have to take in these difficult matters is whether to give the matter precedence over the business set down for today or Monday. I regret that I cannot find the matter that she has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20 Therefore, I cannot submit her application to the House. I hope that she will find other parliamentary ways of raising the matter in the Chamber.

Later——

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) has raised what you, Mr. Speaker, rightly described as a very serious matter. I understand the difficulties you are placed in when such a matter is raised. I believe I am right in saying that the relevant Departments are notified of the contents of applications under Standing Order No. 20. Is it not astonishing, in view of the seriousness of the application, that not one Minister from the Department of Health was present when the application was made? You have rightly said that my hon. Friend may find other opportunities of raising the matter. Many applications have been made concerning the Birmingham children's hospital, and it must be a matter of widespread public concern in the west midlands and in the country at large.

Would it be possible, Mr. Speaker, for you to make representations following the application from my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North, to the Department asking it to make a statement — possibly tomorrow morning, in view of the urgency of the matter — because that would be a convenient parliamentary opportunity for my hon. Friend to raise the matter?

Mr. Speaker: It is not a matter for me whether a statement is made. This would have been a very good question to put to the Leader of the House. I have heard the hon. Lady's application, but I could not give it precedence because of the criteria laid down in the Standing Orders. The House will appreciate that many operations are cancelled, sadly, for various reasons and it is my difficult duty to make a decision on exactly which should be given precedence and which should not.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Everyone recognises your difficulty and the criteria you apply, but there is growing concern among west midlands Members of Parliament that of necessity they are making representations about indvidual cases, many of which relate to the gross inadequacies of the Birmingham children's hospital and its capacity to provide the operations that children in that area need. I ask you to bear in mind, if there are further applications, that each application is but a single symptom of what is wrong. I ask you to give some consideration to the generality of the problem for people in the west midlands.

Mr. Speaker: I will certainly do that. The hon. Gentleman might also bear in mind that he has the opportunity to raise those matters on Opposition Supply days.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It has become noticeable in the past several weeks that the applications in relation to these children, almost without exception, as far as I am aware —I am here, like you, Mr. Speaker, every day—come from the west midlands. You have said that you find some difficulty with the criteria on single applications, such as those from my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North

(Mr. Winnick), my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley). You say that you cannot accept an application under Standing Order No. 20 because the criteria do not allow it. When it becomes apparent that there is not one or two but a number of cases, which do not come from other regions, it becomes apparent, and I am not an hon. Member from the west midlands——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): It is an organised campaign.

Mr. Speaker: Order. A point of order is being put to me.

Mr. Skinner: What I am trying to say, despite that altercation, is that many of us, as I am sure you know, Mr. Speaker, would be making representations from our own areas and not just the west midlands if we were faced with this sort of problem. Will you accept an application from, say, one of my hon. Friends for a debate on the Health Service in the west midlands? Would such an application meet with your approval?

Mr. Speaker: I do not think I can do that. I take individual applications, but the Opposition have the opportunity to choose a general subject for debate once a week on average.

Mr. Dobson *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. No. The question has been put to me. It is in order for the Opposition to use that procedure if they judge that is right. I have to take a very difficult decision, and I hope that the House realises it is not easy to adjudicate on these matters. I cannot give the House my reasons for refusing an application, but there are clinical and medical judgments as well as other matters to take into account.

Mr. Dobson: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. We recognise that there are Opposition daysavailable, but if anyone checks the position he would discover that virtually every debate on the National Health Service that has taken place in the House in recent years has been in Opposition time. My right hon. and hon. Friends from the west midlands took the opportunity to raise the issue during the two most recent debates. The Birmingham issue gets lost in fairly general debates. We are looking for a prompt response to the crisis in the west midlands, or even some time from the Government. After all, they are responsible for resourcing and running the Health Service, although they are most reluctant to have any debates about it.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On that same point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is a bit unfair on other hon. Members who wish to take part in debates to carry on with this matter, which is challenging my judgment. I make a judgment on these matters with extreme care. There may come a time when I feel that the criteria are right, but there are many issues at stake, not least the criterion of urgency, but also clinical judgments to make.

Mr. Winnick: I was in no way challenging your judgment, Mr. Speaker, nor have my hon. Friends done so. You will know that I made an application under Standing Order No. 20, and in relation to that case I think it is right to say that the whole country is hoping and praying that the child will survive after 10 hours of surgery.

Bearing in mind the valid points made from the Opposition Front Bench and my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), would it not help you, Mr. Speaker, to avoid the constant applications that undoubtedly will be made if one of the Health Ministers makes a statement at the earliest opportunity about the crisis facing the Health Service in the west midlands? I hope that the Leader of the House will be notified of what we are saying. We are now facing the most difficult problem since the NHS came into being. Surely part of our job as Members of Parliament who represent the west midlands is to raise the issue on the Floor of the House. If a statement is made early next week on the crisis that I have referred to, there will be less need for these applications.

Mr. Madden: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Several Opposition Members, during the exchanges that have just taken place on the application under Standing Order No. 20, clearly heard the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) accuse my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) and others of my hon. Friends who have made similar applications recently of participating in an organised campaign.

Bearing in mind the allegations that have been made only today about the hon. Member for Northampton, North evicting his tenants in Lambeth, it ill becomes him to make allegations of that sort on these very serious matters.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Fortunately, I do not hear everything that goes on below the Gangway, but it does not help when allegations of that kind are shouted across the Chamber from a sedentary position.

Northern Ireland (Questions)

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I raise a point of order arising out of Prime Minister's Question Time, which was highlighted in the exchange between my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) and the Leader of the House, on the problems of representatives from Northern Ireland, particularly those in the larger parties, in dealing with affairs affecting Northern Ireland.

If one examines the pattern of questions on Northern Ireland over the past three weeks, one sees that we have been missed, for whatever reason. Unfortunately, the Leader of the House confirmed today what some of us have feared when he said to my hon. Friend, "How many times have you asked for an interview or a meeting with the Secretary of State?" As we understand it, this is the place to ask questions, the place of scrutiny. We feel frustrated that others can get in on the act but we apparently cannot. I should like some guidance from the Chair.

Mr. Speaker: I can give the hon. Gentleman clear guidance. He had a perfect opportunity this afternoon to put a question to the Leader of the House on that very matter. I did not call him because he did not rise.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I have been standing on every occasion, even in Question Time today.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Unfortunately, not every hon. Member can ask a question at Question Time. I keep a careful list of who is called and when and who rises and does not get called. The hon. Gentleman does very well.

BILL PRESENTED

British Steel

Mr. Kenneth Clarke, supported by Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Walker, Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Ian Lang and Mr. Robert Atkins, presented a Bill to provide for the vesting of the property, rights and liabilities of the British Steel Corporation in a company nominated by the Secretary of State and for the subsequent dissolution of the Corporation; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 96.]

The Royal Air Force

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

4.34 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Ian Stewart): It is five years since I last took part in a single service debate in the House, and although the scene today in the Royal Air Force is clearly recognisable as having developed from that of five years ago, there is also much that has changed. In particular, the reorganisation of the top levels of the three services and the central staff in the Ministry of Defence, which took place in 1985, was not only an attempt to give greater weight to the tri-service approach to defence policy, but a recognition that the three services themselves, both in objectives and in operations, have been becoming increasingly interdependent.

It has been my clear impression, on returning to the Ministry of Defence, that although many anxieties were expressed at the time about the reorganisation, it has now not only been accepted by the individual services, but it has been found to work well in practice and has led to increased co-operation at all levels from the senior staffs to operational units around the world.

I believe that it is still right for Parliament to have the opportunity to look in closer detail at the single services. However, as became evident from the recent Army debate, there is now a substantial overlap of function from one service to another. In many areas of defence policy and activity the interests of one service cannot sensibly be discussed without taking account of the other two, or indeed looking at our defence capabilities as a whole. Although I want to devote most of my time today to discussing matters directly relating to the Royal Air Force, I also want to say something about certain aspects of defence strategy as a whole which, while highly relevant to the activities of the Royal Air Force, are not exclusive to any one service.

Before addressing those wider issues, I want to describe the current state of play in the continuous process of modernisation of the Royal Air Force, to say something of its training and exercise programe, and to deal with a number of matters concerning its personnel. Let me at the outset remind the House of the very wide range of functions which fall to the Royal Air Force to perform. In the first place, it has primary responsibility for the air defence of the United Kingdom, detecting enemy aircraft and countering them with interceptor fighters, with Bloodhound and Rapier missiles, and with Skyguard radar-controlled guns. In the Federal Republic of Germany it maintains a substantial part of the second allied tactical air force contributing both air defence and strike/attack aircraft.

The RAF also provides units for the early reinforcement of the northern region of the NATO area, and its Nimrods and Buccaneers protect shipping used for reinforcement and re-supply against the threat of hostile ships and submarines. In addition, the RAF provides airlift support for all three services and is capable of mounting operations at long distance. Out of area it supports our defence commitments in Belize, Ascension island, the Falklands, Cyprus and Hong Kong.

The major modernisation of the Royal Air Force is also a most striking feature of the last five years. Since 1979,

the Government have devoted very considerable extra resources to the RAF, amounting to £8 billion after allowing for inflation. Nine squadrons based in Germany and the United Kingdom have already been equipped in the strike/attack role with the Tornado GR1 which, with its terrain-following radar, provides a capability to penetrate enemy air defences far in advance of that of the Jaguars and Buccaneers that they replace.

Two more squadrons will be formed for the reconnaissance role, one based in RAF Germany, to replace the current Jaguar squadron, and, later, an additional squadron in the United Kingdom. During a recent visit to British Forces Germany, I was told that the Tornado was regarded with enthusiasm by pilots and had more than come up to expectations. Nevertheless, we are already planning a mid-life improvement package for the Tornado GR1 for the early 1990s, to improve its ability to penetrate enemy air defences and to provide it with a night and all-weather attack capability, and so enable it to continue to meet the threat into the next century.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I ask this question out of real interest because I do not know the answer. Obviously, in the future, our air defences are more likely to be penetrated by nuclear missiles than by aircraft, because we can always intercept aircraft. That has always been the role of the RAF, of which I was proud to be a part in my youth. Which service or services will be responsible for trying to offset any penetration of air space by nuclear missiles?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman asks a question about the state of play when a war reaches that level. The resources which I have described are for the protection of the United Kingdom during the conventional stage of a war. All the forces would be involved in detecting and, if necessary, responding to nuclear attack.

Mr. Heffer: With respect, this is an important matter. That was the most bland reply that I have ever heard in the House. When the Minister says "all the services", what exactly does he mean? Will he explain how the services would be combined? Which service would put its finger on the trigger to try to stop the missile coming? The House and the nation have a right to know exactly who would be responsible.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman wants to pursue his point. All the forces would be involved. There is the question of detection and then of response, but, even if it were appropriate to go into those details today, it would certainly be wrong, either now or in the future, for this country or any of our NATO allies to spell out exactly the way in which we would respond to such an attack.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): This is a most fundamental and interesting question. Does my hon. Friend agree that we have had peace in western Europe for 40 years because we have deterred? Deterrence prevents this hypothetical matter becoming a reality. Unless we modernise our equipment, which the Labour party appears to oppose, we shall never be able to intercept missiles of any kind. The Labour party does not support the strategic defence initiative. If our equipment were not modernised, the enemy would not be deterred.

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is right. The purpose of our defence policy and of that of our NATO allies is to deter war and to prevent the situation which has been described. The assets of the RAF and of the other services are designed to make it clear that there would be no point in any adversary attacking us in the first place. That is why we have been modernising the aircraft of the RAF and the equipment of the other forces.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in view of the question put by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), it would be appropriate for the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, when he replies, to answer his hon. Friend? The situation described by the hon. Gentleman could occur only under a Labour Government because the Labour party follows a policy of unilateral disarmament.

Mr. Stewart: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right, but it is difficult to give any credibility to the pronouncements of the Opposition Front Bench about any aspects of defence.

The Harrier has proved itself over a number of years to be one of the mainstays of the RAF's offensive support capability. However, we are now planning over time to replace the GR3 with the new Harrier GR5, which will have substantially improved range, payload and avionics. The House will recall the tragic loss in October of a Harrier GR5 test pilot and the subsequent ditching of his aircraft. That has inevitably meant some delay to the programme. However, it is clearly right, in view of the accident, that the most careful consideration should be given to the factors which caused it, that any recommendations arising from the post-accident studies should be implemented and that all the systems of the aircraft should be thoroughly tested. Test flying is expected to resume shortly and will include testing of the Ferranti inertial navigational system which has not yet been cleared for RAF flying.

Provided that the remaining trials programme does not identify any further problems, conversion training should start later this year. Sixty two GR5s have been ordered so far and their delivery should be completed within the next two to three years. We plan to meet our requirement at that stage for an advanced combat aircraft with a close-in agile fighter capability, to supplement the Tornado, with the European fighter aircraft, in the development of which we are collaborating with Germany, Italy and Spain.

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): My hon. Friend referred to collaboration with West Germany, Spain and other countries involved in the development of the European fighter aircraft. The Government have always been firm in their commitment to that aircraft and the "engining" through Rolls-Royce in association with other European countries. Will he tell us what negotiations he has had recently, particularly with the West Germans, and whether they have indicated their firm support for the European fighter aircraft and its European engine?

Mr. Stewart: I have no reason to believe that they do not support that aircraft, but procurement is the responsibility of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement and of my noble Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement. I shall draw their attention to the point raised by my hon. Friend.

In addition to these major improvements, we have also made considerable progress in the air defence of the United Kingdom. Thirty four of the air defence variant of the Tornado, our new interceptor aircraft, were delivered during the last year, bringing the total to 73 out of the 162

[Mr. Stewart]

on order. The first Tornado ADV squadron at Coningsby became operational on schedule at the beginning of November and a second squadron which has now been formed will become operational later this year. The Tornado ADV is armed with the highly effective Skyflash medium-range air-to-air missile and the shorter range Sidewinder which proved its worth during the Falklands campaign.

Although there have been difficulties with the aircraft's Foxhunter air-intercept radar, radars to an agreed interim standard have been fitted which already provide the aircraft with a capability superior to that of the Phantoms and Lightnings which they are replacing. To provide an effective airborne early warning system for the 1990s, the Government have ordered seven Boeing E3 aircraft which will provide the capability to mount continuous patrols and identify the approach of enemy aircraft at an early stage. This will become increasingly important as the Warsaw pact develops its capabilities for operations at low level.

While the E3 will extend the range and quality of our coverage, we are also now well advanced with the modernisation of our air defence command and control systems and ground-based radar. The bulk of the equipment involved in these enhancements, which are known as the improved United Kingdom air defence ground environment — or by the dreadful acronym IUKADGE for short — has already been built and installed, and some elements are already in service. Remaining items will be introduced during the next four years. But we are already capable of effective monitoring of the 500,000 square miles comprising the United Kingdom air defence region, and our quick reaction alert aircraft are scrambled on average three or four times each week to intercept and identify Soviet military aircraft which penetrate this area.

Next I want to say a word about helicopters. In last month's Army debate my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement told the House that a trial involving 6 Brigade, and including helicopter squadrons from RAF Germany, had demonstrated the value of an air-mobile force, and that we proposed to convert 24 Brigade to this role. There has been a good deal of debate during the past year about which service should have possession of the support helicopter force. Before shifting responsibility for these assets from the RAF to the Army we would need to have clear evidence of advantages sufficient to outweigh the obvious problems of upheaval and dislocation and transitional costs.

I can tell the House that, following a study, no such advantages have been identified and we do not therefore propose to make any such change. That is, of course, a different question from where the RAF and Army helicopters supporting 24 Brigade should be located, and that is a matter to which we shall be giving consideration in due course. Until the 1990s, Chinook and Puma helicopters, as part of their overall support role for both the Army and the RAF, will provide the necessary heavy-lift capability, but after that we are looking to replace the Puma with the Anglo-Italian EH101 and to order an initial batch of 25 such aircraft for the deployment of men and material.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Can my hon. Friend say what studies are being undertaken to see how effective a helicopter is as a delivery system for anti-tank weapons?

Mr. Stewart: That is a different question from the one that I have been discussing. The best weapons systems for the anti-tank role are kept continuously under review, particularly in the light of advances in the technology of tank defence. That is a matter that the Ministry of Defence is anxious to appraise all the time. Looking a few years ahead, it is clear that helicopter weapons capability against tanks will be an important — perhaps increasingly important—aspect of future warfare.

Mr. Heffer: This is an important matter. Where precisely will the division be between RAF-operated and Army-operated helicopters? What role will each play? Which areas will the different services work in? In the last analysis, who will take the decisions? I ask because I was involved in these matters at one time. The division between the services is important. I should like to know where overlapping takes place.

Mr. Stewart: Responsibility would have to be resolved according to the circumstances of each case. In the case of converting 24 Brigade to an air-mobile force with the need for helicopters, there would be a joint command structure. It is likely that that would rest with the Army, which would be in charge of the brigade. As I said at the beginning of my speech, examples of co-operation between the forces have been increasing greatly. The RAF provides a support helicopter service for all three services. The service is attached to a unit, under Army or Naval command according to the needs. In this case the question at issue was whether the ownership and control of the assets should be transferred permanently to the Army. We came to the conclusion that it would not be a sensible move.

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): As my hon. Friend is aware, 6 Brigade has been based in Germany and so has the support helicopter force. As I understand it, 24 Brigade is to be based in the north of England, where it is now. Where is the support helicopter force for that brigade likely to be based? Can my hon. Friend hold out any hope of an additional squadron being formed in this country to support 24 Brigade?

Mr. Stewart: It would be wrong for me to chance my arm on that. I addressed the point specifically. It is a question that we have to resolve, but I do not think that we should do so without considering all the factors. We have announced a general decision. Once the decision in principle has been made, we can consider the best ways of implementing it. I take my hon. Friend's point.

There has also been considerable interest expressed in the House about a proposal which was put to the Ministry of Defence by Bristow Helicopters Ltd. to replace the existing service search and rescue function by a civilian contract. We have been considering whether our current arrangements for SAR could be improved, and in our studies we have felt it right to take into account the ideas which Bristow has put forward. Although we have not yet reached a final conclusion about the most effective disposition of our resources for SAR, I can tell the House today that we have made a firm decision that, wherever there is a military requirement for search and rescue, it should continue to be provided by the RAF and the Royal Navy.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I am obliged to my hon. Friend for his announcement, which affects my constituency. I appreciate that this is an RAF debate, but can my hon. Friend confirm that the decision will also apply to search and rescue which is operated by the Royal Navy?

Mr. Stewart: I did say that, wherever there was a military requirement for search and rescue, it would continue to be provided by the RAF and the Royal Navy.

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): As the Minister appreciates, there has been deep concern in Snowdonia and in other mountain areas because of the essential role played by the RAF in support of mountain rescue services, as we saw only last weekend. Did I understand the Minister to say that that support will remain and that there is no threat of privatisation hanging over that aspect of the helicopter support service?

Mr. Stewart: I have said that where there is a military requirement for SAR, which means the great majority of the area of the United Kingdom, the position will be as the hon. Gentleman understands.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Does my hon. Friend accept that his announcement will be warmly welcomed throughout the land, and particularly in Cornwall where we have the Royal Naval air station at Culdrose, the biggest helicopter base in western Europe? I think he can accept that all Back Benchers will agree that he has made the right decision.

Mr. Stewart: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. This is a complex issue. Although we were under pressure to make an announcement earlier, the question had to be treated carefully and thoroughly. We have come to our conclusion after most careful consideration of all the issues.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I want clarification. I do not understand what the Minister said about a military requirement, or whatever his words were. For instance, Bristow has managed to get its foot in the door in the Western Isles and in Orkney and Shetland. Many people would think that there was a military requirement in areas where there are naval vessels. Did the Minister mean that the RAF search and rescue service will operate only in areas where there is a military base? Indeed, there is an RAF base in Stornoway. What is the distinction? Surely the whole country is liable to the need for military as well as civil call-out. Therefore, would it not be better to say that the search and rescue service over the whole country will be kept in the public sector?

Mr. Stewart: Perhaps I was foolish to give way so much and not continue with what I wanted to say.

The RAF and the Royal Navy have provided a service of proven quality, which often involves a high level of skill and courage, and which we know is greatly valued. Last year, for example, RAF and RN search and rescue helicopters flew almost 1,500 sorties and rescued more than 950 people, both military and civilian. We are satisfied that there is a military requirement for the RAF's and the RN's SAR service to continue, and we also believe that that decision will be welcomed by the wider community. Among the military factors that influenced us were the service's valuable role in the training of aircrew; the need to keep a military search and rescue capability for operational crises in peace time, as well as in transition to war, and war; and the need to avoid risk of discontinuity in this vital service at some time in the future. In our judgment, those and other important military considerations outweigh the possible modest financial gains that a civilian contract might have provided.

The military requirement for a military search and rescue service extends around the vast bulk of our coastline and inland mountainous areas, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport may decide to supplement the military service by letting civilian contracts. If he does, he will no doubt consider any approach made by Bristow, whose operations in the Shetlands and the Hebrides have demonstrated its ability to provide a good service.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): My hon. Friend will will know of my concern, for as long as I have been a Member of the House, about the issue of privatisation, and I am delighted to hear his response on this matter. I also heard him say that he had not yet made the final decision on the issue of where detachments will be placed, and whether there may be some changes. In my constituency, RAF Brawdy, which covers the whole west Wales coast, provides an excellent service for military and civilian personnel throughout the region and out into the Irish sea.

Can my hon. Friend assure me that when consideration is being given to the future of the Brawdy detachment he will bear in mind the fact that if it were taken away we should be reliant on RAF Valley in Anglesey or Chivenor in Devon which would very much increase the flying times for the area?

Mr. Stewart: I take my hon. Friend's point. One of the reasons why I thought it right to make the announcement in the debate today, before the final dispositions have been established and before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has completed his analysis of the position, was to enable us to hear the response of hon. Members and to take into account the points that may be raised on both sides of the House. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces, who I hope will be responding to the debate, has been closely involved with these matters and I hope that he will be able to answer the points that will be raised in the debate.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Would the Minister spend a little more time explaining his intentions? I admit that I am confused. He says that the search and rescue facilities will be maintained under the respective services; then he says that the Department of Transport may let contracts. In what areas can it do that? The crunch question is: does the Minister intend to maintain the capability at its present level, or does he intend to let the civilian service run down?

Mr. Stewart: We do not intend to run it down. We intend to maintain a military capability where we have judged that necessary, and where we have judged it necessary is reflected in the existing pattern. It is open to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to decide to supplement it, but not as a result of its being diminished. As regards my right hon. Friend's responsibilities in these matters, it would be better to allow his study to be completed before making any announcement on the matter.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): Our concern is that the quality of the service provided at the moment is

[Mr. Martin O'Neill]

of such a high standard largely because, as the Minister said, there were about 950 operations last year. Civilian operations complement military ones, because they enable the crews to get the necessary training that the former add to the latter. How will the Minister differentiate between the military and civilian operations in this respect?

Mr. Stewart: We are not differentiating between them in this respect. We say that the military coverage should remain, but it is open to the Secretary of State for Transport, if he considers it necessary, to supplement, for purely civilian purposes, the services provided by the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy. I should have thought that was welcome. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the value of the services' provision in this area; it was one of the factors that weighed considerably with us when making the decision.

As the Royal Air Force approaches its 70th birthday in a few weeks' time, its reputation stands second to none in the world today. But the high level of performance which it achieves would not be possible if the RAF could not attract and retain men and women of the highest calibre and provide training for them to the highest standards. That involves not only the routine training of aircrew and ground staff, but also exercises in which aircraft and air defences can be co-ordinated. I am glad to be able to tell the House that, last year again, the RAF did particularly well in tactical exercises evaluated by NATO. Co-operation with the air forces of our Western allies is an essential part of the role of the RAF both in its forward deployment on the continent and in the air defence of the United Kingdom.

In April this year our air defences will be rigorously tested in an exercise named Elder Forest, which will be the largest air defence exercise in the United Kingdom in recent years. Aircraft from eight NATO nations will fly more than 1,000 simulated hostile sorties against our air defences over a wide area of land and sea. Our defending forces will include a dozen squadrons of RAF fighters, supported by early warning and air-to-air refuelling aircraft, while on the ground RAF missile systems and command and control facilities will be fully activated. Two type 42 destroyers acting as area defence ships will also be taking part, illustrating not only how complex and interactive air warfare has now become, but the increasing co-operation between the services.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The Minister started by saying that it is important to retain pilots. He then moved on as rapidly as he could to talk about anything but that. Can the Government retain pilots under their present policies, or are more of them leaving the service than are being recruited and trained? What is the cost of training the pilots that we are losing? Is it in the region of hundreds of millions of pounds for each one lost?

Mr. Stewart: I should have resisted the temptation to give way to the hon. Gentleman. I mentioned that I wanted to discuss both attracting men and women to, and retaining them in, the Royal Air Force and the exercises. Before I had finished the exercises half of my comments, the hon. Gentleman asked me about matters of personnel, to which I shall come in a few moments.

The flexibility of air power is also demonstrated by the operations which the RAF undertakes outside the NATO area. Later in the year the RAF plans to participate in a major air defence exercise in Malaysia and Singapore in support of the five power defence arrangements. That exercise, which is scheduled to take place in September, will be the largest of its kind ever held in the region, and United Kingdom participation will include Tornado F3s. Some of the RAF aircraft involved, as well as other aircraft and a parachute display team, will then take part in an air show to be held in October at the Royal Australian air force base at Richmond, near Sydney, to mark the Australian bicentenary.

Last November I visited the Falklands and was greatly impressed by the enhanced defensive capability and the degree of tri-service co-operation resulting from the redeployment of the garrison from Port Stanley to the new site at Mount Pleasant during the course of last year. The new airport at Mount Pleasant means that the islands could be rapidly reinforced if ever the need arose, and this enables us to maintain a smaller garrison there than would otherwise be necessary. Last December the RAF achieved a non-stop flight from the United Kingdom to the Falklands, without a stop at Ascension, involving air-to-air refuelling on both legs of the journey. Next month we intend to hold the first full-scale reinforcement exercise, known as Fire Focus. The exercise will be directed by Headquarters RAF Strike Command at High Wycombe, and will take place between 7 and 31 March. It will involve the reinforcement of the garrison's air defences and an airlift of troops to the Falklands, followed by unit exercises to take advantage of the excellent training facilities in the islands. Further information about this exercise is available in a Ministry of Defence press release today.

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a good thing to have maximum publicity for what he has just said to deter any successor to Galtieri who might be foolish enough to chance his arm, and that the fact that we can now reinforce by getting wide-bodied jets there in one hop alters the situation radically?

Mr. Stewart: I believe that such deterrence already exists. I only hope that the reinforcement capability that we can demonstrate in this exercise will strengthen that deterrence, as my hon. and learned Friend has said.

Mr. Trotter: Does my hon. Friend agree that the recent 820-mile flight by a search and rescue helicopter from the Falklands to South Georgia—having to land on a Navy ship halfway to South Georgia—to recover an injured soldier is an example of the skill and ability of the search and rescue force operating in that very hostile environment?

Mr. Stewart: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend and join him in congratulating those concerned on that achievement.

On the recruiting side, the past year has been a successful one. Targets were fully met in the main officer branches with shortfalls confined to the professional entry branches, such as medical officers. Ground airman recruiting has also gone well, with 90 per cent. of vacancies for the current financial year filled by the end of December.

Retention is, of course, another essential element in ensuring that the RAF has adequate trained manpower to

fulfil its role into the 1990s and beyond. In this area, too, I am pleased to be able to report that there has recently been improvement. There has in particular been a welcome reduction in applications for premature voluntary retirement in the course of the past year. PVR applications from officers generally fell during 1987 by 19 per cent. Indeed, there has been a reduction of 26 per cent. in PVR applications from pilots, while for fast-jet pilots under the age of 38—our key operational aircrew—there has been a major decrease of 57 per cent. It is, in any case, very important to keep PVR rates in perspective; they are now under 3 per cent. of trained strength for both applications and exits. The total number of pilots leaving the RAF, including those opting for PVR, has over the past three years averaged less than 200 a year, which is more than 20 per cent. lower than the figure averaged a decade ago.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Will my hon. Friend comment on the number of fast-jet pilots who take up their option of leaving at the age of 38, because I think that that statistic ought to be read with the one that he has just given for the PVR rates?

Mr. Stewart: I shall leave it to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to give the exact figure, but one of the reasons for the high levels of exit in recent years has been the end of the eight-year short service commission for pilots and others which was introduced in 1978 when the Government of the day were having extreme difficulty in recruiting at all.

Mr. Sayeed: The figures that my hon. Friend has announced for premature release will be very welcome. Will he confirm that between 1978 and 1979, when the Labour Government were in power, 6·8 per cent. was the figure for premature release for men in the armed services?

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is right in saying that the figures were much higher at that time, and, of course, morale in the services was very low.

Another matter which I know is of considerable concern to a number of hon. Members is the question of low flying. I would like to take this opportunity to assure the House that the Government are very well aware that many people consider military low-flying training an almost intolerable intrusion into their daily lives. We in no way underestimate the strength of feeling of or the inconvenience borne by some of those who see more of this activity than others. The RAF, too, is fully aware of its responsibilities to the public and has no wish to antagonise the very people its members are training to protect. The RAF does, of course, do some of this training overseas. For instance, regular exercises held in Germany, the United States and Canada provide the opportunity for RAF combat aircraft to train at operational low level and carry out realistic practise using live ammunition. But the fact remains that if they were ever deployed in war it would only be by flying as close to the ground and as fast as possible that our aircrew would have a reasonable chance of avoiding enemy radar and defence systems. The training is, therefore, essential and it is simply not practicable to do it all "somewhere else".

Let us not forget that the need for low-flying training is directly related to the threat which NATO forces face in the central region of Europe. In any hostilities we can assume that a major priority of the Warsaw pact would be the destruction of our air defence capability, including aircraft and airfields, and unless we were able to retaliate in kind our land forces in Europe would be at an impossible disadvantage. The Warsaw pact enjoys enormous superiority in numbers, in tactical aircraft as well as in artillery and tanks. While I welcome the efforts currently being made to draw up a negotiating mandate for conventional arms control, I do not think that we should underestimate the difficulty of achieving a satisfactory agreement to limit conventional arms in Europe.

In the first place, we shall need to know a great deal more in detail about Soviet forces than the Soviet Union has for many years been ready to divulge. There are some grounds for regarding the recent Soviet attitude to the provision of information as more encouraging. But I must say that so far *glasnost* has been a pretty selective process. Without full and reliable data from the other side, which has been lacking throughout the 14 years of talks in Vienna on mutual and balanced force reductions, it is going to be difficult to establish a workable basis for negotiation. Even if, as I hope, these problems can be resolved, Warsaw pact forces outnumber those of NATO by such a large margin that we must be very careful not to agree to anything that would undermine the minimum capability which we shall need to maintain the security of the West.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Can the hon. Gentleman now assure us, because the Secretary of State was not able to do so at the last Defence Question Time, especially in view of the superiority in tactical aircraft which he says the Warsaw pact has, that Britain's Tornado aircraft will be included in these very important conventional arms reduction talks?

Mr. Stewart: We are not suggesting that any conventional capability should be excluded; and that, of course, includes the conventional capability of dual capable systems, and there are ground-based forces that are dual capable.

Let us remember that arms control is not an end in itself. The objective is to maintain our security, and, if possible, to enhance it, with whatever degree of arms control can be consistent with that. The Labour party wants things the other way round—arms control as the first priority, regardless of what it would mean for the ability of NATO to deter war or to respond effectively in the event of attack.

We can all welcome the fact that, since the RAF debate last year, agreement has been reached that one of the activities in which the service is involved should be brought to an end. I refer, of course, to the historic INF agreement in Washington last December which, if ratified, will lead in due course to the removal of cruise missiles from RAF Greenham Common and RAF Molesworth. A few years ago, we on the Conservative Benches were sick of being lectured by the Labour and Liberal parties about what would happen if such missiles were deployed. They said it would add to the risk of war, it would make the United Kingdom more vulnerable and it would wave goodbye to any prospect of agreement with the Russians to remove their SS20s. How wrong they were. We all know that if the British Government and our Western allies had not remained firm in our resolve, there would never have been an agreement on INF at all, because there would not have been anything for the Russians to negotiate about.

[Mr. Stewart]

Once again it has been proved that, in matters of defence, the wisest course is usually to do the exact opposite of what the Labour party recommends. It is in that light that we must look at the truly astonishing remarks made by the shadow Defence Secretary, the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), during the Army debate last month. He told the House then that he did not believe that NATO's concept of flexible response and forward defence was realistic any more. Indeed, he went further and told us that he had always believed it was obsolete. He went on to say that NATO should drop the whole idea of follow-on forces attack, which is the essential means of preventing the Warsaw pact from full deployment of the huge reinforcements that it can hold in reserve.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Perhaps the Minister would quote the words that I used in respect of follow-on forces attack. As there is some asymmetry — that is now the fashionable world — in respect of Soviet and Warsaw pact forces, I suggested that one bargaining element to ensure a reduction in the Soviet forces would be for NATO to consider — if there was such a reduction — dropping any plans for follow-on forces attack. I mentioned that in the context of a mutual agreement in respect of a reduction in Soviet forces.

Mr. Stewart: I do not know how the right hon. Gentleman believes that he would be able to cope with the question of Soviet military doctrine — an aggressive doctrine. The right hon. Gentleman's speech is a rich purple passage for those who want enlightenment about the extraordinary defence policies of the Labour party.

Flexible response and forward defence mean that NATO must be seen to be able and ready to mount a robust defence against any attack at whatever level it deems appropriate, and to have some degree of choice in the manner of that response. We have to make it absolutely clear to the Soviet Union and its allies that the risks of aggression far outweigh any possible gains that they could hope to achieve. Conventional weapons alone can never pose an unacceptable risk to a nuclear-armed opponent and the need for a range of both nuclear and conventional weapons in Europe will remain for as far ahead as we can see. It is a melancholy fact, but not a surprising one, that flexible response, which is the foundation of NATO strategy, no longer enjoys the support of the Labour party. There can be little sense in the Labour party's strategy, which makes it clear in advance that, in the event of hostilities, the territory from which any attacks are likely to be launched would be immune from retaliation. The whole concept of so-called defensive defence is based on a fallacy. People do not win many tennis matches by standing on the baseline and blocking the ball back against an opponent who can hit it harder.

Fortunately, the defence of our country is not in the hands of those who advocate such policies. The Government, whom the people have chosen, recognise the high priority of securing the defence of the realm. We are privileged in this country to be supported by armed forces of outstanding skill, courage and dedication. I hope that it will be a long time before the Royal Air Force has to fight again to protect our interests; but it is a very great reassurance to all of us to know that, if ever it had to do so, we could rely upon it. The RAF deserves our thanks.

5.23 pm

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I join the Minister in congratulating the RAF on its pending 70th anniversary. I am sure that the House would also wish to congratulate it on its various successes over the past year in the different competitions in which it has participated. The 70 years of the RAF have been years of distinguished service. It was born out of the conflict of the first world war, and, in retrospect, it seems incredible that the RAF was just 21-years-old when it led the fight for the Battle of Britain. I know that the House would wish to salute those who have dedicated their lives to, and especially those who have given their lives in, the defence of our freedoms.

At this time it would also be appropriate to congratulate Air Chief Marshal Sir David Craig on attaining not only that post but that of Chief of the Defence Staff. We are confident that the country will be well-served by this distinguished and able officer.

Today's debate will be much poorer without the special contributions previously made by my friend Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones, the former Member for Eccles. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear. Hear."] As an ex-navigator, he often confessed that he did not always find the target during the war, but I believe that he often found the target on the Conservative Benches, and always with great courtesy. I am sure that both sides of the House join me in wishing him a long, happy and healthy retirement.

I must declare a personal, vested interest in the RAF. I remember, as a young boy, going down to the pit top holding the hand of one of my brothers who, during the war, left the pit when he was 17 to join the RAF. He quickly became my hero by being commissioned and becoming a member of 617—the Dambusters Squadron — and by being awarded the DFC. Obviously in a mining village he was much admired, and he certainly was my hero. He stayed in the RAF as a regular officer and, incidentally, set an example for a whole generation of nephews who are making their careers in the RAF.

I should like to crave the indulgence of the House to take the opportunity to offer my best wishes to Air Commodore Pat King, another family member, who retired yesterday from his post as Director of Flight Safety in the RAF.

I mention such personal matters for a particular reason. In a recent conversation with the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) he mentioned, among other things, the egalitarianism of the RAF. He said that, perhaps more than in any other service, ability counted for more than background. That is still the case. That principle has emphasised to my hon. Friends and myself that the defence of this country and the desire to defend it is not the prerogative of the Tory party. Indeed, the working-class communities have contributed the lives of many of their young men to that task.

Last October I began my speech in the defence debate by stating that, on both sides of the House, there is a strong commitment to the defence of this country. However, I must repeat once more that I strongly resent the implication, voiced by Conservative Members, that that is not the case on the Labour Benches. The Labour party is, and always has been, strongly and firmly committed to national defence. It is not a matter of

conjecture. One need only look at the record to see what the Labour party did when in power. To suggest otherwise is a mischievous lie and the meanest of political propaganda. The decisions made by the Labour party in office were made with regard to the national interest, in loyalty to our allies, and in opposition to injustice and tyranny wherever they existed.

Mr. Mans: The hon. Gentleman says that the Labour party is committed to the Royal Air Force and to the defence of the country. Would he like to tell us when a Labour Government last increased defence expenditure?

Mr. Rogers: That question — like most of the statistics that are bandied around — is not only irrelevant, but meaningless. I shall deal with these issues later to illustrate my argument, rather than answer irrelevant questions.

It is not the Tory party, but the Labour party in office, that has made the really tough decisions on Britain's defence. Perhaps not all of us will agree on the merits of those decisions, but the Labour party in power made the decisions that it had to make in the national interest, and it would be wrong to suggest otherwise. I remind Conservative Members that it was the Labour party in power that decided to enter NATO. It was the Labour party in power that gave a commitment to European defence. It was the Labour party in power that decided to re-arm at the time of Korea and to support the United Nations' forces there—something which the Secretary of State knows about. It was the Labour party in power that decided to develop an independent nuclear weapon strategy. Contrary to the propaganda and lies of the Government, the next Labour Government will make the tough decisions necessary for the proper defence of this country.

Mr. Sayeed: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Labour party was in power in 1967 when both the First and the Second Sea Lord resigned because the Labour party would not provide the Navy with adequate funds.

Mr. Rogers: We do not have to go that far back to find officers who have left the services. Many tens and hundreds of officers are leaving the Air Force at the moment, perhaps because of bad morale. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) should take the medicine. Indeed, one does not have to go very far back to find examples of Ministers resigning because of Government cuts. That has happened within the lifetime of this Government.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): If the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) wants to go that far back, he should look at the record a little more thoroughly. The reason why Mayhew, the Minister responsible for the Navy, resigned was that he wanted another aircraft carrier to carry on the east of Suez policy. If the Government really want to continue an east of Suez policy, they will need a great many more aircraft carriers than they have now.

Mr. Rogers: Contrary to popular belief and Tory propaganda, the present Government are not very good at defence. If Conservative Members bother to apply their limited mentalities, they will find that it is self-evident that the Government are not very good at the management of defence. This is a subject to which I shall return. Furthermore, it is now becoming pretty obvious to everyone that they are not very good at defence policy, either. That criticism is made, not only by the Labour party, but by someone who knows better than any Conservative Member and who until relatively recently acted as a permanent secretary at the Ministry of Defence. His impartiality and political objectivity are beyond doubt. I would certainly venture to guess that he never voted Labour.

Let us examine what Sir Frank Cooper said—before the Government slap an injunction on him. He said:

"The politics of expediency run the Ministry of Defence —rather than a properly worked out policy."

That is not surprising, but it must have been taken to grotesque extremes for a permanent secretary to have said that. The man is no raving Leftie. He is not even a member of the Labour party. Sir Frank Cooper is chairman of United Scientific Holdings, deputy-chairman of Babcock International and a director of Rothschild, the bankers, besides having been a permanent secretary at the Ministry of Defence during this Government's lifetime. Sir Frank continued:

"ministers made lots of speeches about efficiency and new procurement initiatives and managed to give the impression that things were happening in defence. Instead, Mrs. Margaret Thatcher's successive administrations have failed to tackle issues that will not go away."

What are the issues that will not go away? Sir Frank says that the main issues are Britain's international role in defence and the ability to pay for an over-full defence programme. He said:

"Mr. Michael Heseltine, the former Secretary of State for Defence, adamantly refused to conduct a review of those issues."

Opposition Members have said that on many occasions, especially my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—I am sorry. My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies)——

Mr. Sayeed: Wishful thinking.

Mr. Rogers: It is not wishful thinking. If we can convince the voters of the desperate state of our defences, we shall be in office sooner rather than later. *[Interruption.]* I know that this hurts the hon. Member for Bristol, East, but he should be quiet and listen. He might learn something.

Sir Frank went on to say:

"In brief, the politics of expediency have not changed."—

under this Government—

"They continue to override both policy and management."

The Minister talked about the reorganisation in the Ministry of Defence and extolled its virtues. Sir Frank continued:

"The vast amount of reorganisation, running down and changes in staff in the ministry and its research and development establishments meant that they had neither the capability nor the resources to sort out industry development problems in the way that had been possible 10 or 20 years previously. Ministers were deprived of proper advice during discussions over the cancellations of GEC's contract to develop the Nimrod radar surveillance aircraft in 1986."

So much for the Government's policy. Sir Frank Cooper, an ex-permanent secretary at the Ministry of Defence, thus destroys the Government's credibility on defence policies.

Opposition Members note that the Government like to project a certain image of themselves, that of streetwise business men who know their way about the City and are much smarter than the people who work there. They like

[Mr. Rogers]

to give the impression that they really know the score. In answer to a question on defence in 1985 the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces said:

"My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has great commercial experience. He is not a person who is likely to be out manoeuvred". — [*Official Report*, 21 February 1985; Vol. 73 c. 1246.]

In other words, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) could handle the French, the Italians and the Germans because he was a better business man than the business man.

John Harvey-Jones knocked that theory on the head and gave a rather apt quotation last Sunday. He said:

"Business men make even lousier politicians than politicians make business men, and that's saying something!"

That statement is true of the Government: they are pretty hopeless at managing defence. We know that Mr. Harvey-Jones is correct. Decisions taken by the Government are not always wise, and their management of programmes has not always been correct.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The hon. Gentleman has extolled the virtues of United Scientific Holdings as a source of advice. Will he acknowledge that the Government have responded by appointing a business man with such a background as head of defence procurement to blend politics with business?

Mr. Rogers: Peter Levene has been there for some time, but as yet he has not straightened out the Government. On many issues, policy has not been sorted out. I would rather trust the judgment of an ex-permanent secretary, Sir Frank Cooper, than that of the hon. Gentleman. Britain's defence policy is in a critical state. When Sir Frank Cooper talked about the over-full nature of our defence commitment, he was right. Rather than waving flags or running around shouting gung-ho, it would be better if Conservative Members applied themselves to the problems with Britain's defences that will manifest themselves in the 1990s. Britain's defence policy and defence equipment are in a critical state because of the Government's mismanagement and ineptness. They are a Government of bunglers, quick-money artists and expedience. They have subordinated the national interest to an ill-conceived economic theory, followed by blatant auctioneering. When they make mistakes, they wrap them up in secrecy.

Mr. Bill Walker: As we are debating the RAF, will the hon. Gentleman say what commitments the RAF would no longer have if the Labour party were in government? The hon. Gentleman said that commitments are the problem.

Mr. Rogers: I know that the hon. Gentleman does not like listening to the truth, but he should be more patient. He did not interrupt the Minister when he said that although it was an RAF debate he wanted to make it a little wider. If I make the debate a little wider, it would be courteous of the hon. Gentleman to sit and listen.

Let us consider some of the specific projects that the Government have been responsible for managing. Let us look at some of the Government's incompetence. About £3 billion has been spent on torpedoes, but they still do not work. The Government have managed the Nimrod project for eight years and have spent £1 billion, but it has been cancelled. We shall now have to find £1 billion to replace it.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry (Mr. Robert Atkins): Who originated it?

Mr. Rogers: The Labour Government originated it, but Conservative Governments have been responsible for managing it since 1979. The Government cannot continually duck and say that it is not their responsibility. They must grow up, behave like mature men and accept that they have been in office for nine years—nine years too long. It is about time that they started to accept their responsibility.

Mr. Mans: Given that a Labour Government signed the contract for Nimrod, will the hon. Gentleman say at what stage since 1979 any Labour party spokesman has said that we should cancel it?

Mr. Rogers: Conservative Members continually want to put the responsibility on us. The Conservative party has been in government for nine years. Conservative Members should accept their responsibility, accept that they have made a mess of defence and behave like grown men.

The Government have spent £650 million on the Foxhunter radar, but it still cannot do the job. The battlefield artillery target engagement system—BATES—has doubled in cost, to £200 million, but it still does not work. The command and control system for frigates, CACS 4, has been cancelled, and £30 million has gone down the drain. The SP 70 howitzer cost £88 million, but that has all gone down the drain.

The list is long. The Government put forward the proposition that they are good at managing defence, but those projects show that not only are they bad at policy, but lousy at management as well.

I turn now to some specific RAF projects. With regard to the European fighter aircraft, during a debate the then Minister of State for Defence Procurement the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) described the Turin agreement on EFA as a "major milestone" in the re-equipment programme. He described the efforts of the then Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Henley, as, "a tremendous political achievement."

They have both gone. Seemingly, so has the political will and desire to reach the next milestone in this marathon venture. Indeed, the project does not seem to have reached the first hurdle. Why is that? Mismanagement? Lack of money? Different requirements? Why has there been a deafening silence from the Government as to the exact status of this project? We can discover information only from the Germans. At least they are not obsessed with secrecy — unlike this Government. The Germans are being honest about the difficulties involved, but this Government are hiding behind them. They are using them as a convenient scapegoat. The well-respected magazine *Jane's Defence Weekly* of 16 January said:

"The Ministry of Defence is surprisingly philosophical about West Germany's vacillation."

The Ministry of Defence and the Government are surprisingly philosophical about 40,000 jobs and the future of our military aviation industry.

Mr. Jack *rose*——

Mr. Rogers: The hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to participate in the debate.

The aeroplane should not only be well into its development by now, but its radar suite should have been ordered. I note that the Minister is not prepared to say anything about that matter. It is a serious delay that might do for EFA what Foxhunter is doing for the Tornado.

When tenders are received, will the Minister ensure that EFA has a European radar that is not subject to United States' extra-territorial restrictions? EFA is vital to our air forces on the central front in the 1990s and beyond.

Mr. Jack *rose*——

Mr. Atkins: Give way.

Mr. Rogers: If the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) wants to participate in the debate he should take his feet off the Bench and sit on the Back Benches, where he can catch Mr. Speaker's eye. Meanwhile, he should be quiet.

A number of experts have told me that no existing aircraft can fulfil our need and requirement to combat the Soviet threat. Indian pilots who have flown the F16 and MiG 29 paint an alarming picture of Russian superiority, which probably accounts for the Indian Government's decision to buy MiGs.

Mr. Jack: If the hon. Gentleman had read the *Offical Report* over the past few months, he would have seen a series of parliamentary questions from Conservative Members eliciting a stream of information about the EFA. If he were to quote less selectively from the article in *Jane's Defence Weekly*, he would note that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has written to Members participating in the project urging them to continue their commitment to it.

Mr. O'Neill: Big deal.

Mr. Rogers: As my hon. Friend says, "Big deal."

Last year we heard exactly the same words from the Minister about the EFA. We are still in that position. The project is no further along the road. Regardless of the answers that are elicited, the fact is that the project is not developing as it should do. The radar suite has still not been ordered, which means that when the plane comes into existence it will not have the radar capability to carry out the job. *[Interruption.]* Do not tell me that the radar suite has been ordered, because I found out this morning that it has not been ordered. *[Interruption.]* The tenders may well have been closed, but no Government decision has been made.

In talking about the mismanagement of the Government's defence programme, I come to the "jewel in the crown", the pride of the Government's mismanagement and the peak of their incompetence—the Tucano. What a wonderful non-flying plane! It does not give us any pleasure to catalogue the Government's ineptness in this matter. However, one notices how, in previous debates, Ministers and Conservative Members attacked my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and accused him of scaremongering because he pointed out that plane's obvious deficiencies and queried the reasons for the excessive delays. I am pleased that his perception has been vindicated. My hon. Friend was right—the choice was wrong. There are excessive delays, and there is a cost to the taxpayer.

In both defence debates and questions the Minister has continually reiterated that there is no cost to the taxpayer as a result of the excessive delay over the Tucano. That is simply not true. There is a cost—the cost of keeping in operation the antique Jet Provost, at a cost of about £10 million every six months. There is also the cost to our pilots and service men, who continually have to patch up, make do and train on those 152 antique Jet Provosts. Those planes have given great service to this country, but are 12 years older than the average pilot being trained on them. This is yet another of the Government's disasters in managing our defence programme.

In last year's debate the Minister said that the Tucano would be received by the RAF last May and that it would be up to squadron level by now. However, as we know, the reality is that no Tucanos are in service and training pilots. The plane has not finished its release for service trials. Indeed, it did not commence them until 8 December. There are still substantial problems, such as fitting the engine into an air frame that cannot take it. Although that problem has been pointed out to the Government, it is still nowhere near being properly resolved.

Will the Minister come clean and tell the House the plain truth? What are they going to do about providing a plane on which our pilots can train in future years? It is significant that the PC9, which was turned down by the Government — one of their brilliant commercial judgments — is in service with the Saudi air force. Indeed, 30 have been delivered in the past year alone. The Government have a disaster on their hands and should do something about it fairly quickly before we have to borrow some planes from the Saudis on which to train our pilots.

At the beginning of the debate the Minister spoke about pilot retention and loss. I do not know where he gets his statistics from. He should sack some of his civil servants for coming up with figures that are wrong, as they did last year and this year. The haemorrhaging of pilots from the RAF is a problem of great concern. In last year's debate, referring to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North, the Minister said:

> "It might be helpful if I corrected the impression that the hon. Gentleman gave that this problem is getting worse. Far from it. The latest statistics are good news." — [*Official Report*, 22 January 1987; Vol. 108, c. 1114.]

The Minister then proceeded to give a series of relative figures and percentages which, quite frankly, were as misleading as the figures that he has given today. The truth is that this severe problem is worsening.

Opposition Members have only the most unstinting praise for those who have chosen careers that put them in the front line of defending our freedom. That is why we are concerned that something should be done about our most valuable resources. In 1985, 147 pilots left the Royal Air Force. In 1986 that figure was 175, and in 1987 it was 224. There was a net loss of 49 pilots in the last year alone, with only 175 graduating. I do not know why the Minister gets his figures wrong and gives the House the impression that there is no problem and that things are improving. It is incredible. I do not understand it and I certainly do not believe the Minister's figures. The figures for pilots leaving before they complete their engagements were 58 in 1985, 114 in 1986 and 150 in 1987. This represents a severe problem which the Minister should address and about which he should give some answers to the House.

Mr. Sayeed: I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would answer my question, because I genuinely do not know. Do the figures that he has quoted include those who have qualified as pilots, but who have not qualified in further training?

Mr. Rogers: I have included all the figures. They are available for the hon. Gentleman to inspect. Quite honestly, the easiest way for him to get the figures in all their various categories is to get them from the Library. They may well be complex, which is why the Minister can twist them around so easily. The figures are self-evident. There is severe pilot loss, and the Royal Air Force has a severe problem in pilot retention.

There are many problems. I am not very happy about what the Minister said about conventional talks. I am not quite sure what the Government are going to do about the replacement of ground-launch cruise missiles with air-launch cruise missiles. I am not sure to what extent the Government will include dual capability aircraft in the conventional talks. That problem might well need to be addressed in a further debate.

I realise that time is getting on, but I should like to turn to the issue of air-sea rescue. Obviously we are very pleased with the news of the rejection of the privatisation of the air-sea rescue service. However, we would be much more pleased if the Minister could assure us that the capability of the existing facilities will be maintained. Frankly, I think that the statement contained a little humbug—that is if the whole statement was not humbug.

I should like to know why it took so long to consider the project. The Minister said that it was because he wanted to give the matter careful consideration. However, the facts on which he made his decision were available a year ago. Why did the Government sit on the matter for a year? Obviously, they wanted to privatise the service and were trying to find a way to do so. It was only because of pressure from hon. Members of all parties that the Government have made a humiliating climbdown on the issue. They have turned themselves upside down, but they do not have the guts to say so. The Government wanted to privatise, but, as Sir Frank Cooper said, the politics of expediency have triumphed. Twelve months ago the policies of national interest should have led to an immediate rejection of the absurd proposition that was put forward by Bristow—a proposition which, incidentally, undermined the morale of many of our service men who were involved.

Finally, in view of the Government's statement, will the Minister give a real vote of confidence to the air-sea rescue services by providing them with adequate, modern helicopters to carry out their difficult and demanding task, instead of leaving them with 30-year-old Wessex helicopters and quite ancient Sea King helicopters? The air-sea search and rescue teams need such a vote of confidence, and I hope that the Minister will be able to provide it.

5.59 pm

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): It is inevitable that when we are debating a service that uses such complex and expensive equipment we should spend most of our time discussing that equipment.

However, I should just like to say a few words about the 93,000 volunteers who give their professional skills to the Royal Air Force. My contacts with other countries have revealed how highly the skill of our Air Force is regarded by our allies.

Earlier in the debate, low flying was mentioned. It is essential to practise the capability of flying low under enemy defences in peace time because it would otherwise be impossible to achieve during war time. The safety record of our aircrew has been most commendable. When they have to fly low they do so over unpopulated areas, and the recent safety level is the best that has been seen in modern times, with the lowest number of accidents. It is interesting that two thirds of the accidents that inevitably occur in high-performance flying take place not at low levels but when aircraft are high in the sky. We must pay tribute to the skill and professionalism of our pilots and those on the ground who maintain their complex aircraft.

There is no shortage of aircrew in the Air Force. That contrasts with the situation in Europe. I spoke to the Chief of Staff of one of our smaller NATO allies 18 months ago, and he told me that two thirds of his fighter pilots were contemplating leaving the air force to join the civil airlines who were recruiting actively at that time. Fortunately, we do not have a shortage of pilots in the front line, and the reason is that morale is high. That is because life in the Air Force is as good today as it has ever been, and because nine consecutive recommendations from the Armed Forces Pay Review Body have been met in full. That contrasts very much with the situation when the Labour Government were in office.

There is, however, a problem on the horizon because demographic trends show that there will be 25 per cent. fewer young people in each annual age group by the end of the century. That means that there will be a smaller pool of young potential recruits who can be attracted to the services. In particular, the airlines will be competing for those who wish to become pilots. In the years ahead there will be an increasing recruitment problem because of the demographic situation in Britain.

I should like to say a few words about the Air Training Corps, which has 45,000 members. I am sure that all hon. Members are in contact with the squadrons in their constituencies. I am always impressed with the smartness of the cadets and staff at the Whitley Bay and Tynemouth squadrons. One third of all those who serve in the corps join the Air Force and provide a substantial number of the recruits—both officers and men—into the services. I am impressed by the number of girls who are now seeking to join the corps. I have been in correspondence with my hon. Friend the Minister about that. There is such a demand among young ladies wishing to join the cadets that a ceiling has had to be applied; otherwise, there would be insufficient room for boys in the squadrons.

I am delighted that the strength of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force is being built up. It has always been by far the smallest of the three reserve forces. Perhaps we should be thinking about forming an auxiliary air force unit equipped with civilian aircraft in a transport role. Again, I have been in correspondence with my hon. Friend about that.

The Select Committee on Transport is surveying the Merchant Navy. As we all know, there has been considerable reduction in the size of all the NATO merchant navies. It seems that, in an emergency, we will have to put greater reliance on the use of air transport to carry cargo. Perhaps we should form auxiliary air force squadrons using those civil aircraft that have considerable cargo capacity.

The air defence of the United Kingdom is of crucial importance to securing our home base in Britain. I shall confine the rest of my remarks to that subject. That absolutely vital task has always been performed so well by the Royal Air Force. The United Kingdom air defence area, as has already been said, covers a vast area, hundreds

of miles out into the western Atlantic and north into the Norwegian sea. In war, the main threat to Britain would undoubtedly come from the air. In peace, on average four long-range Soviet aircraft a week enter our air defence region over the sea, and they are intercepted by our on-duty fighter force. In war, we could expect a large number of enemy aircraft to be directed against us, and, with the long range of modern aircraft, they will be able to approach the United Kingdom from all directions.

In 1979, probably the greatest weakness that the Government inherited was the inadequacy of our air defence forces, having regard to the considerable increase in the potential air threat against Britain. One of the greatest achievements of the Government has been the improvement in the air defence of Britain in past years, and the continuing programme for the years ahead.

Our defence depends on a combination of the capability of the fighter forces, the capability of our radar, the effectiveness of our command and control organisation, and, of course, the survivability of the bases and headquarters in the event of an attack on them.

The Government increased the number of fighter aircraft from the inadequate number that they inherited. In the years ahead, we shall need to maintain our present front-line strength, and I am sure that the Government intend to do that. Their next step was to add 72 Hawk fast-jet trainers in an armed configuration to the fighter capability in a crisis. Detachments of those aircraft are regularly moved to Newcastle airport to provide a close defence of the north-east of the country. The introduction into service of the Tornado fighter is a generation away from the aircraft that it is replacing. Indeed, the Lightning that is going out of service represents a 30-year gap in technology. There is an enormous advance in capability.

The creation of a Tornado fighter base at Leeming is particularly welcome. The geographical spread of our fighter bases in the past has not been as it should be. With the creation of the wing at Leeming we are bridging the gap between Scotland and Lincolnshire, and that makes a great deal of sense. The entry into service of the VC10 tankers and the TriStar tankers has greatly increased the capacity of the tanker force and enabled the fighters to provide a far more capable defence. Through air refuelling they can operate further out from the coasts and stay much longer away on station. An additional squadron of tankers is equivalent to a number of additional squadrons of fighter aircraft, and that increase in our strength is greatly to be welcomed.

There have been great improvements in the strength of our ground radar, and many fixed installations have been brought up to date, complemented by the new mobile radars which can be moved as necessary to meet changing circumstances in a crisis. That huge improvement of ground radar has greatly increased our capability. Without doubt the main improvement in radar coverage of the United Kingdom, however, comes from the Boeing E3 and the AWACS systems. No name has yet been chosen for this aircraft. It is known as the E3A Sentry aircraft in the American services. Perhaps we should be thinking of our own name for such a vital piece of equipment in our Air Force. It provides a great mobility of radar cover and can operate far in advance. It is much more survivable against attack than any group of radar stations. In an emergency, it could be used to plug a gap if a ground station is taken out by enemy action.

It is appropriate to say a few words in praise of the devoted crews of the ancient Shackleton airborne early-warning aircraft, which continue to drone through the skies of the north of Scotland. These aircraft are at least 30 years old. They were not even the last model of Shackleton, and the last model was in service when I was in the RAF—a long time ago. Indeed, 30 years ago I remember flying similar aircraft, and they were then described as 30,000 rivets pulsating in unison. I doubt whether they are any better now than they were 30 years ago. Their capability is very limited compared with modern equipment, but their crews maintain the skills in being until they can transfer to the new Boeings.

I was pleased to hear the announcement that an order for a further AWAC is to be placed, bringing the total up to seven. If there is one message that I want to leave with my hon. Friend the Minister tonight, it is that we need an additional aircraft to bring the total up to eight. With seven aircraft we can just maintain the necessary 24-hour cover that we need over our air defence area, but we must take into account the possibility of losing an aircraft in an accident. The planes will be in service for a long time. The ancient narrow hull of the Shackleton precluded any major change in its equipment, but the AWAC is basically a Boeing 707 with a great deal of room inside and one can expect that over the years major improvements will be incorporated as technology develops. However great the skills of the crews, it must be a possibility that one of the fleet will be lost over a 20 or 30-year life span. If only six aircraft were left, would we be able to maintain the essential cover? I strongly urge my hon. Friend to see whether an eighth aircraft can be added to the order. The dollar has fallen and that must make such a purchase cheaper and slightly more affordable.

There have been enormous improvements in command and control in the air defence environment in Britain, and the implementation of those improvements is most welcome. They provide a great deal of flexibility in command and control, with numerous control centres around the country. It will now be possible from the south of England for controllers to operate fighters nearly 1,000 miles away over the Norwegian sea as easily as if they were in a control centre in the north of Scotland. There will be a much improved capability for co-ordinating operations with neighbouring NATO air and maritime commanders out at sea. That will enable our air defence commanders to deploy defending fighters in the right place, at the right time, in the right quantity, and, in particular, as far forward as possible over the sea so that there will be the maximum number of enemy interceptions and engagements.

The need to engage our attackers as far out from the United Kingdom as possible is greater than ever in an age of ever-increasing long-range land attack missiles launched from aircraft. It is possible that, with the number of attackers that could be expected, some would get through and our airfields would become prime targets. Therefore, I welcome the progress that has been made in hardening facilities at our bases. That is a most noticeable change when one visits stations or passes them in a car.

Efforts have also been made to set up a capability to repair damage to those airfields in an emergency and to ensure secure communications under attack. I welcome the increase in the number of Royal Auxiliary Air Force squadrons defending our bases. I hope that we shall

[Mr. Neville Trotter]

continue to add more Royal Auxiliary Air Force defence squadrons in future because they are a cost-effective way of providing an essential element of our defence.

We can expect that as our own attack capability improves, so will that of our potential opponents. We need to maintain a high standard in our air defences for the future in line with new and developing technology for both defence and attack.

In the next year or two, we must consider where we shall go in the next century. It takes five years to decide what to do and 10 years to bring into production equipment that must then last 20 years. There are exciting prospects in over-the-horizon radars, where a beam is bounced off a layer of the upper air, giving a long range. At present, there are problems with weather conditions, but there is scope for these systems in the future. It is something that we should be looking at. I am sure that all Western countries are considering what can be done in that direction. Similarly, surface wave radar are coming into technological development, where the radar beam can follow the earth's curve, and that has the great advantage of detecting low-flying aircraft which at present would be sheltered by the earth's curve as they approach.

There is a highly classified stealth programme in the United States, which officially refuses to admit that it has any stealth aircraft. Indeed, it is only when, from time to time, a sudden hole appears in the ground as one goes astray that one knows that they exist. I am told, however, that they are not so stealthy that they cannot be seen. They are still visible. However, they are so constructed that their radar signature is only a fraction of that of the present generation of aircraft.

However much the United States seeks to keep that technology hidden, it will eventually become available to those on the other side. The plans will either be stolen or developed. We must accept that, looking ahead to the next century, potential attackers will have such technology. We shall have to look ahead to new forms of detection altogether.

Radar, which has been the main defence sensor for 50 years since the Battle of Britain, may well be replaced in the next 20 years by completely new detectors. One wonders whether heat detection may come into its own by that time. High performance aircraft give out a great deal of heat from their skin surface and it must be possible to detect that form of energy release.

The Tornado fighter is designed to detect enemy aircraft at long range and to fire its missiles at them while still miles away. But there is a clear need now for another type of fighter to complement that capability. In the crowded skies over Europe, it is often not possible to engage an enemy at a distance because too many aircraft are about and it is not possible to distinguish friend from foe miles away in such circumstances. Therefore, there is a need for a fighter that is designed more for its agility than for its long-range capabilities—designed for the eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation of a dog fight. The RAF has a clear need for such an aircraft in the 1990s. It is to meet that need that the European fighter aircraft is being brought forward by us and our European allies.

It is not economically practical for the United Kingdom to design and build an aircraft of this nature in the sort of numbers that the RAF will need. The EFA project is an important collaborative programme. It is important economically, militarily and politically. It is the most cost-effective way of meeting the RAF's needs for the next generation of aircraft. I am pleased that we are making significant progress towards the introduction of the manufacturing phase of that plane.

Our total need and that of our allies for that aircraft is over 700, and the United Kingdom industry will perform one third of the work. Such an aircraft should have a good export potential. There is likely to be a big demand overseas for aircraft with such capability and at such a price.

It is important to obtain from the manufacturers the necessary guarantees for the future, in terms not only of performance but of availability once it is in service. It should be possible to enter into an agreement with the consortium to cover both performance and maintainability.

Thirty years ago, in the infamous 1957 White Paper, the end of manned aircraft was forecast. It is difficult to forecast what the exact nature of the environment in the air will be 30 years from now. However, I remind the House that we must start thinking about it because, as I have said, it takes five years to decide what we want and 10 years to build, with 20 or 30 years in service. The aircraft that are now beginning to come forward will be in service well into the next century, perhaps until about 2030—rather a horrifying thought for some of us.

Whatever the technological environment and the circumstances in which the RAF will be flying when it enters its century—it is an interesting thought that in another 30 years we shall have a century of the RAF to celebrate—it will still be keeping the peace and deterring aggression as successfully as it is today. It will be in as fine a shape then as it is today, which has never been better in its history.

6.19 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate, because it gives me a chance to refer for the first time since my election to the Royal Air Force base at Leuchars, which lies in my constituency. Leuchars has been an RAF base since 1920. It currently contains some 2,000 service men together with 1,500 dependants. The presence of those service men and dependants contributes richly to the variety of life in the community, and—in another sense of "richly"—to the local economy. The RAF has become well integrated with the community, and relations are generally very cordial. Indeed, so popular is the RAF at Leuchars that last September an air show which was scheduled to attract 10,000 spectators attracted four times that number, with the result that roads were blocked for some 20 miles around.

Like other hon. Members, I was pleased to hear the Minister of State refer to the Government's decision on search and rescue operations. As the Minister will know, a flight of 222 Search and Rescue Squadron is deployed at Leuchars. Like other hon. Members, I was much concerned at the reports that privatisation was being considered. I was not alone in writing to the Minister on the subject. I shall not repeat the arguments that we put to the Government, except to say that a privatised service would be susceptible to industrial action, and possibly to legal action, as a consequence of which equipment might

be seized. Anything of that nature which stood in the way of a proper and effective service would obviously be something to be deplored and avoided.

Self-evidently, the search and rescue services are complementary to other training and necessarily involve the use of equipment already in place. Search and rescue services began at Leuchars in 1956, and since then 1,955 rescues have been performed. In 1986, the number of rescues was 121, and in 1987 it was 114. Notably, 104 of those were what might be described as civil rescues, and only 10 were military. Those figures emphasise that the existing armed services' facilities for search and rescue are also a very important part of the civilan services.

The House, I feel, would not be slow to offer its congratulations not simply to those who perform such responsibilities from Leuchars, but to others all round the country, on the skill, expertise and heroism that they are often required to demonstrate, frequently in association with other rescue services. If I may make another local point, one such association is with the lifeboat stationed at Anstruther and others stationed elsewhere around the country.

What I said about Leuchars is not unique. It is, I believe, typical. My hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) today drew my attention to the fact that at RAF Boulmer, which lies in his constituency, the same standards of dedication and heroism are frequently displayed.

Low flying has been mentioned, and I should like to say a word about that, and also about training. It is clear that low flying is necessary for the proper training of our pilots; it must be equally clear that, in certain circumtances, it causes inconvenience. On many occasions, it has caused grave concern, and will doubtless continue to do so. It is also clear that where a training squadron is deployed at a base the pattern of activity may change radically because of training requirements.

On 26 November last year, some of my right hon. and hon. Friends, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel), met the Secretary of State and, I understand, the Minister who is to wind up the debate. They were very well received, and helpful and constructive discussions took place. At that meeting, I understand that the Government agreed first to consider the use of independent radar checks to ensure that the RAF's own rules are being observed by its pilots; and, secondly, to consider the extent to which some present low flying might, at least in part, be transferred to either the Falkland Islands or Canada. I should be grateful if the Minister could tell us the result of that consideration, or at least let us know in some other way after the debate.

The issue of training also embraces that of noise. As must be self-evident, an alteration in the pattern of operations, while it may not increase the intensity of noise, may well increase its frequency. A noise that is tolerable at a certain level when it occurs once, twice or even half a dozen times a day may, at the same intensity, become unacceptable if repeated many more times.

In a written answer to a question that I put down on 12 November 1987, the Minister revealed the amount that had been spent in and around Leuchars on insulation after the arrival of a training squadron. That amount was negligible — £45,000. I urge the Minister to be more flexible. Such payments are essentially discretionary, and thus enable the Minister to take particular account of particular circumstances. Relatively modest sums would create a disproportionate amount of good will, because those affected by noise find it very disturbing, and sometimes distressing. I do not consider it an overstatement to say that some at least find the quality of their lives affected. The solution is not to suggest that necessary training should be curtailed or abandoned. The solution is to ensure that the effects of such training are alleviated by more flexible provision of grants for insulation or double glazing.

Reference has been made to pay and conditions. Obviously they have an effect on recruitment. They may be even more significant in the retention of skilled personnel, but in considering the retention of skilled personnel we should not concentrate entirely on pilots. Very high levels of skill and expertise are demonstrated throughout all the trades practised in the Royal Air Force, and dissipation or dilution of those skills is obviously regrettable and to be avoided. The issue of pay and conditions should be considered in regard to all ranks and occupations in the RAF, rather than in relation only to the more obvious occupations, such as that of pilot.

Hon. Members have mentioned the European fighter aircraft. Clearly such development, if successful, is to be applauded. I hope that the Government will give as much emphasis as possible to a policy of common procurement. We should not, of course, underestimate the difficulties involved in such a policy, but, equally, we should not underestimate the desirability of its achievement, in both the financial consequences and as a strengthening of political links within Europe. That is something that alliance Members, at least, find highly desirable.

The country needs a robust defence and within that defence it is necessary that the Royal Air Force should play a significant part. For my part, that is a primary consideration. The proper defence of the United Kingdom is a fundamental responsibility of Government. I do not place any less importance on the responsibility of Government to be responsive and flexible when the possibility of disarmament without prejudice to robust defence is made available.

Suggestions made recently, that the Government favour a nuclear stand-off missile to be carried by the Royal Air Force, would seem to put in jeopardy some benefits of the INF treaty. The United States deploys the Patriot missile system, which is conventionally armed and replaced the nuclear-armed Nike Hercules system. If that is good enough for the roles that the United States seeks to fulfil, the Government would be well advised to pause before embarking upon a nuclear system. It seems neither necessary nor desirable to increase reliance on nuclear weapons.

There is no substantive motion before the House, but the House will not find it difficult to express its confidence in the professionalism of the Royal Air Force, to recognise its loyalty and bravery and to express the hope that those important and notable qualities will continue to be exhibited by those who serve in the Royal Air Force on behalf of us all and to whom we have very good reason to be grateful.

6.31 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) on his speech. It was unexceptional in that it told us very little about Liberal party policy on defence, but that is nothing new from the

[Mr. Michael Colvin]

Opposition Benches because the shadow defence spokesman, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), who opened the debate, was equally shadowy. As long as the Opposition go on shadow boxing we are not worried; it is when they go into action on the real things that we will be concerned.

Mr. Rogers: Will the hon. Member accept that it is not my function as shadow spokesman to delineate the policies? His party is in government and he ought to be more constructive and comment on his party's policy and the Government's action. The debate is about the Government's custodianship of the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Colvin: I agree with two things the hon. Gentleman said: he congratulated the Royal Air Force on its 70th anniversary, and he congratulated Air Chief Marshal Sir David Craig on his appointment as Chief of Staff.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Let us get to the Tucano.

Mr. Colvin: I accept what the hon. Gentleman said about the PC9 and I am pleased that it is being sold to the Saudi Arabians.

As a humble member the PBI, I hesitate to take part in a debate about the Royal Air Force, but having once represented a constituency which has a considerable interest in the aerospace industry, I will address most of my remarks to that aspect of the debate.

The debate is timely because, following the Reykjavik summit in October 1986, progress is being made on reducing nuclear arms in the new and very welcome atmosphere of perestroika. However, the more flexible and encouraging attitude of the Soviet Union must not lead us to lower our guard. The move towards INF reduction was achieved by negotiating from a position of strength. That must remain our aim, just as our independent nuclear deterrent will stay as the linchpin of our defence. It is because we follow Churchill's dictum not to let go the atomic weapon until we are sure, and more than sure, that the other means of preserving peace are in our hands that we must continue to maintain and strengthen our conventional defences.

NATO is still the foundation of our defence policy, and 95 per cent. of our defence budget is committed to it. The Royal Air Force makes a very important contribution to NATO's air defence and strike capability on the European central front. It is responsible for the United Kingdom's air defence and provides airlift support to all three services.

The Minister of State referred to the cover the RAF gives to our merchant shipping. I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) said: I hope that there is a Merchant Navy for it to give cover to in the future. That is a matter of considerable concern to all hon. Members.

The effectiveness of the Royal Air Force in fulfilling its role depends in large part on the equipment with which it is supplied. As 18 per cent. of the total defence budget —some £3·3 billion—will be spent on equipping the Royal Air Force this year, I will speak about the aircraft and aerospace industry. It is good to see my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), the recently appointed Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, attending the debate because he brings to the Department considerable experience and knowledge of the aerospace industry, which I am sure will be extremely useful, and also a considerable constituency interest.

No one can say that the Government, since their election in 1979, have not given the Royal Air Force the tools to do its job. Major items of equipment have been ordered since our election, and I list some of them: the 82 Tornado GR1s, of which 73 have been delivered—they are the strike attackers; 162 Tornado air defence variants, of which 48 have been delivered; and 62 Harrier GR5s —the big wing Harrier, equivalent to the AV8B in America. We should pay tribute to the United States for having joined Britain in developing that aircraft. In fact, if it had not been for the United States Marine Corps there may not have been a Harrier. We should think about what that would have meant for the outcome of the Falklands operation.

Other items of equipment are: seven AWACs, none of which has been delivered—it is a pity it is not a British product, but the less said about that the better; 15 Phantoms, all of which have been delivered; 18 transport-tanker aircraft, which will have tremendous impact as the force multipliers in keeping aircraft in the air—five of those are TriStars converted from British Airways aircraft; eight support helicopters, all of which have been delivered; 130 basic trainers, which are to come soon; and 25 EH101 helicopters, the successor to the Sea King, which will now be manufactured. Let us hope that Rolls-Royce succeeds in getting the RTM322 engine into that aircraft.

The most impressive equipment programme is the Tornado. There are 600 in service in the United Kingdom, West Germany and Italy—the three partners in the project. Some 809 have been ordered from those three countries, and Germany may require a few more. Together with the Saudi Arabian contract, about which we were all pleased, the total output of the Tornados by the time the programme finishes may be well over 1,000. The Tornado, besides being part of the comprehensive modernisation programme, has provided many jobs in a high-tech industry.

I pay tribute to the British aerospace industry for the application of good design. The technological and engineering skills of its men and women have meant that it has been able to add tenfold to the value of the raw material it uses. That is an added value ratio which, for a country such as the United Kingdom, which is not rich in raw materials, is the sort of industry that we ought to encourage. In fact, 55,000 jobs in the United Kingdom aerospace industry are dependent on the Tornado programme.

Sir Antony Buck: My hon. Friend knows much about these matters and, as he has just said, the Tornado is a remarkable example of the success of British technology. Does he agree that the Harrier probably runs it pretty close? Britain has sold 110 of them initially abroad, which is a remarkable achievement, and the Harrier programme has gone on to be another success. The Harrier is a great achievement in British industry and the programme has had much help from the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Colvin: I agree wholly with my hon. and learned Friend, as I usually do. The Harrier and the Tornado are also examples of inter-country collaboration. Bearing in mind the very high cost of aerospace projects today, I believe that such collaboration is the only practical way forward.

The 55,000 jobs that I have referred to are not all within British Aerospace but are spread across Roll-Royce which produces the engines and hundreds, perhaps thousands, of other companies that supply the bits and pieces. As the strike attack Tornado force is completed and the air defence variant becomes operational, we may be tempted to relax a bit. As early as the mid-1990s, however, even some of the Tornados that came into service early might need to be replaced. Certainly all of our Phantom F4 force will have had to go by that time. That is what has led to the biggest ever financial collaboration programme undertaken by a group of NATO allies, the European fighter aircraft. It involves four countries—the United Kingdom, West Germany, Italy and Spain. They have agreed a broad specification for the aircraft in terms of weight, engine thrust and payload. They will share the work, depending upon the number of aircraft that each of them requires.

The United Kingdom will have a 33 per cent. stake in manufacture, because we require 250 aircraft, and West Germany will have exactly the same work share and number of aircraft. Italy will have a 21 per cent. stake because it wants only 150 aircraft. Spain will have a 13 per cent. stake because it wants 100, or perhaps as many as 150 aircraft. We are not sure yet of its requirements. A total of 750 to 800 aircraft will be required for the member countries, who may want more aircraft in due course, and this will bring tremendous export potential.

I should like to put on record the arguments for proceeding with the EFA, which has now reached a crucial stage of decision making. The industry is plagued with acronyms. It is often said that, provided one knows the acronyms used in the aerospace industry, one can find a way around and persuade people that one is very knowledgeable.

It is worth my running through the pedigree of the EFA because it is an important project. It goes back to 1980, when the British, Germans and French together produced the ECA, or the European combat aircraft. That collaboration led in the following year to the United Kingdom proceeding alone with the P110. Perhaps hon. Members will remember the campaign that we mounted at that time to persuade the Government that the project should go ahead.

At the same time the Germans decided to do their own thing, and they produced the TKF-90. Both of these designs were still on paper, and were brought together in 1982 when the ACA, or the agile combat aircraft—I hope that hon. Members are following this—went on the drawing board. At that time, we roped in Italy as an additional partner. That led the then Secretary of State for Defence, now Sir John Nott, to announce at the Farnborough international air show that the EAP, or the experimental aircraft programme as it had been renamed, would come into being.

It is worth quoting from a press release issued at that time. Sir John said that this project was to be

"a research experimental aircraft programme which would bring together current component elements of demonstrator work and further advance our knowledge of the demanding technology which will be essential to the high performance requirements now foreseen".

It was not to be a prototype. No one would be designing an aircraft that he thought would be required in 10 years' time, but an aircraft that could give us all the information required to produce, in the light of circumstances and tests, the sort of aircraft that we needed. The designers were going to look at high agility, more efficient use of composite materials, artificial stability or "fly-by-wire", and stealth techniques that have been mentioned today, as well as advanced cockpit and systems design. A demonstrator model would tell us much about these matters, and provide information useful in developing our STOVL aircraft, the Harrier, and to improve the Tornados already in service. There was much more value in producing a demonstrator model than there could ever be in producing a prototype. In the history of the British aerospace industry, far too many prototypes have finished up on the scrap heap. The Government were right to approach the problem in the way that they did.

Sir John Nott also said at that time that the aircraft would be ready to fly in about three years, and that has happened. Those of us who were at Farnborough two years ago were very impressed at the performance that it put up, and so too have been the 11 pilots who have flown it.

When the EFA first comes into service, it will have the RB-199 engine, built by Rolls-Royce at Patchway. As production proceeds, the aircraft will need a new engine, the EJ200. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) asked earlier in the debate about the Government's attitude towards that engine. It is probably safe for me to say that the Government, if they go ahead with the EFA, which I am sure they will, will have no alternative but to accept the EJ200 engine as well.

In August 1985 came the real turning point in the EFA programme, with the signing in Turin of the agreement to proceed between the member countries — the United Kingdom, West Germany, Italy and Spain. France had pulled out, although it had been in the programme up to that stage. It was developing its own ideas. It wanted an aircraft that was lighter and more adaptable, and would not have the same capability. Its ACX programme, as it was called at that stage, became the Rafale. The Dassault company proceeded with its manufacture. I believe that that aircraft has now flown.

The EFA is very important for jobs. The employment graph in a British Aerospace or Rolls-Royce factory looks like a cliff edge for 1992, when work on the Tornado programme is due to run down. The EFA could generate as many as 40,000 jobs. That is 15,000 fewer than Tornado because Spain has become an additional partner. But the project will be crucial to our aerospace industry. Employment is a good reason for joining the project, although it is not the only one. It must be the right project for the job, as I am sure it will be. Nevertheless, the project is crucial for our aerospace industry and for maintaining a credible industrial base for our defence systems.

Let us also hope that the radar that will go into the aircraft is British. Some of us have received today a note from the GEC-Marconi Defence Systems company outlining its suggestions for radar in the aircraft. The contract will be worth £1 billion and involve the four-nation consortium. Let us hope that we go ahead with a European radar system rather than an American one. The danger of putting an American radar system into this aircraft is that, when it comes to selling the aircraft to third countries, the Americans can sanitise the radar. In fact, the USA even has the right to veto some of the sales at times. I am not sure that that is good. Let us hope that it is British or European radar in the EFA.

[Mr. Colvin]

Last summer, Eurofighter, the national EFA partners' joint company, which will develop and build the aircraft, and Eurojet, the company which will develop and build the new engine required, submitted a definition phase report on the European fighter aircraft. This report covered the technical definition of the aircraft, the division of work between the member companies and the proposed programme and estimate of costs. It will be an extremely tightly costed project. Last Sunday, the *Sunday Times* identified the work already being done by the member companies in this £20 billion project and areas in which economies could be made. They have suggested reductions of about 8 per cent. in the cost of production, worth some £400 million. That is the right attitude towards such a project. Just because the Government are the purchasers, companies should not have the impression that there is a blank cheque, because there is not.

In November 1987, the Ministry of Defence was sufficiently satisfied with progress for approval of the equipment policy committee for EFA developments to be given. However, the final step of approaching the overseas and defence policy committee of the Cabinet awaits international agreement in respect of some aspects of the programme. This is a particularly sensitive issue in West Germany. The West German defence budget is very tight for a number of reasons. First, there is a demographic problem which results in a shortage of military personnel. An increase in conscription in West Germany and an improvement in wage rates did nothing to solve that problem and attract more recruits. Secondly, there has been delay in the updating of their Phantom force. Thirdly, there is the problem of the Luftwaffe's need for additional Tornado aircraft. Finally, there is the launch of a new helicopter, the PAH2. All of these run concurrently with EFA activities.

We are now seeing all the strands of the European fighter aircraft being pulled together in Bonn and I hope that we shall soon receive formal Bundestag approval for the project to go ahead. That is all we now need. Everybody else is happy.

Mr. Rogers: Will the hon. Gentleman explain the basis on which he makes that statement? I understand that Herr Wörner is having great difficulty in justifying the expenditure to the West German Cabinet. Will the hon. Gentleman give the source of his information?

Mr. Colvin: The hon. Gentleman must not be such a pessimist. That is the problem with Opposition Members. They run down this country. I am an eternal optimist. I have talked to the representatives of the industry, the West Germans and our other partners and there is every reason for optimism. We are optimistic that, before he leaves to take over Lord Carrington's post at NATO, Herr Wörner will succeed in obtaining approval for the EFA. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that we want to see that.

The time scale for the introduction of the EFA to the RAF to replace existing aircraft which will be obsolescent by the mid-1990s is now becoming extremely tight. That is why this matter is so urgent. The aerospace industry has already embarked on certain aspects of the work at its own risk to maintain the programme time scale. We should pay tribute to both British Aerospace and Rolls-Royce and to their shareholders for putting up the money. I question whether those companies would have been able or willing to do so had they been in the public sector rather than the private sector.

The EFA is vital to NATO and to the RAF if the Warsaw pact air capability is to be contained. It is also essential to maintain close Government and industrial collaboration on air projects in Europe. It is particularly important to the British aircraft industry to get back into the combat aircraft field. We have not developed a high-performance fighter aircraft since the Lightning and, for the past 20 years, this primary field of military export has been left to the Americans and the French. That is not good enough. We need the European fighter aircraft for the RAF and our collaborative partners in NATO. We need the EFA to sustain the technological capability and excellence of our aircraft industry. We need the EFA to be launched soon.

I should like to say a few words about the aerospace industry, which has served the RAF and the nation well over the years. In turnover terms, in the Western world, it is second to only the United States. Its sales exceed those of France and West Germany added together. Its turnover has increased from £2·5 billion in 1977 to almost £9 billion today. Nationalisation took place in 1977. That shotgun marriage may have been necessary. It brought the industry together, but it cost many jobs. The increase between 1977 and 1988 is some 50 per cent. in real terms, allowing for the rate of inflation. About 60 per cent. of the figure relates to military sales and about 40 per cent. to civil sales.

There are problems about the sale of civil aircraft because of the collapse of the dollar. Civil sales are priced in dollars, whereas military sales are quoted in pounds sterling. Sixty per cent. of the output goes for export. By comparison, the United States exports only 20 per cent. of its output. Exports have increased from £1 billion in 1977 to £5·5 billion last year. In real terms, allowing for inflation, that figure has doubled over the past decade and has made a dramatic contribution to our balance of trade. In 1977, we had a £200 million surplus which has increased tenfold to £2,000 million in the past 10 years. That is not bad going.

I wish to speak briefly about the so-called two-way street — the reciprocal sale and purchase of defence hardware—between ourselves and north America. When we came to power, it was about 4:1 in favour of the United States, but it is now only 2:1 in favour of the United States. That shows how we have managed to increase the sales of our hardware in a difficult area. The United States still takes 28 per cent. of our aerospace exports. The Americans have had difficulty with their budget deficit and, during a presidental election year, their Government are unlikely to be making generous decisions in respect of procurement. As a result, some of the contracts that they have signed will be pushed to the Right, but I think they are still safe.

The industry has great productivity achievements. Productivity has more than doubled over the past decade, which has made our aerospace industry competitive. That is why, over the same period, we have managed to increase our share of the world market from only 10 per cent. in the late 1960s to 17 per cent. today. Job prospects are good and will be even better because the industry has good products to sell. When it comes to selling aerospace products, nowhere is more important than the Farnborough international air show. That is the British aerospace industry's major shop window. Britain and her overseas competitors and partners put their aerospace

wares on display at that biannual show at Farnborough. In spite of rising costs, it looks like being a sell-out for 1988, with bookings up 20 per cent. on 1986.

The show is organised by the Society of British Aerospace Companies. The Ministry of Defence is their landlord. The £1·75 million which the Ministry of Defence charges, or is instructed by the Treasury to charge, for the services it provides at Farnborough is a bit steep, particularly when we bear in mind that the Paris air show, the French equivalent which takes place in alternate years, gets the services at Le Bourget airport for nothing. Perhaps we could learn from that.

Rising charges have an effect on participation. British Aerospace, which is undertaking a cost-cutting exercise, is tightening its belt. But I would say to British Aerospace and to other participants in the Farnborough air show that to cut their advertising to save money is like stopping one's watch to save time: it is a short-sighted exercise.

I trust that by the first week in September, when the Farnborough international takes place, all the partners will have agreed to proceed with the vital European fighter aircraft project. I hope that we can get the EFA into service with the RAF by 1995 and start winning a share of the enormous market for that type of aircraft which will open up as the F16s in particular need replacement by the year 2000. I am mindful of the staggering fact that the final value of the orders for such a project can be over 10 times the initial value of the aircraft. The advanced fighter market is the single biggest market in the business. There will be a dog fight for orders. I want to see Britain and her EFA partners winning it.

7.1 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Like other hon. Members, I welcome the announcement today on the rescue service. I hope that there is no get-out clause. The Minister spoke of local aspects of the service possibly being under private control. I regret that the issue arose, but it arose, not because the Ministry of Defence said that it was thinking of privatising the service, but because Bristows came knocking rather impertinently on the door and said, "Would you mind privatising the service?" That is an unsatisfactory way to proceed.

I want to focus attention on the air defence of Britain. I shall not try to emulate the boyish enthusiasm of the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin). I shall take a more critical approach to the subject than some Government Back Benchers have done. A great deal of money has been spent on air defence in recent years. The *Financial Times* recently estimated the total budget for air defence improvements since 1977 at more than £5 billion. If anything, that is an under-estimate, since the 162 air defence Tornados, the seven E3 AWACS and the money down the drain on Nimrod amount to nearly £5 billion on their own.

At its low point in 1970 the RAF's force of interceptor aircraft numbered not more than 120. Most of them were short-range Lightnings, with limited fire-power and a poor maintenance record. Today there are some 270 air defence aircraft in Britain, of which 50 are the latest Tornado F3s costing £20 million each. When the Government have poured another few hundred million pounds into GEC-Marconi's coffers to make the radar work, each aircraft will be able to do the job of several Lightnings.

No one should over-estimate the Tornado's capability. Certainly the RAF does not. When the Tornado was designed, it was thought that this one aircraft could carry out virtually all combat roles from long-range strike to air defence. But the attempts — comical, if they were not such a waste of public money — to design a plane to satisfy the requirements of all three participating nations soon collapsed, with Britain deciding to go it alone. Shortly afterwards we were told that this wonderful new purpose-built fighter would not be capable of performing the RAF's air defence duties in West Germany.

Then it emerged that the Tornado would not even take over the defence of the United Kingdom for which it was specifically designed. Instead, two of the existing Phantom squadrons had to be retained. Now the original 16 Tornado Mark 2s, most still with concrete where the radar should be, have been withdrawn from service and put into storage at an RAF base in Wales, less than two years after they entered service. When the Minister replies, I hope he can say why more than £300 million worth of weaponry has been languishing in a hangar for the last year. I hope he will tell us what will be done with the aircraft and how much more will be spent on them.

As to the European fighter aircraft, the latest estimate is that they will cost £30 million each. If the history of such projects is anything to go by, it may end up as a jack of all trades and master of none, years late and over budget.

The sorry saga of the airborne early warning system is the second principal area of the Government's enormous spending on United Kingdom air defence. The House knows only too well that £1 billion has been wasted on the Nimrod AEW3, with the subsequent spending of a further £1 billion buying the Boeing AWACS. The main reason for buying these hugely expensive flying radar stations was said to be the need to detect Soviet bombers attacking the United Kingdom at a low level, underneath ground-based radar cover. Yet we now hear that the RAF also intends to buy over-the-horizon radar to be sited around the coastline, also to fill the gaps beneath the ground-based radar coverage. We have heard about over-the-horizon radar for a long time, but there are still many questions to be answered. It is time that the House was given some of the answers. What is the radar for? Where will the stations be built? How much will the programme cost? The antennae are up to 1 mile long and 150 ft high. They will pose environmental problems and electromagnetic radiation will be a potential health hazard. Since Marconi — a name that is always cropping up — will almost certainly be the prime contractor, no doubt another few tens of millions of pounds will be added to our air defence budget.

The third major expansion in our air defences is the revamping of the ground-based radar system, or improved IUKADGE. The history of Britain's radar defences since 1945 has been a sorry tale, with billions of pounds wasted on systems which were obsolete before they were deployed and which would have been virtually useless against air attack.

On current trends IUKADGE looks like repeating the pattern. The first two radars for the new network were due to become operational at Benbecula in the Western Isles and at Buchan in Aberdeenshire in 1983. More than four years later they are still not working fully. The radar station at Buchan, regarded as the most vital one in the country because of its position, continues to rely on a type of radar first introduced more than 30 years ago,

[Mr. Brian Wilson]

supplemented by a more modern United States radar set which was captured from the Argentines during the Falklands war.

The IUKADGE system will involve mobile radar as well as refurbishing the fixed sites such as Buchan and Benbecula. While cruise missile convoys will soon be a thing of the past, radar convoys will take their place. In addition, there are plans to set up decoy radars and passive electronic sensors around the country. I hope the Minister can tell the House what plans there are for additional sites for decoys and passive electronic sensors, and what the arrangements will be for the deployment of mobile radar convoys in peacetime exercises.

All these developments, together with the hardening of air bases against air attack, are costing the British taxpayer, with some assistance from other NATO countries, more than £5 billion. What is it all for? What is the threat of air attack against Britain? If we are to believe the Government's snow on the boot theory, the Soviet air threat to the United Kingdom has expanded greatly in recent years. Suffice it to say that the RAF's own figures demonstrate what a fallacy that is. On 14 December last the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart) said in a written answer that the RAF's interceptions of Soviet military aircraft are now occurring on average only

"three or four times each week."—[*Official Report*, 14 December 1987; Vol. 124, c. *412*.]

That is a reduction of at least 20 per cent. and possibly as much as 40 per cent. in seven years, yet during this period the RAF's protection capability has increased substantially at mind-boggling cost.

Evidence that the RAF has over inflated the capabilities of the Soviet air force comes from many sources. Back in 1977, journalists attending a press briefing at RAF strike command headquarters at High Wycombe were told:

"Royal Air Force crews to date have not intercepted any Tupolev Backfire bombers flying snooper missions, but 'expect some soon'."

The Backfire bomber is the great bogey of the 1970s. Its reputed ability to attack Britain from the west was used to justify new radar stations in the Western Isles, Northern Ireland and Cornwall, and a £40 million upgrading of the airfield at Stornoway against the wishes of the local community and the recommendation of a public inquiry. But it went ahead, because the Backfires were about to invade the Western Isles.

Where are they? There is no evidence that they have ever been seen near Britain, more than 10 years after the RAF expected to see them. The furthest south that they have been recorded is off the Lofoten Islands, 1,000 miles away. The number of Soviet aircraft penetrating the United Kingdom air defence region in recent years has been so low that RAF fighter controllers have been having insufficient practice in controlling real interceptions. To compensate for that, the RAF has installed simulators at even the busiest radar stations, Saxa Vord and Buchan, to enable the controllers to keep their hand in when the Russians are not threatening enough.

NATO already has such a superiority in the north-east Atlantic that the Soviets have been increasingly concentrating their resources on defence, not offence. And, as the Americans pursue their highly risky offensive maritime strategy, US naval intelligence officers have been telling Congress that Soviet activity in the north-east Atlantic has been declining, not increasing, as they pull back their forces to defend their own territory.

Why should Britain be spending a fortune on massively upgrading its air defences? The answer is that the Government have once again caved in to the demands of the Pentagon. The Americans want free protection for their hundreds of nuclear strike aircraft in Britain as payment for the dubious privilege of basing them here. By all means let us have defence against air attack, but this country has poured billions of pounds needlessly into successive generations of over-specified, needlessly complex weapons, largely as an act of gratitude to the Americans, whose military forces make Britain such a target in the first place. What tangled logic this is, from which the principal beneficiaries would appear to be the shareholders of GEC-Marconi and the other contractors in this lucrative industry.

7.12 pm

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): As this is the 70th anniversary year of the Royal Air Force, I offer my gratitude to it for the way in which it has served this country since it was created in 1918.

I want to take a parochial approach to the Royal Air Force this evening. In particular, I want to discuss one air base—Greenham Common—in my constituency. In the course of his opening speech, my hon. Friend the Minister referred to the INF talks. All of us living in and close to Greenham felt that those talks had more importance to our constituency than to any other in the country. They came about as a result of five years of hard negotiation and a great determination by NATO not to be brow-beaten by the Soviets' deployment of SS20 missiles. They came about because NATO stuck to its dual-track approach of bringing cruise and Pershing II missiles to Europe while the USSR persisted in maintaining and building up its SS20 force. The talks came about because NATO was not prepared to allow the Soviets to gain an advantage over it in Western Europe.

In 1983, when the first cruise missiles appeared at RAF Greenham Common, most of us thought that they would remain there for at least a decade, if not longer. So, as we watched RAF Greenham Common being updated from a sleepy standby base for the United States air force to become the active base of the 501st missile wing of the United States air force, we did so in the belief that there was going to be a new generation of nuclear missiles in our part of west Berkshire for as long ahead as any of us could imagine. We watched the old barrack blocks that had fallen into almost complete disuse being refurbished and new facilities being built, including the six huge bomb-proof shelters in which the missiles were to be stored. We began to accustom ourselves to the antics of the women who had come pledged to prevent cruise's arrival and who succeeded only in creating a false hope in the Soviet mind that Western leaders could be frightened off bringing in Pershing and cruise.

Those same women, who brought with them the promise of preventing the arrival of cruise, succeeded only in bringing a great deal of squalor and hassle for local people, an enormous amount of extra work for local police and huge cost to the local population. They also brought, perhaps most significantly for all our lives, a hideous fence around the base, which was the single ugliest and most ostentatious demonstration that cruise missiles had

arrived—and with them, the women and their tinkers' camp of old vehicles, tents and general mess that the women designate their peace camp and which, in miniature, is still disfiguring the Greenham common.

Mr. Cohen: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this country is still supposed to be democratic and that people who want to protest against these missiles, which are deadly and dangerous to them, their families and future generations, should have the right to do so? Is he denying them that right? Is it right that the forces of the British and American Governments at Greenham Common should intimidate and harass those women on every occasion—and zap them, causing them illness?

Mr. McNair-Wilson: The hon. Gentleman talks as if he knew a bit about Greenham common——

Mr. Cohen: I was there.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: Not the base; the common. If he did, he would know that there are byelaws that control the use of the common. They prevent anyone — not only protesters—from camping on it. The people of Newbury have not objected to CND demonstrations that lasted inside a day. They have objected to having this tinkers' camp imposed on them by people who seem determined to ignore the laws of the common — which apply to everyone in the country, local people included — and who seem to believe they have some pre-emptive right to maintain their squalid camp regardless of the aggravation and loss of amenity to local people. I am sure the hon. Gentleman would not want to support people who wish to break the law to make their protest, especially as I agree with him so much that in a democracy, unlike what happens behind the iron curtain, we all have the right to demonstrate as long as we do so within the framework of the law.

Mr. Cohen: I still do not think that the hon. Gentleman has answered the point about these people's right to peaceful protests — and they have all been peaceful. Have not the Government broken many of those byelaws? Are not the Government before the courts charged under a number of them? Is there not a case at the moment about women who were left in a pit with the troops and police surrounding them, denying them the chance to get out? Is there not a case being brought by the NCCL against the Government and the authorities in that instance? How about the hon. Gentleman applying his diktats to their role in those cases, too?

Mr. McNair-Wilson: If the law has been broken, those who broke it will be prosecuted. If the byelaws to which the hon. Gentleman referred do not stand up in court, no doubt the judges will tell us so. As yet they have not said so, but that has not in any sense prevented the women from continuing with a camp which has been illegal from the moment that it was first created. Nor has it prevented them from trying in every way they know how to involve those cruise convoys, which go out to Salisbury plain without any missiles in any of the launcher vehicles, in a serious accident, so that in some way the United States forces shall be held responsible for an accident that will not have been of their making but will have been provoked by the women. I find it difficult to believe that the hon. Gentleman really supports that sort of behaviour, which is against the defence of Western Europe and of our country.

Those women and their protest may have deceived the Soviets briefly — perhaps long enough to make them hold off finally signing the INF treaty—but here we are, five years later, and, thanks to the resolution of the Government and of NATO, we have an INF treaty signed by the President of the United States of America and the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist party of the Soviet Union. Mr. Gorbachev. I think that all of us should celebrate that fact as one of the most significant acts in terms of reducing nuclear weapons that the world has seen since the first nuclear weapon was created.

The INF treaty still has to be ratified by the United States Senate and the Supreme Soviet, but if we may assume for a moment that both parties will ratify it, between 30 and 90 days after ratification the first Soviet inspectors will be arriving at Greenham Common to examine the cruise missiles stationed there and to set about their task of verifying that those missiles are being dismantled in line with the agreement under the treaty. That means that the Soviet observers should be arriving at Greenham Common some time between May and August of this year. Because they are arriving at a Royal Air Force base, they will be greeted by the RAF commander.

I understand that the Soviets will be allowed to bring five teams of two inspectors and will be permitted, under the treaty, to visit three areas of the base and to inspect any room on the base which could take an object 11 feet long and 21in in diameter. Of course, they will fly in in a Soviet aircraft, and accommodation is being built for the aircrew. I also understand that that team that inspects Greenham Common will make visits to RAF Molesworth by road from Greenham. The visits will be for short periods only to verify where the cruise missiles are kept and that they are gradually being reduced in line with the treaty arrangement.

A fortnight ago I had the good fortune to be invited to RAF Greenham Common by the base commander. I was enabled to follow the route that the Soviet observers will take when they arrive at the airfield. I was shown the three areas to which I have referred and was told that it is expected that the last cruise missile and its support equipment will be leaving Greenham in or about 1992—perhaps the last cruise missiles to be taken out of Western Europe as a result of the INF treaty.

Mr. Harris: Did I hear my hon. Friend aright when he said that for this brief visit accommodation would be built for the Soviet aircrew? What is the justification for building accommodation for a very brief visit? I am puzzled.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: The brief visit, as I understand it, will probably last 48 hours. The Soviet aircrew have got to live somewhere, and it was felt to be better that they should live in Portakabins, which are going to be put up for them, than in the barrack blocks currently used by the United States air force.

Then what happens? Three years hence the defence postures of NATO and the Warsaw pact may be very different from what they are today. There may have been further reductions in the nuclear armouries of East and West and their conventional forces may have been scaled down, even though progress in the MBFR talks in Vienna, at the moment at least, are disappointingly slow. All this

[Mr. McNair-Wilson]

is in the future, but the withdrawal of INF missiles, welcome though it is, does not immediately presage a change in NATO's need for vigilance and effective, flexible response. Nor does it suggest that the United States would necessarily wish to alter its dispositions, whether at Greenham or anywhere else in Europe.

Mr. Rogers: The hon. Gentleman said that on his visit to Greenham he was told that the last of the ground-launched cruise missiles would be removed by 1992. Did he find out on his visit when the warheads were going to be brought back to be fitted on to the air-launched cruise missiles?

Mr. McNair-Wilson: I have here the note that I made at the time of my visit, which may be of some interest to the House. I was told that the missiles will go with their launcher vehicles, and it will probably be a flight of missiles at a time, to the Davies Monthan air force base in Arizona, where they will be met by a Soviet team. Any one missile will be split down the middle and its wings will be taken off—rather like cutting up a bird. Then the bits of the missile will be crushed. The warhead will be immobilised and the guidance system can be removed. What happens after that is not in my remit. The launcher vehicle—not the tractor—will be cut up. So the missile and the launcher vehicle will be destroyed, and the warhead will have its guidance system removed.

I am afraid that I have wandered a bit, but I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and I hope that what I have told him has been of some interest.

As I was saying, there will be a Soviet team in Arizona to meet the missiles when they arrive, and presumably the same situation will exist in the Soviet Union, with American observers waiting for the missiles to arrive there.

NATO has a need to maintain vigilance and effective, flexible response for the foreseeable future. As has been said by so many speakers in the debate already, the air forces of Europe have been and are being updated with new aircraft and, as we know, the air forces of the Eurogroup of NATO intend to bring 200 new combat aircraft into service in 1988. Most of those aircraft will be either the advanced Tornado or F16 types.

The Tornado is proving to be an outstanding European aircraft. It has had its teething troubles, particularly with its Foxhunter radar, and perhaps this is the moment for me to ask my hon. Friend the Minister whether he can say whether the present system is meeting all its specifications and, if not, how soon he thinks it will be able to meet its phase 1 requirements. Perhaps he would also say whether any decision has been made about phase 2.

The European fighter aircraft—due to come into service at the end of this century—is another important addition to NATO's armoury; another generation of aircraft to maintain our defence flexibility. Can my hon. Friend say anything about development expenditure on this aircraft? Has an overall cost been decided with our West German, Italian and Spanish collaborators? Has any fresh approach been made to persuade the French to think again about coming into the project?

I think that all of us have felt for a long time that the more NATO can standardise its equipment the better, although I know that the French prefer to have an observer status in NATO. The recent talks with the French Defence Minister make me hope that perhaps it has been possible for the French to reconsider their decision to stay outside the project. There are decisions to be made about who builds the airframe, the engine and the radar programme. It is a huge programme, 800 aircraft, and obviously of the greatest importance to the defence of Western Europe, to the effectiveness of the RAF and to our aerospace industry.

I have allowed myself to digress from the subject of RAF Greenham Common, to which I shall now return. It is possible that some of the aircraft to which I have referred will be stationed on airfields in Western Europe. If there is a reduction in conventional forces, presumably some of those forward air bases may be decommissioned. Such decommissioning could lead to a reappraisal of the airfields in the United Kingdom.

I believe that it is generally accepted that the idea of stationing noisy, high-performance aircraft, such as the Tornado, the EFA, the F16 or the F111, at RAF Greenham Common is out of the question because of its proximity—as much as anything—to Newbury and Thatcham—both areas of considerable population. When I asked the American commander at Greenham what he thought would happen to the base when the cruise missiles had gone, he replied, rather enigmatically, that it would be used for an "air force purpose." He did not say—indeed, he may have been unaware of it—that even when the cruise missiles go, three years hence, Soviet observers will still be able to go to the base. They will still be able to visit the three designated areas and to travel to RAF Molesworth. They will be able to do so until 2001 according to article XI of the treaty. That is 13 years hence. Although the agreement affects both Soviet and Western European bases, I wish to concentrate my remarks on the effect that the agreement must have on RAF Greenham Common.

I hope that the Minister will be able to answer my questions. What will article XI mean to RAF Greenham Common? If the United States air force decides to give it up as a base, will that mean that, regardless of the use that the RAF might wish to make of that airfield, it could do so only on the basis that Soviet observers could arrive and inspect the three designated areas or any room that could take an object 11 ft long and 21 in in diameter? That right will continue for the next 13 years. Does that mean that, whether the USAF or the RAF are stationed at the base, they must always make allowances for those observers to come, even though the cruise missiles will have been gone for years?

If the RAF wishes to use the base for a different purpose, does it mean that it is still subject to those visits? The Soviet observers have the right to come and look around if they so desire. Therefore, does that not considerably limit the future uses to which the base can be put, bearing in mind that six bomb-proof shelters are in that area for inspection? Does that effectively mean that the base is frozen as regards its future for the next 13 years, or could it be de-activated if it was found to be surplus to requirement? In that case, would the base return to what it once was so many years ago—simply Greenham common? Obviously, those arguments must similarly apply to RAF Molesworth as that base is also included in the INF treaty. I should be grateful if my hon. Friend could answer those questions.

During my visit to Greenham common I was taken to inspect one of the shelters. For the first time in the five

years in which cruise missiles have been at Greenham I saw and put my hand on a cannister that contained one. That, in itself, is of no importance to anyone except me.

As I came out of the shelter I spoke to the young airman on guard—he was from the RAF Regiment. In October, I had been to Northern Ireland to see the county regiment into which people from Berkshire and Wiltshire enlist. In the course of talking to those soldiers I was frequently reminded that they were not satisfied with the boots that had been issued to them. They had all sorts of complaints about them, one of which was that they were anything but waterproof. Others said that they did not believe that they were the ideal boot for a soldier. Indeed, one corporal had chosen to go out and buy himself the boots that he was wearing on duty. Hon. Members may ask, "What has this got to do with RAF Greenham Common?" The fact is that when I spoke to that young airman of the RAF Regiment, I asked him about his boots and, to my surprise, he told me that he, too, had bought his own boots. I asked him why, and he told me that general issue boots were too heavy and hurt the Achilles tendons in his heels. In consequence, when on sentry duty, he preferred the boots that he had bought because of their lightness and flexibility, even though they were not very waterproof.

I asked the United States colonel who was accompanying me what he thought about boots and whether his service men were pleased with their boots. He said that the American service men were also rather unhappy about their boots, but that they had got over the problem of waterproofing with over-boots. He showed me a pair of excellent waterproof over-boots. I suggest to my hon. Friend that that is one solution to the problem.

Given my present interest in military boots, and as the RAF Regiment wears the same boots as the Army, I was especially interested in an item that appeared in *The Times* on Monday. That article had the headline:

"Army to march in style with 'Rolls-Royce' boot."

I do not know how accurate that report is, but I should be grateful if my hon. Friend could say whether the Ministry of Defence is considering introducing a new Army boot, which *The Times* described as a "super boot". Has that new boot been approved? If so, how soon will it be introduced? This is an RAF debate, but will those who serve in the RAF Regiment, along with those in the Army, be receiving the boot in the near future to give them the comfort and protection that the present general issue boot clearly fails to provide?

7.37 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): I wish to address my remarks to the problem of low-flying aircraft.

My constituency is in rural Wales and it is a particular victim of low-flying aircraft. Because of the low population density of Wales, we have far more such flights than most of mainland Britain. Indeed, I grew up with the problem—I remember from early childhood aircraft flying low over the ground. However, over the decades, and especially in the past few years, the problem of low flying has become worse. The aircraft seem to go faster and faster and fly lower and lower; and there are far more frequent sorties by the RAF.

Unfortunately, low flying makes the news only when there are crashes. Last year in Wales we had two crashes, one in Aberystwyth and one in Builth, with the loss of three lives. It is unfortunate that low flying makes the headlines only when there are such incidents because it represents a day-to-day torment especially for children and for people working outdoors in my constituency and in other parts of rural Wales.

People complain and over the years before I became a Member of the House I received many complaints. From the reading that I have done in preparation for this debate, I understand that last year the Ministry of Defence received about 5,000 complaints, with about 480 from Members of Parliament, an increase of 50 per cent. on the previous year.

So that the House may understand the complaints of the individuals who write to me or to the Ministry, I would like to read extracts from three or four which I received last summer. The Rev. Dr. Patrick Thompson, rector of Brechfa in my constituency, wrote:

"I have received a great many complaints from parishioners during the past three days about excessively low-flying aircraft coming over Brechfa. . . Several of the small children in the village have been terrified, and their mothers have been having to keep them indoors as a result. We would be most grateful if you could raise this matter with the appropriate Minister."

I dare say that during those three days excesses were committed or that Brechfa was a particular victim.

A mother wrote to me:

"We sometimes have as many as 10 or more a day; in fine weather, this can go on for days on end . . . when we're in the garden my son is too frightened to play outside by himself. Lately this intolerable state of affairs has extended to the evening also, sometimes after 7 o'clock when my son has gone to bed."

Can the House imagine what it feels like to be a small child woken from sleep by these screaming monsters? We are used to so much noise in the House that we get a bit hard of hearing, but young children's eardrums are much more sensitive. When they are playing outdoors in the middle of summer, the sudden searing noise of an aircraft terrifies them.

Last August I had a letter from some grandparents which read:

"We, who are well used to the 'normal' flying, occasionally are subjected to a terrifying attack. Just such a one happened at 10.25 am today. It is not possible to note the direction etc., the shock is too severe, one is still shaking an hour afterwards. Life is precious. I beg you to do all you can to help us. It is so distressing to see our grandchildren terrorised in this way."

That is the experience of thousands of my constituents and millions of people up and down the country.

I had a letter from some people who have just come to live in my constituency. They live in the rural part inside the special tactical training area, where aircraft are allowed to fly as low as 100 ft. They are absolutely amazed and appalled at the low flying activity in their area. They write:

"Flying is continuous on some days and over our property in the valley definitely no more than 100 feet. I am about to have my second child and have been too afraid to go outside the house on a couple of occasions as we have had some aircraft over so low I felt that I would go into labour if outside at the time."

That young mother is so frightened by the aircraft noise that she is afraid she might go into labour if subjected to it.

I hope that those personal examples have brought home to the House the searing and sudden nature of the noise. The aircraft come over suddenly on a quiet summer's day when people are out sunbathing, working or playing. The tranquillity of rural life is shattered within a few seconds and, for young children especially, it is terrifying.

Over the years, I have had the impression that the problem is getting worse, although when one lives with a

[Mr. Alan W. Williams]

problem changes can be almost imperceptible. It was because of complaints such as those that I read to the House that I went with the hon. Members for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) and for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) to meet the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces, who is here tonight, on 27 October. We put our constituents' complaints to him. He gave us a courteous hearing and was very frank with us. However, he immediately conceded that the problem is getting worse and that the number of sorties has dramatically increased in the past 10 years. He said that in 1979 there had been 85,000 sorties, whereas in 1986 there were 151,000. That represents an 80 per cent. increase in seven years. The number has virtually doubled. The Under-Secretary readily conceded, too, that the aircraft involved are noisier today. The F111, the Jaguar and especially the Tornado are noisier. I contend that, with double the flights and double the noise from each individual aircraft, the nuisance today is three or four times as great as it was 10 years ago.

I have a number of peripheral points to make. Some aircraft are allowed to fly as low as 100 ft. It used to be 250 ft. Apparently, only about 0·5 per cent. of all flights are allowed to fly that low and I accept that figure, but may I ask the Minister for an assurance that it will stay that low? We do not want the figure to creep up imperceptibly.

Flying takes place in the late evening and even at night. In a civilised country that should never be allowed to happen. Apparently, about 5 per cent. of sorties occur in the late evening or during the night. That is absurd. There should be a ban on all night flying.

Pilots must have targets set for them. They need landmarks so that they know which flight path to follow. We have been assured that individual farmhouses are never selected as targets, and that is some relief. However, the landmarks selected tend to be road and rail bridges. There tend to be clusters of houses by such bridges at the bottom of valleys because that is where people choose to build, so targeting brings the aircraft nearer to where people live.

As I said earlier, the nuisance is much greater these days than it was 10 years ago. Since last summer, as part of the public relations exercise of the Ministry of Defence, Members of Parliament have been circulated in advance about low-flying exercises. I last received a circular at the end of January which told me that for four to five hours a day during the periods 8 February to 12 February, 15 February to 19 February and 22 February to 26 February and on 29 February there would be low flying. In other words, as from 8 February there was to be low flying from Monday to Friday every week. That advance warning was addressed to me alone. As it happens, I intended to be in London every week during February.

It would be more useful if the Ministry of Defence extended that exercise to allow local newspapers to carry information in the same way as they carry chemists' rotas, hospital visiting hours and other public information so that the general public can be warned in advance of low-flying exercises. It is no good expecting hon. Members to distribute the Government's information or literature.

How should we counter this increasing nuisance? I concede that we need to train our pilots in low flying, but I wish that the nuisance could be less. As I said, the nuisance is three or four times greater today than it was 10 years ago. We want to reduce the number of low-flying exercises.

I am told that with the new technology it is possible to simulate flight conditions almost as realistically as those in flight. Surely more exercises could be carried out on simulators.

Reference was made earlier to flights overseas. I understand that exercises take place from bases in Newfoundland and Turkey and that the Ministry of Defence is considering increasing flights from those bases. I can appreciate the cost of those exercises, particularly in Newfoundland, and the climatic problems, but surely Turkey is an attractive option; it is nearer and the weather is no problem. It is a mountainous country and it is far more sparsely populated than any part of Britain. The nuisance would be much less. The Turkish Government would be willing to co-operate in carrying out those exercises because they would attract foreign exchange. I appreciate that they would be more costly, but I understand that the main cost of training is fuel. However, the cost of fuel is the same whether flights take place over Turkey, Wales or mainland Britain.

Turkey has one clear advantage: it is more mountainous than Britain. Therefore, the quality of training would be far better; it would be a more realistic exercise. I should have thought that, in terms of training quality, one hour's flying in Turkey would be worth two hours' flying in Britain. I hope that the Ministry of Defence will consider seriously those alternatives to low flying in Britain.

It is certain that the number of low flights has increased. Why has it doubled in the past 10 years? Earlier the Under-Secretary said that the need for low flying is dependent on the perceived threat in central Europe. Does that mean that the perceived threat in 1988 is double what it was in 1978? Since Mr. Gorbachev came to power, there has been talk of detente, the INF treaty and an improvement in relations with the Soviet Union. Therefore, I cannot understand why we need twice as many flights today.

People's attitudes to low flying are changing. In my constituency, demographic change has contributed to that change in attitude as more retired people have moved in. Generally, people today are much more aware of environmental issues and are much more willing to complain. They appreciate the quality of life much more. Today we have a much more discriminating public than we had in the 1950s, 1960s — when the problem first started — and the 1970s. The Ministry of Defence is running out of time and the nuisance is increasing. The public is much more critical. We will have to find a solution to the problem of low flying.

7.54 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for having this opportunity to speak in the debate. As hon. Members will know, my background means that I have a special interest in aviation and, more specifically, in aviation connected with the RAF.

For as long as I can remember, the procurement of military aircraft has been a subject of lively political debate. As long as 30 years ago the debate was raging whether the Lightning would be the last manned fighter aircraft in service. Some 30 years later those Lightings are about to leave active service and are being steadily replaced by the Tornado F3.

I was pleased to hear the remarks of my hon. Friend the Minister concerning the Foxhunter radar. I sincerely hope, now that we have negotiated a new contract for the updating of that radar, that we have finally got rid of the time and cost over-runs of the past.

There is now a new debate about the replacement for the Jaguar and Phantom aircraft, the European fighter aircraft, which has been mentioned at some length. I shall keep my remarks about that aircraft brief, but it is of particular significance to me and my constituency, which is situated close to where the aircraft will be built.

The EFA is important to NATO and to the RAF. It is important to the north-west of Britain, which I think has the largest concentration of aerospace factories this side of the Atlantic. This concentration is having a tremendously beneficial effect on the north through the spin-off of technology into other more traditional industries, to say nothing of the employment prospects and other wealth-creating prospects that will exist if it goes ahead.

Despite the remarks of the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), it is not this Government who are holding up the development of the EFA; it is those committees in the Bundestag that have yet to be convinced of its suitability for the roles that have been assigned to it in NATO.

It is true that the Germans are keen to cut the cost, but in cutting the cost we must be careful not to cut the performance envelope of that aircraft, making it little better than an F16 or an F18. We should ensure that the EFA is of the same category and quality as the advanced tactical aircraft, which is currently on the drawing board. We should take advantage of the latest technology—fly by wire, composite materials and stealth technology, which has been so successfully developed in America.

I should like to turn to another major procurement programme that has not been mentioned at length—AWACS. Part of the deal that we signed to procure AWACS was that there would be 130 per cent. worth of offsets—130 per cent. of the value of that aircraft would be in offset purchases in this country. I hope that when my hon. Friend replies to the debate he will be able to give some assurances about how those offset purchases are going. Information that I have been given leads me to believe that there are problems. It may be that Boeing does not always act in the best interests of British sub-contractors. That is particularly the case with regard to the procurement of ground equipment, which amounts to £100 million. I ask my hon. Friend to say whether those offsets are coming through, when we can expect a certain percentage of them and when we can expect the full 130 per cent. to be reached.

Apart from new aircraft, another area of importance is the mid-life update of existing aircraft. Undoubtedly, that applies to Tornado. It is increasingly clear that in the years ahead the survivability of manned aircraft over the target will become less and less, until it gets to the point where it is not worth risking one's expensive and slender air assets over an attacked target. Therefore, I was pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had meetings in France with his opposite number about the development and then procurement of a stand-off weapon for Tornado.

I am not over-bothered about whether we develop it with the French or the Americans. Ideally, in the years ahead, we should look towards a development including both the French and the Americans, because we are rapidly coming to the point in NATO where having two separate areas of technological excellence on either side of the Atlantic is no longer affordable. Therefore, I should like to see that stand-off weapon developed by the Americans, ourselves and the French.

On other procurement programmes, I was also pleased to hear about the Harrier GR5, but I should like my hon. Friend to say whether the problems associated with the nav/attack system of that aircraft have been finally solved. We do not want a repeat of earlier circumstances, where aircraft came into service without properly developed avionics.

Before I leave the topic of procurement, I should like to mention a slightly less fashionable subject. It is all very well to spend many billions of pounds on aircraft hardware, but one essential criterion is that one must know which are one's own and which are the enemy's. In that respect, secondary radar and its development are of primary importance. At the moment NATO has a programme to update its IFF capability, but it is a long way behind what it should be in terms of when the programme should have been initiated. Again, I sincerely hope that that is now under way and that it will provide a better air environment for the Tornados and the EFAs of the future, simply because without it it is much harder to see how those aircraft could be used effectively.

Before I turn to personnel, I should like to speak about management, a subject much mentioned in the speech of the hon. Member for Rhondda — or what he terms "mismanagement". I was fortunate to be able to do a few calculations since the hon. Gentleman's speech. It is noteworthy that he quoted a number of programmes which during this Government's period of office have been cancelled at various stages of their development. If we consider the period 1964 to 1970—I stress that that is a shorter period than the period 1979 to 1987—we see that the number of cancellations, in financial terms and brought up to today's prices, is more than double the number that has occurred since 1979. Indeed, the TSR2 alone accounts for over £1·5 billion in today's money. Therefore, if there is any mismanagement, it has been in the past. Certainly the record of the present Government in managing our air assets is better than that of their predecessors.

Mr. Rogers: The hon. Gentleman has been extremely selective in the dates that he has chosen. Perhaps what he should do is to go back to the record of promotions and cancellations of projects since the war. If he does, he will find a long list of cancellations by successive Tory Governments, through the whole range from the Hawker P1083 thin-wing Hunter, to the Hawker P1121 fighter. Previous Conservative Governments have cancelled an alarming number of programmes.

Mr. Mans: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but I was trying to compare one period of office under a Labour Government with a similar period under a Conservative Government to make my point.

I turn now to personnel in the Royal Air Force. There has been a lot of talk, both in the Chamber earlier today and in the newspapers, about the shortage of aircrew. Such shortages, if they have occurred, are liable to get worse, not only because of the demographic changes that were mentioned earlier, but because the market outside the Air Force for pilots is steadily growing and does not look as if it will reduce in the near future.

[Mr. Mans]

We must look a little more closely at the statistics, and more specifically at the fast jet pilot statistics. We must also look at the way in which we retain people. At the moment, if someone leaves at the age of 38, which is the option date for most pilots, he receives a gratuity. It is no secret that quite often six months after a pilot has left the Royal Air Force he will be written to by the personnel department of the Ministry of Defence and invited to come back. There is a significance in that six-month gap. After it the pilot keeps his gratuity. At the moment there is no possibility of a pilot who reaches the end of his engagement and who wants to stay on keeping his gratuity. He must leave and then reapply. It does not take a genius to see the administrative inconvenience of that system, and how much better it would be to acknowledge the fact that if we need to retain someone it is much easier to pay the gratuity at the time when the engagement ends and ask him straight away to reapply to rejoin the Air Force. I am convinced that if we adopted that policy our training costs would fall. As has been mentioned, the training costs for a Tornado pilot amount to £3 million. We train just over 200 pilots every year. If we could cut that training cost by just a small percentage, by retaining people at the other end, it would be a lot cheaper for the defence budget.

When one runs short of pilots, one does not tend to see that straight away in the front-line aircraft or on the new aircraft. I have little doubt that the Tornado in Germany and, increasingly, in the United Kingdom will be up to strength with experienced pilots who are fully capable of using its potential. However, in the process I have little doubt that the Phantom force is being denuded of experience. There are many young pilots on the Phantom force, but not many who are experienced. That is just one example of the problems ahead unless we take some drastic action over retention rates.

Finally, I should like to say a brief word about organisation and keeping costs down. We hear about this all the time in the Royal Air Force, but normally it amounts to cutting a particular aircraft procurement programme. I should like to suggest a slightly different approach. We should look closely at the supporting arms in the Royal Air Force to see whether we can continue to justify their cost. Those supporting arms, such as the education branch, or even the medical branch, are expensive in terms of pension arrangements and in terms of the people who actually work in them. I am not suggesting that we get rid of such branches completely, but I do suggest that we look closely at them for savings that will be needed in the future, rather than at our equipment programme and front-line strength.

A small example is the Royal Air Force hospitals. At any time, roughly one third of the hospitals are filled with service patients or their dependants. Another third are filled with National Health Service patients from the locality using the particular specialties of that Royal Air Force hospital. When that happens, there is a transfer of funds from the NHS to the defence budget to cope with it. The other third of bed spaces are taken up on a much more ad hoc basis and there is no transfer of funds so, in a small way, the defence budget is subsidising the National Health Service. All I am saying is that if we are to understand the true cost of our defence, we must come up with arrangements that acknowledge such facts.

Another fact that is very much in the news these days is contracting out. Contracting out, or privatisation as Opposition Members would like to describe it, is a perfectly legitimate way of keeping costs down. It has been highly successful, especially in support command at the flying training stations. However, I should like to add a word of warning, because with contracting out go problems of over-stretch.

At times of tension, during exercises and when there are security alerts, service personnel are required to carry out several functions — guard duties, operation duties and their own jobs. That particular burden is falling on fewer service men as a result of contracting out. That should be recognised. It also has to be recognised that a new method will have to be found to deal with that problem. An obvious method is a partnership between civilian manpower and service manpower in a station. That would provide a much better chance of cutting costs without running into problems of over-stretch.

Finally, I should like to add my congratulations to those offered by the hon. Member for Rhondda and say how nice it is to have for the first time in more than seven years an airman holding the post of Chief of the Defence Staff. I congratulate Sir David Craig on his appointment earlier this week.

8.10 pm

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The debate has been wide-ranging over such issues as procurement, personnel and policy. I shall not deal with all the issues that the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) raised. I shall deal with one aspect that he mentioned—the importance of the aerospace industry and its impact, economically and regionally, on the United Kingdom. I have stressed the importance of that industry for employment in the south-west of England, to the detriment of some other regions. The economy in north-east Wales is dependent on the aerospace industry. Its collaboration on a European level in civil and military aircraft development is crucial to that aspect of our aerospace industry.

I welcome the Minister's statement about search and rescue. That is an important issue to my hon. Friends and I, as we represent mountainous and seaboard constituencies. The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) would wish to be associated with my welcome. Hon. Members will have read her recent article in *The House Magazine* describing in graphic detail the role of the mountain rescue services. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones), who has RAF Valley in his constituency, will also welcome the Minister's statement. In my constituency there are mountain rescue services in Snowdonia and tremendous voluntary effort goes into the provision of those services. I mention the events of last weekend in my constituency when, tragically, a number of climbers were killed because of a sudden change of weather. I am sure that the House will want to join me in expressing gratitude to the rescue services and to RAF Brawdy, which plays a similar role in the southern part of Snowdonia.

That is the acceptable face of the RAF and the Royal Navy in my constituency. I now turn to the less acceptable face of the services—the environmental impact of low-flying training in that part of Wales. The Minister would be disappointed if he did not hear me speak on that subject because we have corresponded and held regular meetings on it.

I am concerned that the environmental impact of low-flying training is not taken sufficiently seriously by the people who do not have to put up with it. I am pleased that in tonight's debate a number of hon. Members representing Wales and other areas have made that point.

The Minister said at the beginning of the debate that the Ministry of Defence takes all possible steps to limit the disturbance to the public from low flying. The reality is that the current policy of

"spreading the disturbance as evenly as possible"

is designed to maximise the amount of low flying that can be done, not to reduce the environmental impact. That is publicly intolerable.

That is illustrated by the policy on "avoidance areas". Those are areas around major airports and cities, where military pilots are not allowed to fly below 2,000 ft. Last year, the Minister for the Armed Forces said:

"As part of the continuous monitoring of the UKLFS, a programme of reviews of avoidance areas is carried out and changes made when necessary . . . aimed at spreading low flying more evenly and enhancing flight safety, while at the same time reducing, where possible, the disturbance to those on the ground."

No one could quarrel with that quotation.

Group Captain Alan Bowman, the RAF officer responsible for the operation of the United Kingdom low-flying system, was more frank when speaking to a NATO conference in West Germany in 1986. He said that the Ministry of Defence

"strive constantly to reduce the number of avoidance areas to the minimum".

In recent years, several areas which were previously considered too noise sensitive or not suitable for low flying for other reasons have been opened up to low flying. They include substantial areas of Kent and Sussex and the Isles of Wight, Scilly, Orkney and Shetland. Even Northern Ireland is now officially available for low-flying training by helicopters.

The Minister confirmed last November that no consultation took place with local authorities, farming interests or environmental bodies in those areas prior to their designation as low-flying areas, when the MOD decided to increase the maximum speed for low-flying aircraft from 420 to 450 knots. The Minister said:

"Nor was such consultation necessary." — [*Official Report*, 16 November 1987; Vol. 122, c. *453-54*.]

I must contrast that with the situation in the Federal Republic of Germany, which has attempted to increase the areas available for low flying, but its federal structure allows the individual "lander" to block attempts to impose new low-flying areas. No such control is available in Great Britain. More importantly, the Federal Government actually respond to public pressure to reduce the disturbance from low-flying training. The result is that West Germany has already reached the point where it is unsafe and environmentally impractical to increase the amount of low flying within the present constraints. So it has to export it to places where the regulations are not so tight. That means Britain.

Britain particularly attracts aircraft wanting to fly as low as 100 ft, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) has said, aircraft which are involved in night low-level training. In Germany, night flying as low as 100 ft is banned and the night low-level training can take place only down to 1,000 ft above the ground. Last September, the RAF held its Salmond trophy competition—it has nothing to do with my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond)—which is a low-level bombing and navigation competition for German-based Tornado squadrons, in eastern England and Scotland. It had been shifted from Germany for environmental reasons, and caused an understandable public outcry, particularly in the north of Scotland.

Officially, the Ministry of Defence's policy is that the United Kingdom low-flying system can be used only by forces based in the United Kingdom, although in addition, according to Group Captain Bowman,

"We have agreed that our European allies can carry out limited low flying in the United Kingdom on an exchange basis normally during exercises . . . we do not accept low flying from other countries as a matter of routine."

The reality is rather different. Britain imports routine low-level training, including types of flying that would not be permitted in Germany. For example, in late 1986, the United States army sent eight UH60 helicopters from a base in West Germany to Salisbury plain. The pilots were in Britain to train for their night low-level qualification which included flying 50 ft above the ground, in darkness, with no navigation or collision warning lights on, and over populated rural areas.

Not surprisingly, the extent of low-level training results in a substantial number of complaints to the Ministry of Defence. I am grateful for the way in which the Department has investigated each complaint with which I have presented it over the years.

According to a parliamentary answer that I received, last year the Ministry of Defence received an all-time record number of 5,695 complaints about low flying. An analysis of the figures shows that there was a higher ratio of complaints per low-flying sortie last year than at any previous time. In the mid-1970s, before the free-for-all system was introduced in 1979, following the last review of low-flying areas, the MOD was receiving about one complaint for every 40 to 50 low-level flights over Britain. As soon as the new system was introduced which permitted low flying all over the mainland of Britain, complaints rose to one for every 27 sorties. Last year it reached the record level of one complaint for every 23 low-flying sorties, during a year when the total number of low-level flights went down slightly.

In Germany, there have been 3,000 or 4,000 complaints about low-level flying each year in recent times—rather less than in Britain. Yet the German Government have been more responsive to public criticism and have scaled back low flying considerably.

It is important to take a considerate approach on low flying within European and NATO countries. I am sure that the people of Turkey would have strong views on the suggestion that we should export low-flying training there. I am not arguing for that. I am arguing that all NATO countries in which low-flying training takes place should take a similar sensitive attitude towards the public who have to suffer low-flying training.

The German Government have been much more sensitive than the United Kingdom Government, perhaps because its environmental movement is stronger because of its system of proportional representation. Whatever the reason, the German Government have shown greater sensitivity to public criticism of low-flying training.

We have had much discussion in recent weeks about civil aircraft safety as a result of near misses, problems with air traffic control, and so on. When Britain was

[Dr. Dafydd Ellis Thomas]

opened up for low-level flying in 1979, the number of low-level flights almost doubled. The purpose of that change was to allow for the introduction of the Tornado.

Once again, the low-flying system seems to be coming up against its limits. Last year, there were six crashes involving RAF fast jets at low level over Britain. Clearly, as I have told the Minister on several occasions when we have discussed this, our first concern is with the aircrew who are so tragically killed, their families and friends. But our other concern is public safety.

The Ministry of Defence has refused to release official figures on the accident rate of aircraft at low level, but independent analysis shows that the low-level accident rate for fast jets was higher last year than at any time since 1979. Two of those were mid-air collisions, one of them involving two separate aircraft running into each other while flying independently through the Lake District.

Not only do the Government refuse to release accident rate figures which could easily be obtained from its own flight safety computers, but they have been issuing incorrect figures on the safety record of low-level flying.

In 1974 there was the tragic death of a crop-spraying pilot in collision with an RAF Phantom over Norfolk. That provoked a major row at the time and led to changes in safety procedures. More recently, Ministers, in response to questions, have repeated the statement that no civilians have been killed in accidents involving low-flying military aircraft this decade. That is not accurate. In February 1984, a civilian trainee pilot was killed when his Cessna 150 was in collision with a United States Air Force A10 over Norfolk. According to the official accident report, the collision occurred at about 1,000 feet. Low flying is defined by the Ministry of Defence as anything under 2,000 feet. It is important that we should be clear and honest with the public about such tragic instances.

I am concerned about the free-for-all approach in which individual pilots plan the routes that they fly at low levels without reference to any authority. The system is becoming inherently unsafe. Last year's tragic accident rate may well be repeated in future years. Unlike civil airlines, which are constantly under radar control from the ground, military aircraft at low level are not under any form of air traffic control. When a pilot enters a low-flying area, he is not told anything about other aircraft which may be in the area, possibly flying straight towards him at the same height. It is entirely up to his own eyesight and quick navigation to spot other aircraft in time and to take avoiding action.

The situation is now so bad that the director of flight operations at the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough has written to the Ministry of Defence expressing his fears about the total absence of air traffic control in the United Kingdom's low-flying system. The director's responsibilities include a great deal of night low-level flying, which is bound to increase over the next few years as the new Harrier GR5 is introduced and as Tornados are given a greater night capability. The idea that pilots, flying in total darkness on instruments, should operate in total ignorance of who else is in the air around them is intolerable for public safety.

The Royal Aircraft Establishment's flight operations chief has suggested the installation of a computerised automatic flight planning system. That would collate the planned routes of all aircraft preparing for low-level sorties, work out possible conflicts, and tell aircrews to change their routes where necessary. The technology already exists in the Tornado and Jaguar, and will be installed in the Harrier GR5 and Buccaneer. Therefore, it will be possible for such an automatic system to be introduced.

An automatic flight planning system is now being introduced in Germany. Either when the Minister replies or later, in response to what I have said, I should like him to make a commitment that, in the interests of safety, a similar system will be introduced in the United Kingdom as soon as possible.

8.25 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important RAF debate. I must, first, declare an interest. I am a serving officer in the RAF Volunteer Reserve. I also want to mention the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro). He is an honorary air commodore of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force. He wanted to speak in the debate, but only one of us could be excused from the Committee upstairs and I was the fortunate one.

I join others in congratulating Sir David Craig on his appointment as Chief of the Defence Staff. We are delighted that a light-blue uniform is once again in charge and we are equally delighted that a man who is so capable and highly regarded has been selected for the job.

Earlier in the debate we listened to the Labour party's views on the RAF and defence. In columns 194-95 of the *Official Report* of 26 January we were led to believe that the official Opposition's position, as articulated by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), is that they do not believe in flexible response because it is not realistic.

The truth of the matter is that the Opposition do not believe in many things. Earlier this evening we heard the real voice of the Labour party on defence—the voice of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). What he said showed that the Opposition do not believe in upgrading or replacing weapons systems. They do not think that it is important that the RAF should survive over the battlefield. More importantly, they do not believe that the RAF should have a stand-off capability.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Let me make it clear that the Opposition have supported the European fighter aircraft. The cost is considerable and we have supported it from the beginning. Before and during the general election we made it clear that we would continue with that project. We have continued to support the modernisation of sensible RAF systems. What we object to is the notion that somehow replacing a hydrogen bomb on a Tornado aircraft with an air-launched nuclear cruise missile is modernisation.

Mr. Walker: Of course it is modernisation. As long as the enemy has the capability—and it has—and if the RAF is to deter, it must be suitably equipped. Again, the Opposition choose to ignore the deterrent role of the RAF. If one goes back to the days of the cancellation of the TSR2, which was mentioned earlier, it is clear that the Labour party's view boils down to opposition, except where a manufacturer in a Labour constituency will get an order. That effectively sums up the Labour party's views on defence. Indeed, it would be true to say that the RAF would still be flying Spitfires and Lancasters if the choice were left to the Labour party.

We are all in agreement on the search and rescue services—the helicopters. We all accept that the RAF and the Royal Navy must retain that capability. Our reasons for that are that the service must have pilots and aircraft that are capable of meeting the needs of tomorrow, which may be a war-time situation.

It is interesting that the Labour party supports search and rescue. That service obviously does a lot of good, which the Labour party recognises, and there is a lot of feeling for that in the constituencies. But why is it not equally supportive of the necessary—indeed, essential—low-flying role? The point that I was trying to make when the right hon. Member for Llanelli intervened was that RAF pilots have to be capable of surviving, not just defending. If they are to attack enemy bases, they must be able to penetrate below the radar screens and survive. They will require a stand-off capability to do that effectively.

Mr. Denzil Davies *rose*——

Mr. Walker: I shall give way in a moment.

They will also require the capability to fly low and fast. Therefore, it is essential that pilots are trained to the necessary standard. They cannot acquire that skill on the day that war begins.

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) has pointed out from the Back Benches—and we have agreed from the Front Bench—that the training is needed. The point that we are trying to make is that, in the areas that have to bear the noise, it has increased considerably over the past few years. As my hon. Friends have said, attempts should be made to find other areas to alleviate the burden on rural areas which are suffering, especially in Wales. However, we accept that training is necessary for the safety of pilots and for the defence of the country.

Mr. Frank Cook: Of course.

Mr. Walker: I find this narrow parochialism fascinating. I represent a 2,000-square-mile highlands constituency, where the RAF regularly flies planes low and fast. Anyone who cares to check will see that that is the case. Indeed, we probably have more intensive low-level flying operations than the part of Wales mentioned by the right hon. Member for Llanelli.

I am not being narrow and parochial. I am not suggesting that the low flying should go elsewhere. Of course it should not; it should take place in areas of sparse population, and I represent a constituency that is sparsely populated. I fully expect and endorse——

Mr. Denzil Davies: The hon Gentleman has said that low flying should go to areas of sparse population. That may be, but west Wales is not sparsely populated; it is quite heavily populated, as are the areas over which the planes fly. We do not object in principle, but we feel that efforts should be made to alleviate the burden.

Mr. Walker: That sums up the attitude beautifully; "Let them fly anywhere, but not in my back yard." It is important that the House and the public should understand that.

I hope that we are looking carefully at the need for proper identification of friend and foe, and for secondary radar capabilities. It is important that we can tell friend from foe. I was pleased to hear that the Foxhunter radar has improved, and delighted that it is moving forward.

Sometimes, people are critical of certain programmes, and I have been critical along with others. However, we should remember that in developing technology—particularly in avionics, electronics and radar—we are always entering new areas. It can be frightfully costly and difficult. The cost difference between 80 and 100 per cent. work-out of a programme can be horrendous. It is also important to recognise that we are always attempting to stretch technology to the point at which we will get the maximum from it.

I welcome the news that we are to have an additional AWACS. However, I endorse the view that we should try to find a way of purchasing a further AWACS, so that we have the correct balance.

The Opposition Front Bench made some play of the Tucano question, suggesting that the only voices of doubt and uncertainty about the purchase were those of Opposition Members. That is not true, as anyone who has studied the matter will realise. I was very hostile to the purchase of the Tucano, and left no one in any doubt about that. However, I have since visited the Tucano factory in Brazil. When I went to see for myself what had happened to the aircraft, I found that it has been substantially redesigned. We are not talking about the Tucano that used to exist. The best example that I can give to hon. Members with a long and lasting interest in aircraft is this: the difference between the Tucano that is going to come into service and the earlier model is like the difference between the Mustang with an Alison engine—which was a very poor aircraft—and the Mustang with a Rolls-Royce-Packard-Merlin engine, which became the most successful long-range fighter aircraft of world war 2. I am very optimistic about the Tucano, and I only hope that the Ministry of Defence will not have to pick up the cost. I feel that Short Brothers and Embrair between them should bear the true costs.

On my recent trip to the Falklands, the service on board the TriStar was unique. The only other time when I have enjoyed service of such a standard was when I was fortunate enough to fly in the presidential service jet in the United States, where I was served in a manner that I had never before experienced. I compliment the crew of the TriStar.

I was pleasantly surprised—that word is important, because the name of the base that I am going to talk about is Mount Pleasant—at the high quality and standard of the buildings, and of the runway and taxiways. I had thought that an airfield built in such a short time would be reminiscent of the airfields built in a comparably short time in the war. However, it is a very fine and well-built base, and I congratulate the RAF and those responsible for its construction.

The ability to use tankers and air-to-air refuelling has enhanced the operations of the RAF in a remarkable and wonderful way, which means that fewer aircraft can carry out many more sorties much more effectively.

I also had the good fortune to visit the Harriers in Belize. I was very impressed by the morale of the forces, the use of the Harriers and the way in which local people never complained about the noise that the Harriers made. No matter how low the planes flew, the people welcomed them. That is because they see a real threat, not an imagined one. No one is saying, "It is 40 years since anything troubled us in Western Europe; perhaps we can do away with this". In Belize, they know that the enemy is just over the border, and they have never doubted the

[Mr. Walker]

enemy's views. The enemy wants to take over Belize, and the presence of the Harriers is very welcome. I met that feeling at every level.

I have a special affection for the reserve and auxiliary forces, and I should like my hon. Friends on the Front Bench to give sensible and serious consideration to how we can enlarge our capability in that regard. It is interesting to reflect that we have been saving money by converging support roles on bases, and we have been using what the Opposition would call a privatised structure to achieve that. I remind my hon. Friends on the Front Bench that immediately after the war we had volunteer reserve bases. Those units were manned by people who worked for organisations such as Airwork, but all the instructors were members of the reserve forces. They were all there to be used at any time when the RAF required them. We should look at that much more carefully.

We should also look carefully at the circumstances in which individuals leave the service at any of the break points up to the age of 38, and find a proper, fulfilling function for them, with a proper reserve commitment. I know that we use a number of them in air experience flights with the Chipmunks, and they do a splendid job. I hope that the Chipmunk operations will continue for as long as Chipmunks can fly—and, given the way that they are flying, it looks as though they will fly for a long time.

The cadet forces are often forgotten, but they are the natural source of the best material for the RAF. There are 35,000, or perhaps 45,000, cadets, the squadrons, the 27 volunteer gliding schools and the central gliding schools. I ask one question about the central gliding schools: when can we expect to see replacement winches?

I wish to say thank you to Wing Commander Paddy Gilmer, a gentleman who has given many years of service and who is to retire this year. He is retiring for a second time, because he retired from the regular Air Force to take up his appointment at Headquarters Air Cadets to look after the interests of the gliding schools and air experience flights. He took over at a time when morale was low and things were very bad. Largely due to Paddy Gilmer's inspired leadership, the position has changed dramatically and today morale is very high. I hope that he has a long, healthy and wealthy retirement.

I draw the attention of my hon. Friends on the Front Bench to the concern felt about the dog-training unit at Newton. Two attempts have been made to work out a system of marrying the Army and RAF dog-training capabilities and on both occasions it was decided that RAF Newton would be the best venue. A third review is going on. I hope that something will be done about this soon because it creates a lot of uncertainty. It would be sensible to amalgamate the unit at Newton, as has been twice recommended.

One aspect for which the Royal Air Force often gets very little credit, although it has done a splendid job, is YTS. The Royal Air Force has always been open to people from all walks of life. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), who opened the debate for the Opposition, referred to the conversations he has had with me. My fondness for the Royal Air Force is partly because one is judged by one's ability to do the job, not by the way one speaks or where one has come from. It is important that one is capable of doing the job professionally and effectively.

One of the interesting by-products of YTS is the substantial number of youngsters who would not have been accepted for training by the Royal Air Force because they were considered to be below the standard required, yet, after 12 months in YTS, about one third of them have been accepted for full-time service in the RAF. This is marvellous and I hope that the House will compliment the Royal Air Force on achieving this breakthrough for those young men who may not have been considered up to the standard required by the RAF. Anyone who knows anything of the RAF knows that, whatever job one does, it must be done to a very high standard.

Reference has been made to the problem of retention when a break point in the engagement is reached. The problem is not new; it has always been there when civil airlines are short of people. The civil airlines, which do not train people and often make no investment in training, want Royal Air Force people, particularly aircrew. They try to entice them away from the Royal Air Force or the Royal Navy.

I believe that there are ways of finding answers to problems. One way of retaining the young men on whom we have spent a lot of money to train in various jobs, whether pilots or ground crew, and of encouraging them to remain in the service after they have reached the break point at eight, 12 or 22 years, is by giving them a lump sum greater than the lump sum they would get if they were to leave. They would have a substantial sum to invest, which would encourage them to stay, because people who join the Air Force to fly do so because they love flying. They love the service and the flying and they do not want to go outside because they want a stable home for their family. We should give them a lump sum. I am not talking of £1,000; I am talking of tens of thousands of pounds, because it costs millions of pounds to train chaps up to standard. That money should be invested to keep the chaps in the service. More importantly, they would be able to provide a stable home for their families. They would not have to commute their pensions, as many of them do, to provide a family home. Serious consideration should be given to that.

I hope that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench will bear in mind that, in order to keep families happy, married quarters should be kept in good condition. If families are happy, the chaps are happy. If the chaps are unhappy, it is because their families are unhappy, and they are more likely to leave and to give trouble.

8.45 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) began his 20-minute dissertation with a most unworthy attempt to vilify the Labour party's attitude to defence. There is no way that the hon. Member can question my commitment or the commitment of the Labour party to the defence of the country. I counsel him in future not to be quite so gratuitously offensive. The role of Her Majesty's loyal Opposition is to question the Government on the basis of facts, and that is precisely what we have been trying to do, as opposed to the blather that has been emanating from the Government Benches.

Before the ink was dry on the INF treaty the Prime Minister had declared her intention to Mr. Dimbleby on

television in December to proceed with a fresh escalation of the arms race with a brand new air-launched missile for the RAF. The missiles will have a range of about 400 km, giving the Tornado a similar range to the ground-launched missiles at Greenham.

If those weapons are fitted to the 200 Tornado fighter bombers, which carry an average of two missiles each, we would end up with 400 long-range air-launched nuclear missiles, compared with the 160 ground-launched missiles that will leave Greenham and Molesworth under the INF treaty, not counting the United States missiles at RAF bases in Britain. This would represent a major escalation of capability. That is an undeniable fact. Those weapons are not a modernisation of old weapons; they represent a new type of weapon which NATO has not deployed before.

If we are to maintain a balance, the Minister should tell the House which types of weapons the Soviets are developing, as neither the International Institute for Strategic Studies' "Military Balance" nor the Pentagon's "Soviet Military Power" makes any mention of such weapons being designed to equip Soviet tactical aircraft or even being in development. The argument for those weapons is that we must be able to penetrate Soviet air defences, but after Mathias Rust's flight the RAF would be better advised to buy the much cheaper high-winged, low-flying Cessna than the cruise missile.

The USSR and the United States have had large, heavy and often inaccurate air-launched cruise missiles on long-range bombers for many years, but the proliferation of small, highly accurate nuclear missiles for fighters is a unilateral escalation and should be acknowledged as such without any equivocation or ambiguity.

On 26 January the Secretary of State told my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) that he was not aware of any United States plans to base air-launched cruise missiles in Europe in the future. That was a very misleading statement. Was he deceiving himself in misleading the House, or did he mislead the House honestly? The United States, according to testimony to Congress from Secretary of Defence Carlucci, is making development of a nuclear tactical air-to-surface missile an "urgent priority" within the framework agreed four years ago at the Montebello nuclear planning group meeting. He says that the missile

"is a development programme to provide both US and Allied dual capable aircraft . . . with the capability to attack high value heavily defended targets throughout the theatre."

There can be no doubt that these missiles will employ cruise technology. There are two candidates already for the system. The first is the United States joint tactical missile system, which, according to United States sources, is already flying. This is a cruise missile with stealth technology. The second missile is the modular stand-off weapon, the MSOW. It is likely that both will be deployed eventually and use cruise technology. Thus, it is clear that the United States is developing nuclear air-launched cruise missiles for deployment in Europe according to NATO decisions, to which the Government were party.

For the Secretary of State for Defence to say that he is unaware of such plans means that he is not doing his job. He is not reading the papers in his ministerial box. Equally, if he knew about this, he has misled the House. If he did not know, he is guilty of neglect. There is another explanation, though, which is that his officials are using a false and legalistic definition of air-launched cruise missiles which deliberately refers to the present existing US air-launched cruise missiles that are carried by B-52 bombers as ALCMs.

The reason for the right hon. Gentleman's fear of using the phrase "cruise missile" is that it is well known to the public. The right hon. Gentleman would prefer to call them "stand-off" weapons. We have heard that phrase used tonight. Indeed, he would prefer to call them anything other than what they really are. The public think accurately that these are cruise missiles and are an escalation. That view has been confirmed by the Secretary of State in his desire to misinform the House.

I ask the Minister to confirm whether these weapons are indeed part of the NATO programme. Will he say whether they will be fitted to United States F111 and F15 aircraft at RAF bases in the United Kingdom, or is there some hidden opposition to the Prime Minister's nuclear addiction? On the other hand, can the Secretary of State categorically deny that these nuclear air-launched missiles will be in this country? Will he explain precisely his intention and whether he will allow the United States to base more F111s in the United Kingdom and to deploy the new F15E Strike Eagle here? According to Mr. Carlucci, the F15 Strike Eagle can deliver the full range of nuclear and conventional bombs and missiles, and it will be deployed throughout Europe by the early 1990s.

In the recent United States report on nuclear strategy, entitled "Discriminate deterrence" by Kissinger, Brzezinski, ex-Under Secretary of Defence Iklé, and many other military figures, it is made clear that the weapons that the United Kingdom Government want for RAF bombers, which the United States will put on United States planes based in the United Kingdom, are crucial to their plans. The report says:

"The Alliance will still need an ability to use nuclear weapons effectively and discriminately."

It continues:

"The Alliance should threaten to use nuclear weapons not as a link to a wider and more devastating war—although the risk of escalation would still be there—but mainly as an instrument for denying success to the invading Soviet forces."

Central to these new strategies are the highly accurate cruise missiles that are now in development. According to former Under Secretary Iklé, they add up to

"The most important military development since world war 2 . . . the thirty-year revolution in accuracies has more cumulative impact than the initial leap from conventional explosives to the A-bomb."

The new weapons have revived the ludicrous idea that it is possible to fight a limited nuclear war in Europe; naturally, where else? The idea is still being pursued at the highest level in the United States. Before Conservative Members protest that that is all right because we will act in this insane way only when the Soviets have already gone mad and attacked us, they should ponder the problem of war by accident escalating from a regional crisis or from technical and human error: from cock-up rather than from a conspiracy.

The Royal Air Force is already part of the nonsense of flexible response, which could only promise to add a nuclear defeat to a conventional one. These new weapons will reinforce those obsolete ideas. According to the NATO allied tactical paper 33A, dealing with the deployment of nuclear weapons in tactical air operations "nuclear weapons must be used with discrimination and precision."

The RAF is unfortunately still forced to train according to this nonsense. Ask the inhabitants of Nagasaki and

[Mr. Frank Cook]

Hiroshima how much discrimination and precision they recall. Ask the people who were close to Chernobyl and the nuclear fallout how precise that was.

These ideas may constitute a dangerous political strategy of bluff, but they are not a military strategy, for to justify the term "strategy" a military plan must have at least some chance of securing victory, whereas these ideas owe more to the traditions of the charge of the Light Brigade and the mentality of *The Sun* than to the Battle of Britain.

What is worse about the Government's position is that they have not the remotest real interest in pursuing a policy of arms control and disarmament. The Prime Minister's scuttling style and bullying tactics since the INF deal are manifest testimony to that.

I could continue, as I have many more remarks to make, but I am conscious of the fact that two more hon. Members have been waiting to catch your eye all evening, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wish to give them the opportunity to speak in the debate.

I plead with the Minister to answer the questions that I have asked tonight. Those that he cannot answer tonight will he answer later in some form of letter to me?

8.57 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) for curtailing his remarks so that I may speak in the debate. I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) and for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker). They laid the ground very well for this most important debate.

My own interest is in future RAF procurement needs. The reason for that is simple. In the middle of my constituency of Fylde is the British Aerospace military aircraft division at Warton. Along with other military aircraft establishments in Lancashire, and the Preston area, Warton accounts for about 16,500 jobs. In addition, we must take into account the contribution by companies such as Lucas Industries at Burnley and Rolls-Royce in Barnoldswick.

I pay tribute to the work force in the aerospace industry, both management and trades unions. Their contribution is noted and it does much for the quality of the aerospace industry.

I hope that I can follow in the footsteps of my good friend the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins). He has made many pertinent interventions in debates on aerospace. In last year's debate on this subject he raised 25 per cent. of the questions on the RAF. For his trouble, he is now the Minister with responsibility for aerospace, so I suppose that that says something about parliamentary promotion.

The background to the debate was laid by other hon. Members, but there are three key points underlining the role of the RAF and therefore its future procurement needs.

First, the enhanced role of conventional aircraft has been brought into sharp focus by the INF treaty. Secondly, there is the still real threat of the conventional bomber and, thirdly, the improvement—this is a most important point—in Soviet fighter cover. Today, Soviet fighter cover, such as that accompanying a bomber force, can reach the west coast of the kingdom for the first time. That raises important questions about future procurement to counter that new threat.

For me, there are three key issues — first, the Tornado mid-life update; secondly, the development of the small, agile, mobile battlefield aircraft, known as SAMBA; and, thirdly, the European fighter aircraft. I should like to add my thanks to Ministers for their efforts in their dealings with the other three partner countries in this project. There may be problems, but it is not for the want of trying that we are now teetering on the brink of getting the project under way.

I should like to ask the Minister when we can expect to see the placing of contracts in respect of the Tornado mid-life update. That is vital to British Aerospace in maintaining continuity of employment in my constituency and my constituents would greatly appreciate some more positive news. SAMBA is a private venture concept which British Aerospace is currently evaluating. Its principal role is the destruction of helicopters, for example, heavily armed helicopters in a German battle situation. It could also be adapted to take on tank formations. That is an interesting concept. It poses some powerful questions about the future role of the helicopter on the battlefield. I should be grateful if the Minister would comment on that.

On the European fighter aircraft, we are so near and yet so far. I raise this point, not by way of criticism, but to try to stem the uncertainty which has been circulating in Lancashire, particularly in the local newspapers. Many of the workers are influenced by rumour and I hope that this evening we can quell some of those rumours about the future of the project. I was reminded of the EFA in church on Sunday because, when the vicar was reading the marriage banns, he paid attention to the number of partners he wanted to join together. In the case of the European fighter aircraft, we want to join together four partners. If anybody in the Chamber knows of any good reason why those four partners should not be finally joined together, I challenge him to declare it now. We want to see the marriage fully consummated by the final signing of the full development project.

It is important to restate the operational requirements that the European fighter aircraft will fulfil. We must review the alternatives if something went wrong. We should also consider the implications if the project was stopped. Many people would lose their jobs. We should also consider the role of and justification for the EFA. This can be summed up in a quotation from the November 1987 edition of a magazine called "NATO's Sixteen Nations", which states:

> "In its current postulated form, EFA should be one of the most effective European combat aircraft ever introduced into service."

There can be no finer plaudit for that project than that simple assessment. The project incorporates new technology in materials, radar and avionics. Its principal role will be to back up the Tornado F3. It will also be able to take on potential enemy bomber forces. It would help to replace the Phantom aircraft in West Germany and to cope with the need for an agile dog fighter. It also has the capability of a ground attack role. That would be of particular value to NATO, particularly in respect of the northern Norway commitment.

The European fighter aircraft project is a great ambassador for the British and European aerospace

industries. Its principal role is to counter the growing threat from the MiG29 — known by its NATO nomenclature of Fulcrum, a fighter not dissimilar to the F18 and the Sukou Flanker, the bomber escort. It can help to counter the renewed threat from the bomber in close-in fighting only by using its agility, speed, weapons system and radar. The EFA is a unique solution to this air defence problem.

It also has a tremendous export potential. I ask one question of Opposition Members: has the Labour party altered the policy published in 1986 dismantling the export machinery for selling British armaments abroad? If that is still its policy—I have not seen anything to counter it—it would be profoundly worrying to aerospace workers, particularly in my constituency, who look to Saudi Arabia, for example, to update its air force by the purchase of the European fighter aircraft.

Without doubt the EFA can meet the challenges of the RAF's specification — agility, a single-seat fighter cheaper than the Tornado which uses state of the art avionics. It has a stealth capability, but it is not so stealthy as to sacrifice performance as a fighter aircraft. Most important, it has the ability for STOL—short take off and landing. In other words, it will not be restricted if runways are damaged. It has the technical capability to do the job.

I should like a clear statement from the Government Front Bench tonight that the F18 fighter is not a realistic alternative for the Germans or for the United Kingdom to consider. The Ministry's own assessment of the capability of the EFA and the F18 show that, while the EFA has an 80 per cent. chance of survival in a dog fight, the F18 or the F18 Hornet 2000—an idea existing only on paper—would stand only a 20 per cent. chance of survival. If that is not a clear reason why all the European partners should proceed at all speed to have the European fighter aircraft, I cannot find another argument. The advanced tactical fighter, a large aeroplane, is not an option for us to consider.

We should ask the Secretary of State for Defence to do all he can in conversation with his West German counterpart to influence the Germans strongly to make an early decision on the project and to make certain that the European fighter aircraft enters service at the earliest opportunity.

9.7 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me at this stage. I shall try to curtail my remarks.

It is a shame that I have so little time because I would have liked to say a lot about the waste of money, particularly in relation to RAF procurement, but many of my hon. Friends have already spoken on that. I shall refer simply to the Foxhunter radar system which is to operate in the Tornado aircraft, which is vital to the Government's military strategy. That aircraft is now known as the Blue Circle jet because it flies not with a Foxhunter radar but with slabs of concrete where the radar should be. That project must be approaching the £1 billion mark; it is almost 100 per cent. over budget. Many of my hon. Friends have already referred to that and to other examples of waste.

I want to concentrate on modernisation, the public relations term used by the Government which the press dutifully repeats. Initially the Secretary of State talked about compensatory measures in the wake of INF. It might be more appropriate to call it circumvention or, if we wanted to be nasty, even cheating on INF. The Russians call it rearmament. "The Soviet News" of 27 January had the headline, "NATO plans of rearmament". The description by the CND was probably the most appropriate. It referred to renuclearisation—a difficult word to pronounce but a much more valid description than "modernisation".

What is this all about? It is a new technology covering the speed and accuracy of nuclear weapons. The Pentagon's discriminate deterrence report referred to the possibility of a surgical nuclear strike and making the weapons politically usable. In those circumstances, the target would be not only the Soviet Union, although it is the main one, but the Third world. That is a dangerous development and it will make the world a much more dangerous place.

After the INF agreement the Prime Minister said that, in her view, arms control had gone far enough. She wants the opposite of arms control: a new arms build up, potentially leading to a new arms race. We have clearly seen that in the form of the short-range and battlefield nuclear missiles. The Prime Minister sets her face against the third zero in the triple zero option to such an extent that even the West German authorities are now strongly in dispute with her. They do not want such weapons because they know that they will fall on their territory if they are ever used. That is why the Government put great emphasis on the Tornado with new nuclear bombs and missiles, so that it can replace the WE177 free-fall thermonuclear bombs.

There was a possibility of a deal with the French on the ASMP. One could call that, in the words of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), the Euro bomb. The Government rubbished it before the election, but are now considering it. One can spot the Tory in the case of the hon. Member for Devonport, or the Owenites in the Tory party — or a bit of both. However, the Government are unlikely to do that deal with the French. They prefer being in bed with the United States, to which they are almost completely subservient in these matters. Also, they want a longer range than the French ASMP has, as a compensatory measure for the scrapping of missiles in the INF agreement.

How much will the replacement of the WE177 cost? *The Guardian* of 9 February quotes a figure of £2·3 billion. Is that true? If that is included in the Defence Estimates, what will have to go from the Defence Estimates to pay for it? What jobs will have to go? Is this sort of expenditure the real reason why the Government will not—properly—invest a similar amount in the National Health Service, as the Opposition have been demanding for months on end that they should? That article in *The Guardian* also says that the Government have been working on a replacement for the WE177 at Aldermaston. I have been asking questions about that and receiving evasive answers. Has this work on a new nuclear weapon been going on without parliamentary approval? When did the Government authorise it? We deserve an answer to that.

Then there is the matter of the 1,300 air-launched cruise missiles that, it has been suggested, are likely to arrive by the 1990s. They represent a massive increase in NATO's ability to hit the USSR and the Third world. They would be capable of hitting the same range of targets as their ground-launched counterparts, which went out under the

[Mr. Harry Cohen]

INF—but with a shorter flight time. Politically, they would be highly provocative, and they come on top of all the other non-RAF nuclear weapons such as Trident, the enhanced radiation neutron bomb, and the MLRS nuclear-capable systems.

It has been suggested that more nuclear bombers will be based in Britain, perhaps at Lakenheath and Upper Heyford. Has the Secretary of State offered RAF Greenham Common and RAF Alconbury as bases for the F111 or its replacement, the F15E Strike Eagle? We are to have all those and the Tornados at RAF Waddington and RAF Marham all over the place, too. Britain will become, and is increasingly becoming, a nuclear battle station. That can only be described as renuclearisation. It is certainly a replacement of those that were scrapped under the INF treaty.

I come back to the points made by Soviet youths because they pose the choice between arms control and arms build up. It is said:

"They want to act contrary to the wise English saying that one cannot 'have one's cake and eat it'. The replacement of the systems of nuclear armaments with other ones, more numerous and no less dangerous, is not disarmament. It is a mockery of nuclear arms reduction.

Unless NATO nuclear arming in answer to the elimination of intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles is prevented, this can lead to a new spiral in the arms race, and undermine the nascent positive process in Soviet-American relations."

I think that that is the case and certainly this new arms build up was never put before the electorate at the last election. The points about politically usable weapons were never put to the British public before the last election and the British people do not want them. If the British people perceived the truth of the matter in this respect, they would see the Prime Minister and the Government for what they really are—nuclear maniacs.

9.16 pm

Mr. Rogers: When the Minister was winding-up the defence debate in October he threw across the Table at me one of my election leaflets, on which was written, "This is the only election address Conservative Central Office could find." It was one of the election addresses that I put out dealing with social services. The Minister challenged me—and, of course, it is on record—saying that I had not said anything about defence during my election campaign. I said then, and I reassert now, that I did, particularly in my main election address. Anyway, I thought that I would bring a souvenir for the Minister tonight—the declaration of the result in the Rhondda constituency, which is in the *Guinness Book of Records* as the largest majority in this Parliament. I think that will demonstrate to him that, defence or no defence, the people of the Rhondda know how to vote.

Each year the debate seems to follow a pattern dictated, it would seem, by the Ministry of Defence's word processor. We have a tour of the world, some fine words about morale, some blood-curdling rhetoric about the Soviet threat and some inaccurate information about equipment—a part of the speech that gets thinner and thinner every year, particularly as Trident takes an ever-increasing share of a decreasing budget. Because of this, of course, we are unable to perform our vital NATO role.

The Opposition contend — as I think we have demonstrated in the debate—that it is not just Trident that is distorting our defence problems, but general mismanagement by the Government.

One of the issues that has not come out in this debate, but to which the Minister could perhaps address himself in his winding-up speech, is the change in Government policy of not publishing project unit costs. I put down a written question to the Minister asking when it became his practice not to publish project unit costs, and the answer that I had from him was that it could be inimical to the commercial interests of manufacturers.

Why is that? The price of a Tornado has no commercial secrecy value. The aircraft is made up of many individually priced parts and there is no commercial value in simply knowing the price of the whole.

Is it true that the policy is brought about by the Government's increasing embarrassment in their procurement role—that it is not secrecy to cover security that we are seeing, but secrecy to hide incompetence? It is not secrecy in the interests of the nation; it is secrecy in the self-interest of the Government and the Tory party.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) brought up the acute problem of low flying. He demonstrated to the House the enormous physical impact that a low-flying aircraft has on anyone who happens to be under the flight path. It is an extreme and shattering experience. Although the Minister has addressed himself to this problem on many occasions and answered us with the greatest of courtesy, I hope that he will continue to consider it.

I accept the strictures about the need for training. I have an Army—I had a humble role—rather than an Air Force background, but I cannot accept that there is any skill acquisition from flying at 500 miles an hour at 100 ft. All that happens are knee-jerk reactions. As I have said before, one cannot improve one's reflexes simply by practising in that way. There are other ways to test and improve such reflexes. To repeat what I have said before—indeed, it illustrates the point well—one does not get better at Russian roulette by practising.

Mr. Bill Walker: Pilots do not fly low and fast simply for fun, nor do they do it, the older they get, simply to get a kick. They do it because it is the only way that they will survive in a battlefield environment, and, sadly, there is no substitute for it.

Mr. Rogers: The sad truth of the matter is that many pilots do not even survive peace-time practice and the accident rate is now reaching alarming proportions. I still contend—I will leave it at this—that there is no real skill acquisition in flying at a height of 100 ft at 500 miles an hour. All one can do is practise knee-jerk reactions.

Mr. Mans: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rogers: No. The hon. Gentleman has just entered the Chamber. We are tight on time and I gave way a considerable number of times during my opening speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) mentioned many interesting matters in his speech. He talked about his relief that the search and rescue service had been redeemed. However, both my hon. Friend and I are still disturbed about the "get out" clause that was included in the Minister's statement. I hope that

that matter will be clarified when the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State replies to the debate. My hon. Friend is also concerned about the present problems with the Tornado and IUKADGE. There are grave difficulties with our Air Force defence and I hope that the Minister will address himself to them in the relatively short time that he has.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. McNair-Wilson) mentioned his visit to Greenham Common and informed us of his discussions with the United States commander. Apart from giving us a nice dissertation about boots, he did say that the commander had said that the base would be used as an aerodrome. Perhaps the Minister could tell us——

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson: I said "for an air force purpose."
That is in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Rogers: I am sorry. However, my question is still pertinent: whose air force and for what purpose?

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) made an extremely good contribution to the debate. In common with me, my hon. Friend gets extremely offended at the gratuitous insults that are sometimes thrown from the Conservative Benches.

Mr. Frank Cook: It is not all of them; just one of them.

Mr. Rogers: From one or two Conservative Members. However, I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree that the pattern appears to be that Conservative Members believe that they are the sole custodians of the defence of this country. I have addressed this problem before and would simply ask them to consider the problem themselves. They should remember the record of some members of their party during the 1930s.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North made some extremely pertinent points about nuclear deterrence and strategy. I hope that he will not consider me in any way condescending if I say that he has acquired a formidable reputation on nuclear matters, both civil and military, and that his remarks are heeded.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) referred to a surgical nuclear strike and demonstrated the absurdity of some of the contemporary discussion of political and military strategy.

The hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) made an extremely critical and balanced speech. He addressed the problems as they should be addressed in a debate such as this. He referred to one concern of Opposition Members —the identification of friend and foe system and the incompatibility that is developing within the NATO forces. He also referred to an issue that I mentioned in my opening remarks — the problem of pilot retention, or perhaps I should say pilot loss. He told the Minister that drastic action was needed. The hon. Gentleman preferred to refer to privatisation as contracting out, but properly pointed out the dangers that can arise when there are more civilians than service men in a military unit. The service men then cannot carry out their operating role because they are administering the civilian sector.

The hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) was concerned about the future of the European fighter aircraft, in which he has a large constituency interest. I am glad that he is joining us in putting pressure on the Government. We are not being negative. We are saying deliberately and clearly that it will not be possible for the Government to fulfil their nuclear role with Trident and their conventional role within NATO. We may find a severe defence gap developing in the 1990s because of that. Will the Minister tell us whether the EFA is to maintain its dual role as an air interceptor and ground attack plane, or whether the Department has given in to the Treasury and downgraded the specification for the EFA to make it a single role interceptor?

It is well over a year since the Government decided to purchase AWACS, and the matter has been raised yet again today. What is to happen to the Nimrod airframes, of which there are 11? Are they still rotting away at Waddington and Abingdon? Will they be sold or converted to perform a maritime reconnaissance role? Surely the 11 airframes will not be needed for that. Their maintenance is an enormous drain on our defence budget, and, furthermore, they have the capacity to be sold off. The Government are keen on selling off surplus assets in health and so on. How about selling off some surplus assets in the RAF, which could probably realise about £100 million to contribute to the ever-decreasing budget available for defence?

This is my second bite of the cherry this evening. The Minister has been posed an awful lot of questions and I should like to leave him as long as possible to answer the genuine questions and grievances that we have put to him. Opposition Members say that the Government are in severe difficulties and that they will experience even greater difficulties in safeguarding the defence of this country as we move into the 1990s. As Sir Frank Cooper — a former permanent secretary at the Ministry of Defence — has said, the main issues have not been and are not being addressed by the Government. He also mentioned Britain's national role and the problem of an over-full defence programme. Until the Government address those issues they will not fulfil their obligations to this country.

We are anxious to co-operate to obtain maximum security for Britain. We want to safeguard our freedoms and traditions as much as anyone else. I hope that the Minister and other Conservative Members will accept that our commitment to the defence of Britain is at least as strong, if not stronger, than theirs.

9.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Roger Freeman): I thank the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) for giving me a copy of his parliamentary election return, which I read with great interest. I congratulate him on the size of his majority, and I draw attention to the fact that, judging by the return at the bottom, he holds the record in this country for those voting for more than one candidate in a constituency.

Mr. Rogers: People in the Rhondda are extremely generous. Having given me 35,000 votes, they had to give some to the Communists, the SDP, the Tories and Plaid Cymru.

Mr. Freeman: The debate has been good natured, interesting and informative. Many questions have been asked — I counted over [illegible] — so I am sure that hon. Members will forgive me if I do not answer them all in the time available. I give an undertaking, as I did last year,

[Mr. Freeman]

that I or one of my colleagues in the Department will write to hon. Members who have raised points that I cannot answer tonight.

We take these single-service debates very seriously, as do the services. The thin attendance for the debate would give a misleading impression to those who look only at the numbers who attend. It is an important debate, many important issues have been raised and the Ministry of Defence very much welcomes it.

I offer the House, through you, Mr. Speaker, the apologies of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, who is hosting an official dinner for a German defence delegation, for not being present.

According to today's *Daily Telegraph*, Lloyd George told the young Harold Macmillan:

"You've no idea how to make a speech. Twenty points make a good speech to which nobody listens . . . As a junior Minister, you can allow yourself two."

I am afraid that I am about to cover 15 or 20 points, which raises the question, if our proceedings are to be televised, of how television will cover the winding-up speeches.

The hon. Member for Rhondda and my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) mentioned exit rates of pilots, particularly fast-jet pilots. There are three categories of pilot exits. The first category is premature voluntary retirement. I hope that the hon. Member for Rhondda understands that the application rates from all pilots — fast-jet pilots, and younger fast-jet pilots specifically — for premature voluntary retirement is down, which is good news. The second category of exit is those who leave at the end of their career. We cannot be blamed for that. The third category is those who reach recognised option points during their career. The hon. Gentleman rightly drew attention to the fact that those who signed on for a 12-year commission in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but who had an option to leave after eight years, are now leaving in slightly higher numbers. We regret that, but it is not terribly surprising, because there are great attractions in the civil airlines. However, I advise my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Rhondda that the total exit rate for PVR — those who are leaving either at the end or during their engagements — is not excessive. There is no shortage of fast-jet pilots now, nor is one foreseen in the Royal Air Force.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) raised the question of gratuities—I apologise to him for not being in the Chamber when he spoke—as did my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre. In the light of recent social security legislation, which requires occupational pension schemes to preserve benefits after two years' service, we are considering whether gratuity earning engagements should continue to be offered in the future, or whether to allow short-service officers and airmen to become members of the armed forces pension scheme from the outset. My hon. Friends will appreciate the significance of that. If those service men become members at the outset, there is no question of paying a cash gratuity at the eight-year point. If they leave at that stage they will have a preserved pension right, but there will not be a cash incentive for pilots to leave. I take that point seriously.

Mr. Bill Walker: I believe that we should consider a positive approach to this problem and pay those officers to stay in the Royal Air Force. It would save the Air Force millions of pounds in training costs if we gave service men a handsome gratuity to stay in with which they could then buy the houses and all the other things for which they are now using their terminal gratuities.

Mr. Freeman: I appreciate my hon. Friend's point. However, the right way to proceed would be to make sure that the pay and allowances for those who continue to serve are continuously looked at and improved where possible. I do not think that a cash gratuity to those who stay in and are retained would be the right way to proceed. However, I take my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Frank Cook: Will the Minister consider establishing some form of transfer fee? If the pilot or flying technician — call him or her what one will — took up another flying post on leaving the RAF, with another military air force or civil airline, could we not charge something for the training that that pilot had received?

Mr. Freeman: That is an interesting idea, but I do not hold out much hope of making it effective. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have a minimum return of service for pilots and, indeed, a quota system for those who, sadly, decide to apply for PVR. We seek to amortise the expensive cost of training pilots. It costs £3 million to train a pilot, and £1 million to train a navigator.

The hon. Member for Rhondda raised the question of Foxhunter, the radar for Tornado. Even in its present form this radar is performing much better than on its first introduction to service. We are confident that its capability will continue to improve as the development progresses. It does not yet meet in full the requirements of the RAF, but radars to an agreed interim standard are now in service and the system is already providing an operational capability that is superior to that of the aircraft that it is replacing. Already two units of Tornado F3, one squadron and the operational conversion unit, have been declared to NATO and a third will be declared shortly.

The hon. Member for Rhondda and my hon. Friends the Members for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), for Newbury (Mr. McNair-Wilson), and for Fylde (Mr. Jack) mentioned EFA and EFA radar. I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde to these debates. I feel sure that he will be a great successor, not only to the previous hon. Member for that constituency, but to my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), who used to carry the flag for EFA and the aerospace industry. We look forward to his contributions in these debates. My hon. Friends asked about the decision on the radar for the European fighter aircraft. Bids for the radar were received last week and are being assessed, but no decision on the radar will be taken before Easter.

The hon. Member for Rhondda also raised the question of the Tucano programme. The first two production Tucano aircraft are currently undergoing flight clearance trials at Boscombe Down. Once those trials have progressed far enough, deliveries to the Royal Air Force will start, although it will be later than was originally planned. Shorts expects to recover any delays later in the delivery programme.

Mr. Rogers: Are the Minister and his Department absolutely satisfied now that the technical problems of shoehorning the engine into the Tucano airframe have been overcome?

Mr. Freeman: With any complicated aircraft — the Tucano is less complicated than the Tornado and the

European fighter aircraft—one can never be 100 per cent. sure. I have made a statement which I believe to be clear and comprehensive, and I am sure that we shall return to the subject at a later date.

The hon. Gentleman asked me whether any decision had been made on the future of the 11 airframes. We have recently decided that three of the Nimrod airborne early-warning airframes should be utilised to provide spares for Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft. The future of the remaining eight airframes is still under active review.

The hon. Member for Rhondda and the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) asked some important questions about search and rescue. I am happy briefly to expand on what my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said earlier. He explained that where there is a military requirement for search and rescue the service will continue to be provided by the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, whose services will, of course, continue to be made available to the wider civilian community.

Several hon. Members asked me to explain what is meant by a military requirement. I should explain that military search and rescue are the responsibility of Defence Ministers, while my right hon. Friend the Secretay of State for Transport is responsible for civil, marine and aviation search and rescue policy. The military requirement is to rescue military personnel of all three services, in peacetime, transition to war and war itself, on land or sea. To meet that requirement, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force helicopters cover most of the United Kingdom coastline and inland mountainous areas, providing a search and rescue service in all those areas where military personnel are likely to be in difficulties throughout the year.

That does not apply in the north of Scotland, where Bristow provides a service at Sumburgh and Stornoway. Military personnel benefit greatly from the dedicated and courageous services of other organisations, such as HM Coastguard, the RNLI, the civil police and civilian mountain rescue organisations.

At the same time, the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force search and rescue helicopter squadrons gladly make their services available to civilians in trouble. More than 90 per cent. of their call outs are to help civilians. That will continue.

Civilian search and rescue requirements are defined by the helicopter coverage group reporting to the Department of Transport. In some areas the helicopter coverage group would wish to see some improvements. As a result of the deployment studies which were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces, and which are continuing, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force helicopters, together with civilian helicopters established in the Shetlands and Hebrides, will provide coverage in future, meeting virtually all the requirements of the helicopter coverage group. I can assure the House that overall coverage will not be diminished. On the contrary it will be enhanced considerably by the military search and rescue helicopters.

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Freeman: I shall finish my point. These helicopters are subject to study for redeployment and we expect to make an announcement shortly. Coverage is also provided by civilian helicopters, of which there is only Bristow in the north of Scotland.

I recognise that hon. Members would like details of our deployment plans, but I cannot provide those today because our studies are not yet complete. However, we thought it right to put an end to uncertainty and speculation about contractorisation and to set at rest some fears that are understandable but groundless. Where we do not find it necessary to provide military helicopters to meet military search and rescue requirements, but where my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport judges that civilian activities require unusually high search and rescue needs, my right hon. Friend may decide to supplement the military service by letting civilian contracts. I must ask the House to accept that that will be so.

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Freeman: In a moment. The vast bulk of the search and rescue helicopter service will continue to be provided by the much-admired yellow and dark blue helicopters and by their dedicated and courageous crews.

Mr. Wilson: The more the Minister speaks, the more he reintroduces doubts that we thought had been erased. It might be purely a semantic confusion between the military service and the service provided by the military mainly for civilian use. Will the hon. Gentleman assure us that no base from which the Ministry of Defence provides a search and rescue service will be privatised? Will he also assure us that there is no area covered by the military service, beyond the areas covered by the two bases which already exist, where the privatised area will encroach, either from those bases, or from other bases which are to be established? In other words, although the principle of privatising the whole service has been rejected—we are pleased about that—we do not want to see a gradual erosion of the Ministry of Defence service, with Bristow's finger going a little deeper into the pie every time it obtains another base, as it has in Stornoway and Shetland.

Mr. Freeman: The answers to the hon. Gentleman's two questions are yes, and yes.

Mr. Denzil Davies: The Minister mentioned military redeployment and said that he may be able to tell us something in the future. Is he in a difficulty because that redeployment might mean a reduction in military needs and demands and he is hoping that that reduction can be made up by civilian operations conducted through the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry?

Mr. Freeman: The answer is no. The studies are taking some time. We hope to announce the result shortly, because they involve consultation with different Government Departments. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that there is no intention to diminish or contract the military cover that is provided. As he knows, some 90 per cent. of those rescued by military helicopters are civilians.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) and the hon. Members for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy and for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) asked about low flying. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East talked about radar. He was referring to Skyguard. That is a fire control radar system, normally used in association with Oerlikon guns. The possibility of using a Skyguard system to monitor the heights of low-flying aircraft was the subject of a recent trial. The equipment's potential in that role will not be clear until the

[Mr. Freeman]

results of the trial have been fully assessed. However, I can assure the hon. and learned Gentleman that I and the Ministry of Defence take seriously the evaluation of the trial. If the trial proves that the equipment can be used to monitor the height of low-flying aircraft, it will be so used.

The hon. and learned Gentleman also asked about the extent to which we can transfer. He mentioned low-flying training in the Falklands and Canada. Yes, we would like to transfer to many different countries, but it is costly to transport the aircraft and crew, and it clearly reduces our defence capability while the aircraft are away. One must also bear in mind that those countries might also have views on the number of aircraft that they are prepared to take. The answer to the hon. and learned Gentleman's question is yes. Where possible, we are seeking to increase the amount of low flying done abroad.

The hon. and learned Gentleman also asked about the noise compensation scheme at Leuchars. I worked closely with his predecessor and I pay tribute to him for his defence of his constituents' interests. I understood that the noise insulation grant scheme was welcome. If there are problems and the hon. and learned Gentleman cares to write to me, I shall be pleased to pursue them. I believe that the grant rate scheme per house is adequate and that it is a widely popular scheme.

The hon. Member for Carmarthen made a thoughtful speech and raised five points. First, he mentioned children being terrified. I take his point, and I give him an undertaking that I shall reflect further on how we can alert and inform children, either through school or through parents, about the effect of low-flying aircraft and the suddenness of the sound. While I regret to say that low-flying training must continue—and the Tornado and the F111 are noisy aircraft—the hon. Gentleman has made a valid point.

The hon. Gentleman was probably mistaken in believing that the problem is not only becoming worse, but will continue to get worse. He was right, however, to draw attention to the fact that, over the past five or 10 years, the number of missions flown at low level has increased. That is historically true. The reasons are simply that our pilots must perfect the technique of flying low. That is a relatively new development, because the introduction of the Soviet radar system is itself relatively new, and that is the reason for pilots having to practise low flying. The Tornado aircraft is now fully in service, and, with the introduction of a new aircraft, such techniques must be practised.

Where the hon. Gentleman is wrong, and where I hope I can help him, is in his view that a plateau has been reached in the number of missions flown. I believe that the hon. Member for Rhondda said that 1987 had seen a small diminution, and the situation will not get worse.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the proportion of flights undertaken at ultra-low level. I cannot give him an assurance that we will stick to the percentage of 0·5 per cent. However, I can say that flights in the centre of Wales, the borders and the north of Scotland are necessary and will always remain a very low proportion of total missions flown. It involves great skill to fly down to 100 ft., and it is done in preparation for training abroad.

The hon. Gentleman asked about a ban on night flying. Night flying forms a very small proportion of the total. Although I cannot offer the hon. Gentleman a ban, I can say that, where possible, crews cease flying at 7 pm. Night flying has to be practised in the summer months, because many missions flown in war would be in the middle of the night, but they try to keep the disturbance to a minimum.

The hon. Gentleman raised an interesting point about notification of low-flying exercises, and whether we could do more about notifying the local media. I try to write to hon. Members notifying them not only of general exercises, but specifically when there is going to be activity in ultra-low-flying areas. However, I shall see what else we can do.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy raised a number of points. Let me comment on three or four of them. He talked about our policy on avoidance areas. Since 1979, when the Labour Government changed the low-flying system into one unlike the German system, in which pilots could fly anywhere in Great Britain, apart from the great conurbations and airfields, our policy has been constantly to try to reduce the number of avoidance areas. Sometimes we introduce new avoidance areas—I announced one recently at Quedgeley, a suburb of Gloucester—but our general approach is to reduce the number of such areas. This, I believe, is consistent with the comments by the RAF officer. Our purpose is constantly to spread the burden as widely as possible. I accept that it is an interference.

The hon. Gentleman asked about low flying being exported from Germany back to this country. I am not sure which aircraft he is thinking of. Our own aircraft, belonging to RAF Germany, are part of the Royal Air Force. Sometimes they train in Germany, but they also return to this country: that is legitimate. Only 1 per cent. of all missions are flown by non-RAF and non-United States air force jets, and they are mainly from the European NATO air forces. I consider that a modest proportion, and I do not accept the implication that other European nations are sending all their fast jets here and over-burdening us.

The hon. Gentleman's most important point was about the safety rate. There is no time to go into the subject in depth, but I will say that we take it extremely seriously. The accident rate in 1987 was the lowest for the last decade. Accident rates are expressed in terms of accidents per 10,000 hours of flying. The rate in 1987 was one accident per 30,000 hours flown in military jets. Each mission flown normally lasts for between an hour and an hour and a half. That was a good safety record, despite the sad bunching of accidents in the middle of the year, and the inevitable media interest that has followed.

The hon. Gentleman drew to the attention of the House the fact that only one third of low-flying accidents—sadly, there were 14 or 15 accidents last year—can be attributed to low flying, when technical malfunction or pilot error resulted in a crash. Two thirds of such accidents occur at high level and may involve technical malfunction or other reasons. I am proud of our safety record and hope that it will be maintained.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the civilian pilot who was lost in 1984. I am sorry if I misled him in any way. The statistics prepared are for civilian casualties on the ground, not in the air. There was no intention to mislead him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside referred to the RTM322 engine, the Rolls-Royce turbo mecca engine. We have decided that a competition will be held for the supply of production engines for the Anglo-Italian EH101 helicopter. A

specification is being prepared and we aim to issue tenders and complete the competition as soon as possible. We expect the RTM322 to be a strong contender and we are looking forward to receiving a keenly competitive bid.

My hon. Friend referred to the Farnborough air show and asked whether something could be done about the charges. I should like to think about that and write to him. We would like to be helpful, but we are restrained by Treasury requirements and good housekeeping to ensure that we recover our costs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury referred to Greenham Common. Under the terms of the INF agreement Soviet inspection teams will be entitled to visit Greenham Common on a limited number of occasions over 13 years after the entry into force of the treaty, which will be shortly after ratification by the two countries. All treaty-related items will have been removed from the base during the three-year draw-down period.

As for the United Kingdom being a base country, the treaty applies only to cruise missiles and their support facilities at RAF Greenham Common and RAF Molesworth, so it places no formal limitations on other forms of activity or use of the base. However, in practice we would have to take into account in our forward planning the fact that for the foreseeable future Soviet inspection teams will be arriving to make inspections at very short notice. I do not expect that a decision on the future use of RAF Greenham Common will be made for some time, but I notice my hon. Friend's comment about the sensitive question of future use, and about aircraft being based at Greenham Common.

My hon. Friend also referred to the boot. Being an Army boot, I am afraid I am unsighted on that and I shall have to write to him. I appreciate the problems. I am afraid that we will never satisfy the Army or the RAF on a new boot, but we will try.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North referred to dog training. This review is the eleventh in the Ministry of Defence under various Governments, as far as I can gather. A decision is expected once our consultants have reported.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre referred to the Boeing offset agreement. We are currently evaluating Boeing's first six-monthly report detailing contracts for which it wishes to claim offset credit. There is no reason to believe that Boeing will not meet its obligations under the AWACS offset programme, which will also cover the seventh aircraft. Its only other offset commitment in the United Kingdom, against the purchase of Chinook helicopters, has recently been fulfilled.

The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) asked about air-launched cruise missiles. No decisions have been made on modernisation or changes to the United Kingdom's tactical nuclear capability. As my right hon. Friend has told the House, we are studying the possibilities, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that no decision has been taken.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fylde asked about Tornado mid-life updates. This is planned for the early 1990s.

Finally, the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) asked about several issues. I assure him, as I assure the hon. Member for Stockton, North on the free-fall bomb. This is the tactical nuclear weapon for the Royal Air Force. It is most important in bringing our systems up to date. No decisions have been made, but I can assure the House that the RAF will be given the capability to defend the country.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Berkshire Draft Structure Plan

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ryder.]*

10 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I am grateful, Mr. Speaker, for your selecting as a subject for debate the Berkshire revised structure plan. It is a matter of importance to my constituents in Wokingham and to the constituents of those of my hon. Friends who represent Berkshire constituencies and who are here tonight to take part in the debate, with your permission. I shall be speaking for all of them in relation to the revised structure plan and the Government's suggestions on it.

The message from Berkshire is clear. Over the six weeks of the consultation period, the county has been making the Government well aware, by many means, of its strong opposition to the proposed 7,000 houses that the inspector has recommended should be added to the substantial growth total already in the draft structure plan proposed by the county council.

Opposition has been expressed to the Government over the vagueness of the new use classes order and how that might apply to the guidance in the structure plan on the amount of development to be permitted for industrial and commercial purposes. We welcome some of the features of the structure plan as it stands.

We are grateful that the rapid rate of housing growth, which has been higher than 5,000 a year, should fall to 3,900 on the Government's suggestion, but we still feel that that is too high, as I shall explain. We welcome the Government's firmness of purpose, as stated in that document, to preserve the strategic gap between settlements, although some of us wonder how much meaning we can place on this when we see the decisions in some recent planning appeal cases, such as the Keep Hatch case, which seem to erode those vital green gaps between settlements.

We obviously welcome the affirmation by the Government that there will be strong support for those areas of Berkshire that are demarked as green belt or areas of outstanding natural beauty. But we are concerned about the pressures that will result on other parts of the county including, especially in my case, the Wokingham district where there is not the same protection because much of the land is not demarked as green belt or as areas of outstanding natural beauty.

We also welcome the Government's genuflection in favour of local discretion in many features of the plan. But we fear that we might yet again reach the position where the Government overrule many of these decisions, which are taken locally and exercise discretion in the best interests of the local community, by making a series of appeal decisions against the wishes of the people of Berkshire and their duly elected representatives. I should be grateful to hear some assurances from the Minister that where the local duly elected representatives exercise their discretion under the plan the Government will give them some backing.

We are considering here local authorities which have done more than their bit to accommodate the very rapid growth in the south-east in general, and Berkshire in particular, in recent years and which have never pursued a Luddite approach. They have accepted much of the growth, perhaps too willingly, and attempted to accommodate it. But there comes a point at which we must say that enough is enough and that we need a reduction in the growth rate.

I put the case to the Minister on two main grounds. I wish to deal with matters that relate to Berkshire. There are times when one must be selfish because all Berkshire Members are here to represent the interests of our county, to defend what is best about it and to ensure that its future growth and prosperity are based on sound planning. We wish to see the public consultation reflected in the Minister's decisions. The views of the public were canvassed extensively over two long consultation periods by the county council before the decisions were made about the revisions to the draft structure plan. The views of the local communities were entirely clear. They felt that they had had too much growth and they wanted to see a substantial reduction in it.

Many of our councillors have valiantly tried to make good-quality decisions to accommodate some growth and, at the same time, to preserve what is best in the countryside and in our local amenities and facilities. We need some assurances that loyal and hard-working councillors will not always be overridden to the point where they ask themselves why they bother to be councillors at all, if their decisions will always be overridden.

We need to know what Government thinking is on our public services. If we have rapid population growth of the kind that we have had, largely from inward migration, we must accept that there will be tremendous pressure on all kinds of public facilities. The Government have not been too ready to come forward with plans for major increases in public spending. When it comes to the schools budget, or the hospitals budget, we are told that things are difficult.

Why are we faced with growth that we do not want, without the resources to accommodate it properly, when other constituencies would desperately like some of that population growth or even some of those people to stay with them in urban areas which are properly serviced, but which are now contemplating school and hospital closures because there is insufficient demand for those services?

We also wish the Minister to take full account of the importance of the local environment. Berkshire has much beautiful scenery and the characteristic of the county rests upon the clear segregation of village and market town settlements one from another. We are in grave danger not just of the important green gaps between the major settlements being eroded, but of the gaps between the lesser settlements being eroded. The village and market town style will go for ever, to be replaced by one large urban sprawl. For that reason, we oppose it. Much as I like my hon. Friend the Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay), we do not wish to see our two major settlements amalgamated by a continuous urban sprawl.

Last but not least, we are extremely worried about the traffic pressures on the county's roads. The roads were designed for a much smaller resident population than we currently enjoy. If we wish to seek proof of what can happen, in the past 10 years traffic accidents in Berkshire have risen by 13 per cent., whereas elsewhere in the country they have been static or falling. That is evidence enough of the enormous pressures that we now see if we are foolish enough to try to drive to the House from our constituencies at peak time in the morning. It is impossible to make reasonable progress on the M4.

I wish to deal now with the broader national interests. I and many of my hon. Friends greatly welcome the Government's strong initiatives to redevelop the inner cities and to ensure that the prosperity of the country pulsates through the veins up and down the land. That requires that more of the growth, economic prosperity and new investment should take place in the great conurbations of the country, not continuously in the south-east—more especially, in a very narrow part of the south-east.

We wish to help this policy. Sometimes people are unaware of just how great migration has been in this country. Over the past 10 years, the leading conurbations have lost 100,000 people each or, in the case of Glasgow, 135,000. Even London, in the heart of the prosperous south-east, has experienced a net outward migration of 250,000 people. Over that same 10-year period, the south-east has had to absorb 500,000 new people, when it already had relatively full employment and a great deal of prosperity. Accommodating further moves on that scale will make nonsense of the Government's inner-city strategy and will do nothing to spread prosperity across the nation.

A similar imbalance in new housing goes with the migrating patterns. Is the Minister aware that new house building in London has slumped from over 30,000 10 years ago to well under 10,000 in recent years, despite the rebuilding of substantial chunks of docklands? There is evidence that in cities there is plenty of land available if it can be prised out of the public sector which keeps it, magpielike, and will not allow it to be developed.

We do not wish to see Hyde park or St. James's park built on. We would all like to see more parks in the inner cities. But the message is simple: the land is there for parks and for houses. We wish to see the Government's resolve strengthened to make sure that more of the vacant land is used and more pressures are taken off other parts of the country.

Sometimes people say to me, "Yes, but you are trying to rig the market. The market demands more houses in your area." The only reason why the market demands more houses in our area is that the market is completely rigged elsewhere. The planning system clogs development in inner cities, in the north and in many parts of the country. Because the public sector owns so much land and often does not wish to develop it, we have an entirely false market in land which makes it difficult for sites to become available.

Those matters are entirely within the Government's power. We all support a Government who believe in the planning system and that it has to be exercised with discretion and skill so that enterprise and market forces are not totally impeded. The burden of my argument is that the planning system is skewed and is putting far too much pressure on the south-east and not enough on the areas that most need development.

I should like to make many other points, but the Minister said that she would like almost 15 minutes to reply, and I would like, with your permission, Mr. Speaker, to allow two of my hon. Friends to intervene in this important debate.

10.11 pm

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) for allowing me a few moments to put the case for my constituency. We in Newbury are affected by the Secretary of State's proposals to the extent of having another 950 houses imposed on us in the Newbury and Thatcham area over and above the houses already agreed by the county council in its review of the structure plan.

The Minister will know that the county council put forward proposals for a further 36,000 houses in Berkshire for the period between now and 1996. In simple terms that means an increase in the county's population of about 100,000. That is an enormous number. Clearly, with those people will have to come the infrastructure of hospitals, roads and all the necessities that human beings need.

I am sad that the Secretary of State did not accept the figures put forward by the county council as probably the most accurate estimate that anyone could make of what is likely to be required for the county. I am even more sad that the Department of the Environment seems to be incapable of accepting that the local authority, representing the people of the county of Berkshire, might not conceivably be able to estimate more effectively and with more sensitivity the requirements of the county than can either the Department itself or the independent panel to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred the review of the structure plan.

I support everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham has said. He has raised questions which require deep answers. I hope the proposals will be reconsidered and that the Secretary of State will recognise that Berkshire has had as much development as any county over the past 25 years and that to allow still more development is to destroy one of the most beautiful of the home counties.

10.14 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): I want to endorse the powerful case put by my hon. Friends the Members for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and for Newbury (Mr. McNair-Wilson). We in Berkshire feel very let down and sore. We think that the democratic process has been trampled on by the Secretary of State. All the hon. Members who represent constituencies in Berkshire, all the local authorities—parish, district and county—and all the people of Berkshire have recommended one course of action, and it has been completely ignored.

In my constituency, an additional 2,500 houses have been foisted upon us by the Secretary of State, on top of the large increase that we have already reluctantly accepted. That will affect not only the environment—our countryside will be ruined—but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham said, our infrastructure, as there has been no financial provision for roads, schools, hospitals and social services. That will put an unreasonable strain upon us.

There is a wider aspect, too. I have said in previous debates that we are not Luddites. We have accepted more than our share of development, but if we now proceed to allow developers the soft option of building on greenfield sites in the shire county of Berkshire we shall do irreparable damage to our excellent inner-city initiatives and increase the north-south divide.

For those reasons, I hope that the Secretary of State will reconsider what I believe are his unsound views on the modifications to the structure plan.

10.16 pm

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): I endorse every word said by my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), although I am not so much affected. We do not have the infrastructure or the facilities for roads — particularly roads — and schools, and we shall doubtless feel the effects of the construction in other constituencies.

On several previous occasions major decisions have been overturned by the Secretary of State. I hope that in future the Government will not attempt to overturn local decisions.

10.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mrs. Marion Roe): I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay), for Newbury (Mr. McNair-Wilson), and for Windsor and Maidenhead (Dr. Glyn) for putting forward so clearly the deeply held concerns of many people about development in Berkshire generally and, more specifically, about the modifications that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State proposed to make to the replacement structure plan for Berkshire. I also note that my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr. Watts) is in the Chamber listening to the debate.

Hon. Friends representing Berkshire have spoken in this House previously on the subject of development in Berkshire, and some attended and spoke at the examination in public held in July 1986 into the replacement plan. The views that they have expressed have been very helpful in articulating the strong local support for the county council's proposals to secure a sharp reduction in house building in Berkshire, at preventing urban sprawl and the coalescence of settlements, and at conserving and safeguarding the countryside.

I know that it is not just concern about safeguarding the landscape and environment that causes anxiety to my hon. Friends in Berkshire. There is also genuine concern about the consequences of increasing volumes of traffic and about the demands on, for example, social services, on health provision and education, caused by the pressures of an expanding population.

We recognise and appreciate these concerns. At the same time, however, the Government have the responsibility to consider and take into account the overall levels of population growth and housing demand in the south-east and in the country as a whole, as well as the importance of sustaining and encouraging national economic recovery. To say that is to imply not that Berkshire should be sacrificed to economic expediency but that, in deciding the levels of development appropriate in Berkshire, all these factors have to be weighed.

Therefore, the argument is not all one way. It is not only the county council's views or the views of those at present living in the county that have to be considered, however important these are. My right hon. Friend must take into account all the material factors. My hon. Friends will know that, because of its attractive environment and its economic vitality, there is considerable demand for more housing in Berkshire, and there is a need to consider what the social and economic consequences might be of denying such demand.

These are very difficult issues, but at the end of the day my right hon. Friend has to exercise his judgment in reaching his decision on structure plan proposals. As part of this process the opportunity is given for representations to be made both in favour of and against the county council's proposals, for selected issues arising from those proposals to be debated at an examination in public and for the panel to make its recommendations. My right hon. Friend is not obliged to accept these recommendations, but it must be recognised that the panel, having heard all the arguments and having studied the county at first hand, is well placed to reach a balanced view. It would be unusual for my right hon. Friend to disregard a panel's main recommendations unless there were reason to believe it had misinterpreted Government policy or had seriously misjudged some relevant consideration.

My right hon. Friend gave careful consideration both to the written representations and to the panel's report, but found no reason to disagree with the broad recommendations in the panel's report in respect of Berkshire's replacement structure plan, or with its particular concern that insufficient housing would be provided in the later part of the plan period.

My hon. Friend has made it clear that my right hon. Friend's proposed modifications to the replacement plan are not welcome to himself or his colleagues in Berkshire, or to many of their constituents, including the county council and most of the district councils. The reasons for their concern have again been put forward forcefully in this debate, but my hon. Friend will know that under the statutory process for dealing with structure plan proposals my right hon. Friend's proposed modifications will be advertised by Berkshire county council and a period of six weeks will be given in which objections and representations can be made to my right hon. Friend. This debate cannot be a substitute for that process, and I shall look forward to receiving detailed written comments from all those who have relevant points to make.

A number of points about the proposed modifications have been made by my hon. Friends. I cannot at this stage deal specifically with the comments made tonight since before my decision is taken it will be necessary to consider all the representations made during the objection period. These may include, of course, some which may suggest that the proposed modifications to increase the housing provision do not go far enough. My hon. Friend will understand that I have to show a proper reticence and will, I hope, forgive me if I do not appear to respond to his points. I can, however, assure him that very careful consideration will be given to all the objections and representations received before my right hon. Friend makes his final decision.

My hon. Friends will have seen the panel's report and the statement of reasons explaining the proposed modifications. It may be helpful if I make a few comments. A number of key points were made by the panel which are central to the panel's recommendations, and which my right hon. Friend has agreed and accepted.

First, the panel concluded that past high rates of house building should not continue.

Secondly, because of the high level of existing commitments to development, the major part of the housing proposed by the county council will be built before 1990. The county council saw this as leading to a very low rate of house building of only about 1,600 dwellings a year in the 1990s. However, the panel considered this level of housing to be too low to meet the needs of the naturally increasing population in Berkshire

in the later part of the plan period even if the county were to cease to cater for in-migration of population from other areas. It pointed to problems that this might give rise to, such as increased pressures on existing housing, with high occupancy rates, suppression of household formation and more difficulty in securing housing for those at the bottom of the market.

Thirdly, the panel did not see the extra provision it recommended as requiring any breach of fundamental planning or other constraints. Fourthly, the panel did not consider the implications of the extra housing for traffic and other infrastructure and service provision were such as to rule out the increase. As I have already said, my right hon. Friend found no reason to disregard the panel's conclusions on those key points.

Notwithstanding the disappointment that my hon. Friends in Berkshire feel, they will recognise that my right hon. Friend's proposed modifications will result in a substantial reduction in house building rates, by about 2,000 dwellings a year from present levels in the county. Past and current high rates of house building in Berkshire are a result of the major growth area status given to central Berkshire in 1970, the strategic plan for the south-east, and reflected in the central Berkshire structure plan. Indeed, much of the housing proposed in the replacement plan is as a result of commitments to development under past policies.

Following my right hon. Friend's statement in June 1986, setting his new regional strategic guidance for the south-east, there is now no policy requirement to encourage major growth in Berkshire. For that reason, and having regard to the arguments put forward by the county council and by my hon. Friends, he has not proposed to accept the argument put forward by developers at the examination in public that a high rate of growth should continue. But nor does the regional guidance suggest that Berkshire should become an area of restraint of growth. In fact, growth is already severely restrained in much of Berkshire because of the extent of the area of outstanding natural beauty and the green belt.

On the matter of planning appeals, may I assure my hon. Friends that all appeals will be considered on their merits in the light of the structure plan and local plan policies. Once the replacement plan is approved, there will be a firm policy base for planning decisions.

It is frequently argued that development should be directed instead to the inner cities and less advantaged areas. I appreciate my hon. Friends' concern. I do not agree that allowing development in Berkshire is depriving those areas. We take the view that it is not the ready availability of sites in the south-east that keeps development out of the inner cities and other less-advantaged areas. Developers would no doubt tell us that the planning policies generally applied over the south-east make it difficult rather than easy to locate or expand there. No, the challenge is to make the inner cities and other areas places where people and industry want to live and work. The Government's promotion of their inner-cities policies is seen not as an alternative to growth in the south-east, but as an objective that needs to be pursued on its own merits. In our view, investment in places such as Berkshire is a separate strand of economic activity and provides a stimulus to the national economy that benefits the whole country, including the inner cities.

There can be no doubting the Government's determination to revitalise the inner cities. Since 1979 more than £3·7 billion has been committed to that work through my Department's urban group programmes alone. A comprehensive range of initiatives has been developed. We shall continue to build and improve upon those. In particular, we are making sure that the work of different Government Departments is co-ordinated and targeted effectively both at national level and, through the city action team, at local level. The Prime Minister has recently appointed my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to advise her on the co-ordination of action and its presentation.

However, the potential for development in the inner cities, as well as through the creation of simplified planning zones and through the use of urban land and the re-use of derelict land, will not meet all the housing and other development needs of the existing population of counties in the south-east. My hon. Friends and hon. Members will know that new, 1985-based sub-national population projections, published in an Office of Population Censuses and Surveys monitor on 19 January this year, show that there is continuing growth of population in the south-east. On the basis of those projections, the population in the south-east is now expected to be nearly 500,000 more than the 1983-based projections suggested. It is important to note that the major component of that continuing population increase comes from natural change rather than migration into the region. That reinforces the concern felt by the panel about the adequacy of the county council's proposed housing provision in the 1990s.

When we last debated the issue of development in Berkshire, in July 1987, I said that the way to resolve the planning problems in Berkshire was to complete the revision of the structure plan. The proposed modifications are a major step in that process. They reflect the panel's careful assessment that, while building rates should come down, more housing is needed than the county council was prepared to allow, and that the extra development can be accommodated in the county without serious problems. I reject entirely the view that the Government have abandoned their concern for the countryside. It has to be remembered that in Berkshire areas of outstanding natural beauty or of green belt account for almost 60 per cent. of the land area of the county, and I stress again that those areas are not at risk from the proposed modifications.

The planning geography of Berkshire, therefore, will lead future growth to be concentrated in those areas that are not specially protected, provided those areas can accommodate development without, as the panel put it, breaching fundamental planning constraints. I stress that the proposed modifications do not remove any of the county council's policies for the protection of the environment. Landscape and amenity considerations will remain an important factor in determining planning applications.

Now we must wait to receive the comments on the proposed modifications. I have noted all the points made tonight by my hon. Friends, and all those points and all representations we receive will be very carefully considered.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 12 February 1988

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Malicious Communications Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.36 am

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill stems from the 1985 Law Commission report on poison-pen letters and its purpose is to protect individuals from great distress and anxiety. It would make it an offence in England and Wales to deliver or send a letter which the sender knows or believes to be false. The Bill pertains specifically to material where the intent of the sender is to cause the recipient distress or agony. At the request of the Minister of State, Norther Ireland Office, the Bill also contains provision for matters relating to Northern Ireland to be dealt with by Order in Council.

I propose that it would be a definable offence to send a letter or an article of a grossly offensive nature or containing an indecent message or any material carrying an unjustifiable threat. I propose that it should be an offence to send a letter carrying false information or any information believed by the sender to be false. An article of an indecent nature that is sent should also be considered a definable offence, and that includes delivering or causing any such material to be sent or delivered. That must stop.

At some time every hon. Member will, either at his advice surgery or by letter, have been requested by a constituent for help as a result of foul, offensive hate mail. What advice can we offer? Nothing except sympathetic understanding. Indeed, hon. Members are themselves recipients of such muck. I have an example in my hand that is so obscene that even parliamentary privilege would not persuade me to read it out to hon. Members. We accept such letters as part and parcel of our job, but, nevertheless, many innocent people and their families have had their lives completely ruined by such mail and have had no redress. In a civilised society that cannot be tolerated.

I felt it right and opportune to use my private parliamentary time to introduce the Malicious Communications Bill, which will fill a significant gap in our legislation. Under the existing law, malicious communications are not a punishable criminal offence, but they must become so.

According to the present law, poison-pen letters can be dealt with only by means of criminal libel, which only prohibits the publication of material that exposes the victim to contempt, hatred or ridicule. It does not apply when the communication is a false death notice or an article that contains indecent suggestions or threats. The Bill would correct that and make those offences accountable in law. It is already an offence to send indecent or obscene material through the post, but that applies only to articles sent by post and ignores all other forms of delivery. It is also an offence under the Telecommunications Act 1984 to send an indecent or offensive message by telephone.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): Is there not also another defect in the law of criminal libel? The offensive item must be published, unless it is deemed likely to cause a breach of the peace when received by the recipient. Is that not a serious flaw in the law of criminal libel, and the reason why many of us welcome this measure?

Mr. Stewart: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend and I am grateful for his support.

The Bill provides that the sending of a malicious communication would be triable only by a magistrates' court, with a maximum penalty of £400. The courts would also be responsible for deciding whether the article or letter was grossly offensive or indecent.

The Bill also provides for certain explainable exemptions from its requirements. It would exempt those who believe that by delivering a message they are employing the only means of securing repayment of an overdue debt. That cannot be considered a threat, so hon. Members can still expect those regular letters from the bank manager and their irate constituents. The Bill provides a defence for the sender of a letter who believes that the threat is warranted.

My Bill also ensures that an honest error will not be penalised. It catches only the knowing accomplice who mails or delivers a communication. If a friend delivered such a letter, unaware of its contents, he would not be penalised, because he would not have the required intent to cause distress or agony. The Bill specifically requires that the defendant must prove that he had reasonable grounds for making such an accusation. My Bill addresses itself to a specific mental state of intention to inflict pain or suffering on unsuspecting individuals. Morally blameless behaviour will not be penalised.

There is no reasonable excuse for sending hate mail with the purpose of causing the recipient any form of anxiety or distress. Hate mail has been the cause of much distress over the years. Victims of it have included various public persons and, more recently, families of non-striking miners during the 1984 industrial dispute. It has also been a common weapon used against our ethnic minorities, who have suffered the indignity of receiving grossly offensive articles, such as excrement, through the letter box, with the explicit intention of causing distress and anxiety. Our new citizens find it difficult enough coping with the cultural changes without this sort of harassment, and I am delighted that my Bill will give them the added protection that they deserve.

Many people ask how widespread this problem is. There are no specific figures, because it is not a criminal offence, so there is only a limited incentive for victims to report hate mail, but the Law Commission concluded that there was sufficient evidence that the sending of poison pen letters was a common occurrence and required special measures to deal with it.

It might be interesting to compare the prosecution figures for all offences under the Telecommunications Act

[Mr. Stewart]

1984. In 1984, there 486; in 1985, 512; and in 1986, 460. I believe that the problem of hate mail is far wider than those figures suggest. The offence is not difficult to prove——

Mr. Greg Knight: Will my hon. Friend underline to the House that the offence under the Post Office Act 1953 covers only indecent or obscene material, and not threatening letters? That is important.

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is again correct. I am sure that when the Bill is in Committee that point will be examined.

In order to protect unsuspecting people from malicious communications offenders must be made criminally accountable and subject to punishment under the law. The gap in the law must be closed. My Bill would set a standard of limitations on what is legitimate. In short, it is a wonderful piece of legislation which speaks for itself.

9.45 am

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) on having had the good fortune to appear at No. 6 in the private Members' ballot. Throughout the last Parliament, and so far in this one, I have never appeared in the top 20, so I envy him his luck. I think that he used his good fortune well by introducing this excellent measure.

Some people regard the subject of poison-pen letters as a bit of fun. I always remember teasing a former girlfriend that if she ever sent me one of her recipes through the post she would probably be arrested for sending poison-pen letters.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): That is why she is an ex-girlfriend.

Mr. Knight: It is certainly one of the reasons.

I well remember the much-loved British comedian, Tony Hancock, who is sadly no longer with us, devoting one of his half-hour programmes to the subject of poison-pen letters. Although we can at times see the funny side of this subject, it is a serious matter that can cause immense distress. Its most common form is the letter, but I am pleased that the Bill is widely drawn and will cover other forms of malicious communication, such as tape recordings, video recordings and other forms of abuse.

I well remember, when I practised as a solicitor, being informed by a colleague of a case that he had handled in which a landowner was in dispute with a farmer over a strip of land. The farmer had erected a fence on my friend's client's land and the client had, quite properly, written to the farmer politely pointing out that the fence was on his —the client's— property and asking him to remove it. He received an objectionable letter in reply, along the lines: "Please note what I think of your allegations concerning my fence by referring to the enclosure." In the envelope was a huge amount of excreta. That caused the client extreme distress, and if I read my hon. Friend's Bill correctly, communications such as that will be caught by it.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): My hon. Friend spoke of video recordings. Is he aware that section 11 of the Post Office Act 1953 would catch video material sent through the post if it was judged by the courts to be indecent or obscene, although it would not catch other video material? My hon. Friend is right to say that an abusive message sent through the mail should be caught.

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend is right. A video recording pushed through someone's letter box, and not sent by post, would not be caught by the Post Office Act 1953.

Mr. John Patten: No, but it would be caught by the Bill because it provides for different modes of delivery, including delivery through the post and hand delivery.

Mr. Knight: That is exactly right, and that is why I said at the start of my speech that I was delighted to welcome the Bill because it closes a number of loopholes in our existing law.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood said that he had received threatening and abusive letters. I think that at some time or other most hon. Members have received such correspondence. When I looked through some of my files, I noted that just before Christmas I received such a letter from a constituent who had become quite worked up about the community charge. In the letter he made his points about the community charge and then made some rather unpleasant references to me because he said that he thought I would support the Government on the issue. When I found the letter again this morning, I wondered whether it would come within the scope of the Bill. On reading it again, however, I decided that the letter was obviously sent by an eccentric who was a member of a diminishing band of Socialists in the east midlands. That being so, I decided to leave matters as they were.

Mr. John Patten: Socialists are becoming a protected species.

Mr. Knight: They will soon become a protected species, especially in Derby, because Socialism there appears to be dwindling.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend has seen fit to include in clause 1(2) a provision for a defence in certain circumstances. We must remember that while we wish to prevent unnecessary distress, we live in a free society where free speech, vigorous debate and the strong expression of opinion should not be discouraged.

Last night I watched "Newsnight" as I was reading the Bill. Clause 1 makes it quite clear that, should the Bill become law, it will be an offence to send false information for the purpose of causing anxiety. When I had reached that part of the Bill, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) appeared on the television screen and accused the Government of manipulating the law. I recalled the comments of the right hon. Gentleman during the general election when he said that Britain was in the throes of an economic crisis and I began to think about what would happen if someone received a press release from the right hon. Gentleman referring to the manipulation of the law by the Government — the right hon. Gentleman implied that freedom was under threat—or received one of his earlier press releases about the country being in an economic crisis. Such communications would cause anxiety and distress, and I began to wonder whether extravagant speeches of the kind made by the right hon. Gentleman might fall within the scope of the Bill.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): Does my hon. Friend agree that if a future Labour Government — heaven forbid — threatened to call in the IMF that would be caught by the Bill?

Mr. Knight: If they sent letters or press releases about that, it would cause the utmost distress and anxiety. If there were a Labour Government they would need to call in the IMF, and therefore any information about that would not be a false communication.

Mr. Corbett: My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) never has and never will make a speech that causes anxiety or distress. He will continue to do as he has done in the past and point out the follies of the Government's economic policies.

Mr. Knight: The hon. Gentleman ought to travel the country a little more, because in the parts to which I have been the speeches by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook have caused anxiety and distress. Luckily, I or one of my colleagues have arrived on the scene soon afterwards and allayed the distress. I am concerned that hon. Members such as the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook may fall foul of the provisions in the Bill, and I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood to consider that. Perhaps the answer is either for the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook to cease to circulate his speeches or to be a little more careful in future about what he says.

We must pose the question: is there a need for the Bill? I believe that we could do with less, not more, Government, and that when legislation is proposed it needs continuing justification. I have considered the existing law and see a need for the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood spoke about the law of criminal libel. The difficulty about criminal libel is that it is not defined by statute. Roughly, criminal libel is the publication of defamatory matter which is not trivial and which is in permanent form. It is a defence to argue that the published material is true and that publication was for the public benefit. However, there must always be publication unless it can be argued that the material was so offensive that it was likely to cause a breach of the peace when it was received. That means that the recipient was likely to go berserk or something like that.

That is a serious defect in the law of criminal libel because, as is often the case with the poison-pen letter, there is no publication. It is sent to the person for whom it is intended, who reads it and is shocked or distressed, but does not show it to someone else. Therefore, in law there is no publication to a third party.

In matters of this nature the law of criminal libel does not help us very much, and no doubt that is why prosecutions for offences of criminal libel are rare. A poison-pen letter may not be defamatory. If it is sent for the purpose of causing distress, it does not have to be defamatory to the person who receives it. It could say, "Your wife, who was on holiday in Skegness, is dead." The allegation could be untrue but, of course, a letter in such terms would not be defamatory.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood and the Minister spoke about the Post Office Act 1953. Under section 11 of that Act it is an offence to send indecent or obscene material through the post. As I said to my hon. Friend the Minister, that applies only if the material is sent through the post and would not cover the case of someone delivering obscene material through the letter box or getting a third party to deliver it in that way. In addition, it affects only indecent or obscene material and not material that can be highly defamatory and upsetting without being obscene.

The law does not end there, because there is also the law of blackmail. In essence, blackmail is committed when someone makes an unwarranted demand with menaces with a view to gain for himself or with intent to cause loss to another. For example, "Give me £1,000 or I shall shoot you," would be a good example. Poison-pen letters may not have all those ingredients. Someone may be seeking to upset or to cause distress, but not necessarily to seek gain for himself. Therefore, the law of blackmail does not help us in this area because it is not broad enough to catch many poison-pen letters.

While I was listening to the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook on television I was also studying the law and was surprised to note that our existing law is not broad enough to catch a written threat to injure. Although it is currently a criminal offence to threaten to kill someone, it is not an offence to threaten to injure him. Hon. Members may say that our law contains other provisions that could be brought into play; for example, a binding over. I do not think, however, that a binding over is sufficient in such cases. For a start, the courts can bind over someone who has not committed a criminal offence, and I do not consider it an appropriate way of dealing with people who send poison-pen letters.

Let me ask my hon. Friend a question. I appreciate that if a person is charged with and convicted of sending a poison pen letter the Bill provides for the courts to impose a fine. However, on examining the case, the magistrates may well decide that the sender needs some form of medical treatment. They may take the view that he is a little unbalanced or agitated and needs the help of the probation service. If my hon. Friend's Bill becomes law, will the courts have the power to deal with an offender in that way? I hope that they will.

My hon. Friend asked whether there were enough offences of sending poison-pen letters to justify new legislation. I think that we can answer his question in the affirmative. He has identified a serious gap in the law, and it must be right for us to close it by passing the Bill today.

I must admit that when I first read the Bill I wondered whether it was necessary to include clause 1(2), which deals with the raising of a defence. I wondered whether we should create an absolute offence. I believe, however, that my hon. Friend was right to include the provision.

I well remember the comedian Tony Hancock being interviewed about his half-hour programme on poison-pen letters. He admitted that he liked sending out threatening letters at the weekend. When asked to explain what he meant, he said that he was not talking about gratuitously offensive letters, but, if someone owed him money, he liked to send a letter on Friday. When asked why, he explained that the debtor would receive the letter on Saturday and would not be able to obtain legal advice until Monday. During the weekend, if the debtor worried about it, he might well pay up.

I feel that there is a legitimate need to allow that sort of letter to be sent, when there is a genuine debt. When I used to practise as a solicitor in the east midlands, probably 90 per cent. of the post that I sent out on behalf of clients were letters in the threatening category, although I hope that they were always couched in the proper

[Mr. Knight]

language. There is a problem when people are slow in paying their debts and think that they can get away with not settling their accounts. Often, a solicitor's letter does the trick. Most letters sent by solicitors contain a threat that unless the amount is paid within seven days of receipt the solicitors will have no option but to institute court proceedings on behalf of their client, without further notice. In most cases, that is effective.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend has appreciated that, in normal business practice, there is a place for that sort of letter. If a debt is owing and the debtor has failed to pay, it is of course right and proper that the person to whom the money is owed, or his agent, is able to send a letter in those terms.

I see a possible loophole, which my hon. Friend may wish to consider closing in Committee. Let me give an example. Let us say that Mr. A wants to cause distress to Mr. B, and they both reside in England. Mr. A considers sending a poison pen letter to Mr B. But, as Mr. A reads *Hansard* and is aware of my hon. Friend's measure—I assume that this takes place after it has passed into law—he also decides that he does not wish to be brought before the courts for sending such a letter. Accordingly, he waits until the summer, when he is due to take his annual holiday in Spain. He then takes with him the most obscene, obnoxious and threatening letter that he can think of, running to, say, half a dozen pages. He posts the letter from Lloret de Mar, on the Costa Brava, to Mr. B in England. He then returns home.

As I understand the position under the Bill, although A and B reside in England and are normally covered by English law, if the letter is posted abroad, A will not have committed an offence. If I am right in that assumption, I ask my hon. Friend to give the House an undertaking that he will consider this when the Bill is in Committee.

In conclusion, let me say that I feel that my hon. Friend has done a service, not only to the House, but to the unfortunate recipients of letters of this sort. I am glad that he has couched his Bill in wide but moderate terms, and that the test is to be objective. One of my fears when I first heard of my hon. Friend's intentions, but before the Bill was published, was that the test might be subjective. We can all imagine the cases of which I am thinking. For instance, let us suppose that someone sent a video to Mrs. Mary Whitehouse—a video which the courts would not regard as obscene, but which upset Mrs. Whitehouse so much that she called for a prosecution. I am delighted that my hon. Friend has resisted going as far as that, and that in all cases the test will be objective. That is a wise move. Indeed, I can sum up the Bill by saying that it is drawn in wise language. It is firm, but it is nevertheless well drafted, and I commend it to the House.

10.7 am

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): I, too, welcome the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) is to be congratulated on using his good fortune to bring it before the House. As has been said, it is brief and clear, and it closes a small but very nasty loophole which causes considerable grief and distress.

Anonymous messages are not always bad. Sitting here this morning, I have been thinking about some of the better kinds of anonymous message. Nevertheless, they are not always good either. We are reminded of the recent preface to Crockford's Directory, which caused such problems, and eventually grief, to so many people.

Some of the finest poetry in our land has at the end the magic little word "Anon", and, with St. Valentine's day approaching, we must think how sad it would be if people were not allowed to send those loving, innocuous and good-fun cards on that day. The essential point is how anonymity is used rather than anonymity itself.

I think that many people will be suprised to learn that this matter is not already covered by law. We all know that obscene phone calls are covered, but poison pen letters are not. Indeed, offensive material generally is not covered. I believe that in many ways poison pen letters are worse than obscene phone calls. Obviously obscene phone calls are shocking when they happen. Clearly when someone puts the phone down he or she cannot forget about the call. However, if someone does not have the courage or initiative immediately to tear up a poison pen letter, or burn it, the letter may remain in a drawer; it may be pulled out and re-read and the recipient may wonder whether there is any truth in it. It gnaws at the recipient and causes far more damage than an obscene phone call.

It is possible today for someone to cause offensive material to be sent to people. Many firms will send all kinds of material — some of which may be quite respectful — that may be distasteful or offensive depending on someone's taste. Often one need only fill in a form in a newspaper with the name of the person to whom the material should be sent. Sometimes even quite mild material sent to extremely sensitive people can cause the most tremendous distress. I am pleased that such action will be caught within the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood said that there is no evidence of the scale of the problem. However, I have examined recent reports from professional psychiatrists and people who deal with such cases. They have estimated that their number has risen by about 200 per cent. in recent years.

I believe that, in making the sending of poison pen letters an offence, it is important that we should alter the way in which people regard this matter. Making such actions an offence will punish, and I hope deter, the person responsible. It will also encourage the person who suffers to pursue the perpetrator of the offence. If someone receives such material, he or she will take some kind of action—consult friends or take legal advice. The advice will be that there is little that can be done to punish the miscreant. When the recipient realises that little interest is being taken in the problem, he or she will not pursue or report the matter.

The Bill will punish and deter and will also allow us to understand how often these cases occur. We should be provided with accurate figures. It is crucial that we know what is happening, because I suspect that it is happening more often than we believe.

Clearly the sending of poison pen letters can affect anyone. My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood has already referred to the effect on ethnic minorities. I agree with my hon. Friend that those sections of our population often have difficulty settling in. The kind of treatment that reportedly they have received obviously makes life more difficult for them. No one is more aware of how the miners suffered during the miners' strike than my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood. The nasty aspect about what happened is that it was not the miner who was tackled. My

hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood is more aware than I just how rugged, tough and able are our miners. They can stand up for themselves. However, the evil people directed their attentions at the miners' families and children. They focused on the vulnerable. That was a loathsome tactic to adopt and it shows the size of the people concerned.

However, it is not simply the vulnerable in society who may be attacked. Famous people have also been attacked. Recently Julia Somerville, the well-known newscaster, received the most dreadful threats. I understand that a poster was found at ITN featuring a photograph of her with the eyes gouged out. Can we imagine the effect that that must have on someone in the public eye? I understand that Anthony Hopkins, the actor has received poison-pen letters for months. He has received death threats and threats of arson attacks. He has had to continue his career in public life with those threats hanging over his head.

People who send poison-pen letters also create an effect in the most tragic circumstances. Hon. Members may recall the Penlee lifeboat disaster in 1982 when eight men died in the most tragic circumstances. They may also recall that five of the widows received anonymous letters suggesting that they might be happy that their husbands had died because of the money that they received. Can we imagine the anguish that that must have caused? If it is possible, I came across an even worse case than that. I read a report of a Cornishman who was forced to exhume his 87-year-old mother because of the number of poison-pen letters that he had received suggesting that he had been responsible for her death.

I ask hon. Members to contemplate the effect that such letters must have on the recipients. The effects do not last for a day or a week; they last for the rest of the recipient's life. The recipients are permanently scarred with a feeling of guilt. No matter what has happened, they are left with the feeling that there may be some truth in them and that in some way they may be responsible. Those examples serve to show just how essential is the Bill.

It is important for us to remember that these evil and cowardly acts have a terrible effect out of all proportion to the effort needed by the perpetrator or, until now, the punishment that he or she will receive if caught. That is why I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood has introduced this Bill. I congratulate him on the sensible use that he has made of his fortune in coming sixth in the ballot. Neither my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) nor I have been lucky enough to come in the top 20. However, I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood has succeeded in the ballot and has used his opportunity to introduce this Bill. I sincerely hope that the Bill receives a fair wind and becomes law as soon as possible.

10.16 am

Mr. Chris Butler (Warrington, South): Hate mail is a reflection of the seamier and viler face of human nature. It affects many ordinary people. It also affects many prominent people who appear on our television screens. I can attest from my time dealing with much of the correspondence in No. 10 Downing street that Prime Ministers receive much hate mail, or rather, the poor Garden room girls receive that mail and are affected by it.

I do not know what possessed an American lady to send her late husband's ashes to President Reagan. When the correspondence unit in the White House examined the offending article one hot, sweltering Washington afternoon, a high-powered fan took up the ashes and dispersed them around the room. The poor lady never received her husband back.

All hon. Members will have received letters from crackpots like that. I hope that hon. Members will have filed them deeply and in an appropriate quarter. All hon. Members will have received letters from constituents expressed in blunt and hard-edged terms. I understand that hon. Members are supremely sensitive souls and will suffer an element of distress when they receive such letters, especially if there is an implied threat that the vote of that constituent will be placed elsewhere.

Of course, it would be very bad politics to arraign and fine one's constituents. However, it would be bad law if hon. Members were enabled to do that. I am glad that it will be up to the courts, and not the recipients, to determine whether such letters are grossly offensive or indecent. I hope that the courts will draw a very sensible line and exclude letters or communications that are suffused with frankness or fair comment. The old Latin tag, "de gustibus non est disputandum," should be remembered: in other words, one should not argue about taste. Unfortunately, the courts will have this difficult problem, and I hope that they will fulfil their role properly and sensitively. It is right that they should do so because many people are over-sensitive and take offence when no offence is implied. It will be unhelpful if the courts are over-loaded with trivia or with imagined offences of imagined threats.

I welcome the Bill because it will root out one element of maliciousness that affects our present-day society. The links between us all, for whatever reason, seem to have lessened over the years. People have less respect for one another and for other people's rights and feelings. If the Bill is enacted, it will combat one manifestation of this maliciousness, but it will highlight another which remains — the maliciousness and indecency of much of our gutter press. The freedom of the press carries a responsibility with it.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): The Right of Privacy Bill is listed on today's Order Paper. I have introduced that Bill to deal with the way in which the freedom of the press has been subverted in some quarters to destroy individual freedom. Does my hon. Friend agree that the freedom of the press is precisely to protect individual freedom, but that it is frequently used nowadays to produce the contrary result?

Mr. Butler: My hon. Friend's contribution adds to the debate. I am sorry that his Bill is No. 13 on the Order Paper and that, sadly, it may not be reached today. The House and the country would appreciate a discussion of that Bill. I hope that he will bring it forward again at a later date.

The thrust of the Malicious Communications Bill is excellent, but the drafting will need careful scrutiny and tightening up. For example, in clause 1(2), a person may not be guilty if he uses a threat to reinforce his demand and believes that he has done so with reasonable grounds. I have much experience of people with bees in their bonnets. They always genuinely believe that they have reasonable grounds for their threats and demands. If such people are to be convicted, there is a presupposition of objectivity on their part, when in fact it is the lack of objectivity on their part that has led them to commit the offence.

[Mr. Butler]

That does not detract from the need for the Bill. If, because of the nature of this place and its processes, my hon. Friend's Bill is delayed, perhaps its provisions could be incorporated in the Criminal Justice Bill, on the Standing Committee of which I have the honour to serve.

Mr. Greg Knight: I wish to take further my hon. Friend's point about subsection (2). I hope that he is not suggesting that that provision should be withdrawn from the Bill. Let us say, for example, that a debt is owed. The date by which the debt should be paid passes by, so a letter is sent to the debtor threatening court action unless the money is paid. However, let us suppose that, at the same time as the letter is posted, the debtor posts the money back to the sender of the letter, the person to whom he owes the debt. In that case, when the letter arrives, it is clearly a threat made after the money has been paid, but written when the person thought that he had reasonable grounds for sending it. Surely, if that provision were withdrawn from the Bill, that person might be in difficulty.

Mr. Butler: I am seeking to establish an objective rather than a subjective test of what is reasonable. That is a matter for the Standing Committee.

Mr. John Patten: I welcome the presence of my hon. Friends the Members for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) and for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) on the Standing Committee of the Criminal Justice Bill. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South accept that, given that the measure started as a modest little Bill and has now grown to 158 clauses, the Government are unlikely to welcome any additional clauses being tacked on at this stage? As the Minister in charge of the Bill, I am bound to say that an extra one or two clauses may be the straw that breaks the junior ministerial back. Does he agree that, with the all-party support that I hope the Bill will attract, it should make rapid progress towards enactment in the normal way?

Mr. Butler: I accept my hon. Friend's strictures. Like him, I have no desire to be stuck in Committee during late nights and early mornings for ever and a day.

Mr. Patten: And listening to me for hours and hours.

Mr. Butler: I am sure that I shall enjoy the many discourses of my hon. Friend. However, the Bill is important, and if, because of the processes of this place, it is thwarted, it could easily be tacked on to the Criminal Justice Bill. That is a long Bill, but I suspect that even my hon. Friend will add a few extra clauses. An extra few per cent. added to that Bill would be no great detriment to our proceedings in Committee. I hope that the bill will be passed today, and, if not, that it will be tacked on to the Criminal Justice Bill.

10.26 am

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): As my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) said in his excellent speech, the incidence of poison-pen letters is sadly on the increase on a very sharp curve. He mentioned the figure of 200 per cent. over the past few years. That figure is the reason why my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) has introduced the Bill and I congratulate him on doing so. It is clear that there is a pressing need for the Bill, and that is shown by the fact that it has all-party support.

I should like to start by defining the word "threat". The House may feel that that word will not admit of much definition, but it does. My dictionary defines it under three sections. The first states that it is

"An expression of an intention to inflict pain, injury, evil, or punishment on a person or thing."

The second definition states that it is

"An indication of the impending arrival or occurrence of something harmful or undesirable."

The third definition states that it is

"A person, thing or ideas regarded as a possible danger; a menace."

Many unpleasant things are included in the word threat. There are two main types of malicious communication, known and unknown. As hon. Members have said, we receive malicious and unpleasant communications. I do not mind that, provided that I know who sent them. We are fair game in this place. People can write us hard and unpleasant letters and, provided that they are not gratuitously unpleasant, we can handle them.

I recently received a letter from a constituent who wrote to me at great length. He had several complaints. As is my wont, I took them up with the various authorities. In response to that one letter I had to send out three or four letters to different authorities, councils and groups. As is also my wont, I sent my constituent a letter telling him what I had done and that, when I had received responses, I would contact him again. I then received another letter from him saying how remarkably stupid it was of me to have done all that. He said that if he had wanted to write to those various groups he would have asked me to do so, or he would have written to them directly. He ended his letter by saying "Your constituents must think that you are the most gullible Member of Parliament."

That was within the first fortnight of my being elected, so I wrote him a very short, sharp letter saying, "I have been doing my best to help you, you wretched man, and if that is your attitude, I will have nothing more to do with it."

Mr. Corbett: That reminds me of the story about the late Rab Butler, who, on receipt of similar letters, used to answer by saying, "Thank you for your letter of such and such a date. I have wasted little time in reading it."

Mr. Summerson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. We certainly have a great deal to learn in this place, and that is just another item of knowledge to be added to the store.

Having dealt with the constituent in that way, I retired to the Tea Room, where I recounted the tale with great glee. My more experienced colleagues shook their heads and told me that I had been "courageous". Anyone who watches the well-known programme, "Yes, Prime Minister" knows perfectly well what that word means, and I quaked in my shoes for several days afterwards. However, I am happy to tell the House that that man has not bothered me again.

As I have said, when one knows who has written that sort of communication, one can deal with it. The difficulty arises with anonymous communications of different types. My hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central mentioned the well-known television news presenter who was sent a poster of herself with the eyes gouged out. That is peculiarly unpleasant, and I am sorry to say that that sort of thing is not unknown among famous people. I understand that when Shirley Williams was a Member of the House she was sent a packet containing 30 pieces of

silver. — *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) thinks that that is all right. Had that former Member of the House been of a capitalist disposition, she would have welcomed the arrival of that packet. However, we all know that the fundamental message behind that is thoroughly unpleasant.

My hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central also mentioned the Penlee lifeboat disaster. The widows of those who died so tragically received poison-pen letters. I am sorry to say that that sort of event is not confined to major disasters such as that. As I understand it, such events occur after any sort of disaster and those suffering deeply tend to receive that sort of letter. It astonishes me that there are people in this country with warped minds who can take advantage of that sort of tragedy and add to the suffering.

I am a little worried about definition and how the Bill will be interpreted. For example, if I receive a letter saying that the branch of the beech tree overhanging my house is about to fall off, is that a malicious communication, a statement of fact or something else? We all know, following the October storm, that branches on beech trees have a habit of falling off in high winds. Indeed, in the days when the countryside was thickly populated with elms they were notorious for dropping limbs, for no apparent reason, even on the calmest days. Would it be a threat to say that the limb on a tree is about to fall on to somebody?

Mr. Lord: As my hon. Friend knows, I have some arboricultural knowledge. He is right to say that the branches of elm trees frequently drop off in still weather. However, I am sure he will appreciate that there are few elm trees left. The beech is not peculiar in the fact that its branches fall off in high winds. I would not want people with beech trees in their gardens to feel that they should rush out and start taking surgical action. My hon. Friend might be interested to know that, legally—I am not a legal man—if one's attention has been drawn to a tree and it has been suggested that it might be dangerous, one is more liable if anything happens to the tree than one would be if its condition had not been brought to one's attention.

Mr. Summerson: I thank my hon. Friend for his helpfulness. I certainly did not want to slander beech trees. It is perfectly true that beech trees suffered badly in the drought of 1976. They are thin barked trees and many of them died in that drought and have suffered since.

Mr. Cash: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. A moment ago I tried to leave the Chamber but, unfortunately, I found that the door on the right of the Chamber was locked. I do not know the reason for that. I would be grateful if somebody would look into the matter, so that I am able to leave the Chamber to come to see you by way of the back of the Chair.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): It would be a pleasure to see the hon. Gentleman. I am sure that any problem with the door will be taken care of right away.

Mr. Summerson: That door is probably made of beech and has locked itself in protest at my remarks.

In 1986 my local council, the London borough of Waltham Forest, returned a Labour majority, and that council brought in a 62 per cent. rate increase. There was an enormous amount of popular fury at that whacking great rate increase. There were demonstrations and protests by 5,000 people at a time outside the town hall. I am sorry to say that there were manifestations of malicious communications in one form or another against certain Labour councillors. For example, the leader of the council had a fire bomb thrown at his front door. I wonder whether that could be regarded as a malicious communication. In my view, it could and should be.

There is something else that is germane to the Bill, and it is something that truly horrifies me as well as the people of Waltham Forest. A long-standing Labour councillor, Councillor Vi Smith, who has been on the council for many years and is well liked and respected throughout the borough——

Mr. Greg Knight: Does she do kissagrams?

Mr. Summerson: She is not the type of lady who would do kissagrams, I am sure of that.

That councillor received a great deal of poison-pen mail. There seemed to be a campaign against her, and it culminated in some sick people delivering a coffin to her front door. I am sure that the House would agree that that sort of thing is intolerable and thoroughly appalling. I hope that that sort of item will be caught by the Bill. It is a matter of definition. I hope that if the perpetrators of that sort of outrage were apprehended, the court would hold that they would be caught by the Bill.

Mr. Butler: That again raises the question of what is reasonable and what is not. I remember the devolution campaign in Wales. I was very much involved in that. After the referendum in Wales the Secretary of State for Wales at that time, the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), looked at the figures, which were disastrous for him. He said, "When you see an elephant on your doorstep, you realise that it is there." In the subsequent election campaign we hired an elephant. The cost of the elephant was quite enormous, so we had to divide it between three constituencies so that it would not overlap the electoral expenses. We took the elephant to the doorstep of the Secretary of State for Wales. I would not regard that as malicious. I hope that a distinction will be made between what is reasonable and what is malicious.

Mr. Summerson: It largely depends on the elephant and its disposition. It would be interesting to know whether, if it trod on the Secretary of State's toe, it could be held to have done so with malicious intent.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): My hon. Friend may recall that on at least two occasions people paid their electricity bills by writing on the side of an elephant. If they wrote a message, could that be a malicious communication?

Mr. Summerson: I should like to think that it could.

Different types of letter are sent to famous and ordinary people. Letters are sent to famous people to cut them down to size, to call them silly names or to make them feel small. Those sent to ordinary people are merely letters of denigration. They tell them how foolish they are and make suggestions such as, "You are having an affair with so and so," and are sent to try to bring people down to the sender's level.

People who send malicious communications are meddlesome and cowardly; people who send anonymous

[Mr. Summerson]

letters are cowards. Those who write some sort of threat, complaint or insult cannot bear for it to be shown in public what sort of people they are.

How should we cope with those letters? The answer is to get in touch with the police straight away. If anyone receives a malicious communication, in whatever form, he should contact the police straight away. The Bill will give the police a weapon at hand to deal with it.

I have defined the word "threat", but there are different types of threat. There is the veiled threat. Will such a threat be caught by the Bill? It would be for the court to decide whether a threat was a veiled threat and whether it was caught by the Bill. However, I wonder whether it could be defined more sharply.

There is the idle threat, with which we are all familiar. We are always idly threatening each other in this place, but I do not think that that would be, or need be, caught by the Bill.

There is a further type of threat. Again, I return to definitions in the Bill. If someone set his dog on someone, would that be caught by the Bill? Clause 1(1) refers to,

"Any person who sends to another person".

Could a person who threatens to set a dog on someone be defined as sending? Paragraph (a) of clause 1(1) begins

"A letter or other article".

Could a dog be defined as "or other article"?

Mr. Cash *rose*——

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Will my hon. Friend bear in mind that the appropriate penalty under the Bill is a maximum fine of £400? Surely the example that my hon. Friend has cited is an attempted assault, which carries a much more severe criminal penalty. Therefore, the Bill would be unlikely to be used for that purpose; there are other elements of the law that would help in that respect. I do not wish to interrupt my hon. Friend as he is going down this interesting path, but I do not think that it will affect the Bill very much.

Mr. Summerson: I was about to talk about the dog barking or growling.

Mr. Cash: My hon. Friend is developing an interesting line of argument. Unfortunately, I must disabuse him of something. It would be extremely difficult for a dog, unless is was extremely small, to be ejusdem generis as a letter. The words "or other article" must be construed, as we put it in our arcane language, ejusdem generis—of the same kind of type—as a letter. I cannot imagine a dog that would look very much like such an article. Perhaps my hon. Friend will give further examples that will help me to understand his point a little better.

Mr. Summerson: I thank my hon. Friend — my learned Friend — for that lesson. I doubt whether it would have any effect on the dog to mutter ejusdem generis at it.

Mr. Greg Knight: My hon. Friend has raised an interesting point. What will happen if the dog has a threat tattooed on its side?

Mr. Summerson: That would depend on what the dog was called. If it were called "killer" it could be construed as a threat.

Mr. Cash: A previous hon. Member, Mr. A. P. Herbert, drew the attention of the House, not to threatening dogs with unpleasant letters on them, but to something far worse — threatening letters put on the side of a cow, which came from the Inland Revenue. Would my hon. Friend regard that as a malicious communication?

Mr. Summerson: I am very fond of cows. I should not like to think of any cow as being malicious, except when it twitches its tail across one's face at 5.30 am when one is about to milk it. I remember that in that case the cow had a cheque made out on it for a certain amount of money. I would not describe that as a malicious communication.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: With regard to "a letter or other article", does my hon. Friend agree that the other article could be a parcel? It is conveyed by the Post Office, and that parcel might contain a dog. We should not rule out the dog at this stage.

Mr. Summerson: We seem to be dogged by this subject. I agree with my hon. Friend, but I believe that there are regulations about sending live animals through the post. However, if it were possible, the parcel with the dog inside could be defined as an article that conveys, not a message that is indecent or offensive, but certainly a threat.

I should like to mention one or two incidents that I have had when I have been on the road. I tend to travel to the House on a bicycle. In the course of my journey I am quite frequently carved up by motorists, sworn at and sometimes threatened. I had occasion today to swear at a motorist who nearly knocked me off my bicycle on a sharp corner. Having sworn at him, I was about to threaten him when I rembered that I was due to speak on the Malicious Communications Bill. I thought that I had better contain myself, so the Bill has done some good in that regard.

I was involved in another incident a few weeks ago, from which all hon. Members and members of the public could benefit. I was travelling along Picadilly on my bicycle when a taxi shot out in front of me without any warning — taxi drivers always shoot out without any warning—and stopped. I had to jam on my brakes to prevent myself running into it. The taxi driver pulled down his window. I opened my mouth to tell him what I thought of him and cast aspersions on the legitimacy of his ancestry, whereupon he said, "I am so sorry." That entirely took the wind out of my sails, and I commend that course of action to the House.

10.49 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) on bringing forward the Bill, and on the skill and clarity with which he presented it. In his constituency he is known as a notably effective constituency Member.

Hon. Members admire those representing all political parties who, against the odds, and against the predictions of professionals and political journalists, manage to win and to retain seats when that was thought to be impossible. My hon. Friend, by 650 votes in 1983, snatched a seat which the hard-bitten professionals at Central Office said it was impossible for him to win. To my great pleasure, he increased his majority to 4,495 in 1987. His constituency work is effective and efficient, and Ministers know that he pursues constituency cases in that way. His style, in attempting to deliver something useful to society in an effective way is characterised by his choice of subject for

his Bill. I hope that it will receive all-party support and will quickly and rapidly pass into law and effectively help those who are being persecuted by malicious communications.

However hurtful malicious communications are, no one could say that hate mail is at the gravest end of the spectrum of human behaviour. It is vicious, harmful and without excuse. As my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) said, when it is anonymous it is particularly unpleasant, yet it is not the most serious abuse. However, the Government agree that it is serious enough to be made a criminal offence.

In its admirable report on the subject in 1985 the Law Commission exposed a considerable gap in the existing law which allows those who use such repugnant means of communication to escape punishment. I fully support, and the Government fully support, my hon. Friend's attempt to plug that loophole.

It has been pointed out by my hon. Friends who have spoken that malicious communication can be sent in all sorts of ways. The criminal law already catches the sending of some kinds of material. The threat of violence is already caught by the present criminal law, but there is no prohibition whatsoever on the sending of a wide range of material with malicious purpose. My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood does not consider the existing state of affairs to be satisfactory, and I entirely agree with him.

We have all seen well-publicised examples in recent months and years of the dreadful effects on individuals and their families of malicious communications sent through the post, whether the victims are ethnic minority leaders, non-striking miners—who suffered so terribly during the recent pit strikes—or national figures in the public eye.

From time to time all Members of Parliament receive what might be termed hate mail. My favourite, from a major in Abingdon, was a letter that arrived on a day when I was in my constituency. I did not see it until my assiduous private secretary had already replied on my behalf. The letter from the nameless major was very brief. In regard to my political future, he wished that I would speedily be dismissed from my ministerial job by the Prime Minister. As for my personal future, he enjoined my private secretary to poison my tea with rat poison. My private secretary had written back saying,

"Your letter has arrived on a day when Mr. Patten is in his constituency. I know that he will be most grateful for the constructive suggestions contained in it."

There are ways of dealing with such letters, although I am bound to say that the response from the late Lord Butler which the hon. Member for Erdington drew to our attention was perhaps the best example.

The Bill sets a new boundary to the territory that is on the outer fringes of what is acceptable behaviour in contemporary society. It draws a boundary around what is acceptable behaviour and casts outside that boundary matters where criminal law should have effect. However, we must be careful not to make criminal activities which most people would regard as legitimate. None of us would want to see, for example, trivial private quarrels brought into the courts. The Law Commission recognised the pitfalls of drawing any new offence too wide. My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood has wisely based his Bill on the commission's proposals.

The essence of the behaviour that my hon. Friend seeks to outlaw, what makes it criminal rather than merely undesirable, is the malicious purpose in the mind of the perpetrator. That is where it starts. We are not after the form; we are after the perpetrator. That is the key to the Bill.

Mr. Cash: I am concerned about one point in the Bill, which I may have to refer to later. Could the words or the article concerned include newspapers and periodicals? It is just possible that, despite the point about ejusdem generis as it applies to letters and dogs, newspapers and periodicals could be caught by the Bill. That would represent a serious problem which I shall explain later, but I would be interested to have my hon. Friend's comments.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend makes an interesting suggestion. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood will have the chance to respond to it. If we make rapid progress this morning and reach my hon. Friend's Bill, which is placed 13th, he may have the opportunity to discuss the matter later. None of us would want to stand in the way of speedily reaching a discussion on that point.

Mr. Greg Knight: I know that my hon. Friend the Minister was in the House when I spoke earlier this morning. Will he answer my question about a person who sends a letter that is clearly threatening and abusive from his holiday address in Spain? Would such a person—I suspect not—be caught by the Bill?

Mr. Patten: Such a person might well be caught by other measures presently going through the House, such as the extradition procedures in the Criminal Justice Bill, which is in Committee, of which my hon. Friend is a distinguished member. If a malicious communication was made, it might be thought to be something to which extradition could apply. However, as my hon. Friend knows from his appearances in Committee, the list of extraditable offences is to be abolished and a no-list system is to apply to fairly serious crimes punishable by imprisonment for 12 months or more. My hon. Friend's example would not be caught by that measure.

It is right that the offence should be committed by the act of sending the article, not by the sender's success in causing distress. We are seeking to get at the malice involved in sending the article, not to measure the success in causing distress by the sender. That would probably be impossible. We certainly would not be justified in creating the offence if the suffering caused by such behaviour was not serious, but it is serious. All my hon. Friends who have spoken have attested to that.

It must be very hard to imagine the grief of a woman who receives a letter telling her, entirely falsely, that her husband who is on a business trip abroad and is out of contact, has been killed. Such cases have been reported and such letters have been circulated. That is the offence that the Bill seeks to catch. Equally, it is hard to imagine the fear felt by a family that receives letters making racist threats. This category of letter would be defined as entirely abhorrent. People who set out to cause such suffering need to be restrained by the criminal law. That is why I believe that the Bill presented by my hon. Friend is exactly right in trying to deal with such offences through the criminal law.

We have no evidence, nor did the Law Commission in its excellent 1985 report, that there is a major epidemic of poison-pen letters. It is difficult to determine the number of poison-pen letters sent in any one year, but there is enough evidence to show that there are a sufficient number

[Mr. Patten]

to justify introducing this offence. My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood has made it clear that he is seeking to change the law because of the behaviour involved in sending such letters and that this should be an offence, however small the number of victims in any one year. We should stamp this out as soon as possible. Although——

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 11 (Friday sittings).*

Birmingham Children's Hospital

11 am

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington) *(by private notice):* To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the decision of the Birmingham children's hospital to halt the admission of emergency cases requiring intensive care.

The Minister for Social Security and the Disabled (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I understand that the doctors at Birmingham children's hospital—I emphasise that this decision was taken by the doctors at the hospital—have decided that, because there are a number of children awaiting cardiac surgery at Birmingham children's hospital, it would not be right to delay operations by admitting further patients who need to be in intensive care beds. Therefore, they have made arrangements for a limited period that any emergency admissions requiring such intensive care facilities will go to hospitals in nearby regions or to Great Ormond Street hospital.

Mr. Corbett: How many more children have to die in Birmingham and the west midlands before the Government ensure that there is cash to give those children the life-saving operations that they need when they need them? Will the Minister confirm that more than 100 innocent children are now in that tragic queue at the hospital, the doors of which have been slammed, and some will certainly die before they are admitted? Will the Minister now undertake to contact the regional health authority to agree an immediate allocation of funds to ensure the reopening of this hospital for the benefit of the children in Birmingham and the rest of the west midlands?

Mr. Scott: It is not a matter of cash or resources. Nevertheless, discussions are taking place with the regional and the district health authorities about the level of facilities that are available for paediatric cardiac surgery in Birmingham children's hospital. Arrangements are being made in the interim to seek to place these children elsewhere.

The hon. Gentleman's rhetoric outruns the reality. In the past two months, December and January, 20 open-heart operations and a further 24 closed-heart operations have been performed in Birmingham children's hospital. Because of the build up of cases there, the doctors have decided that it would be wise, rather than have children either extending the queue at Birmingham children's hospital or having their operations delayed, to make sensible alternative arrangements with other health authorities or with Great Ormond Street hospital.

Mr. Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): Has not this measure been taken because of the shortage of skilled nurses? Are not the Government addressing this problem in their proposals for higher pay for nurses who take more skills? Are there not alternative possibilities of treatment in other hospitals, so there is no question that patients will be left without the treatment that they require?

Mr. Scott: My hon. Friend has put his finger precisely on the point. It is a matter of the shortage of skilled nurses, not cash resources at Birmingham children's hospital. As my hon. Friend says, the Government are taking steps to rectify that shortage.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Why were there no Ministers from the Department of Health and Social

Security here yesterday when my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) applied for an emergency debate to urge that Claire Wise and 100 other children desperately in need of heart surgery at this hospital be given those operations? What action is the Department taking to ensure that those operations take place? In view of the applications for emergency debates which were made yesterday and in recent weeks concerning this hospital, will the hon. Gentleman arrange for a full statement to be made on Monday by the Department so that the public of the west midlands and elsewhere may know what action is being taken to deal with the obvious crisis that grips this hospital?

Mr. Scott: I am advised that my right Friend the Minister for Health was on the Front Bench yesterday when this matter was raised. The question of a statement being made on Monday is not, of course, a matter for me, but I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has heard the hon. Gentleman's comments. I repeat that this is a perfectly sensible decision which was taken not by the administrative staff but by the doctors at the hospital to ensure that the queue at Birmingham children's hospital is not prolonged and that delays are not imposed but that the children get the treatment that they need in the hospitals in a position to provide it.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Will my hon. Friend confirm that we are operating at the frontiers of medical technology? The problem is that demand has suddenly been built up by progress in medicine and that, with the best will in the world, it is difficult to respond instantly when a large number of cases emerge because of changes in technology. Is not my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Miller) correct, in that at the heart of the problem is the need for new and additional skills for nursing staff? The review, which is now being conducted as a matter of urgency and which will soon report, will seek to address that problem. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is grossly irresponsible to distress the parents of the children involved by raising this matter repeatedly in a public arena and giving the impression that this problem can be solved by making emotive speeches in the House of Commons?

Mr. Scott: My hon. Friend has put his finger on the point. I said that the rhetoric had outrun the reality. It is clear that the Opposition are more determined to make political points than to provide care for these children. This care will be provided by the arrangements that are being made. I cannot emphasise that sufficiently.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Of course, I understand that emotion is involved in these matters and it is right that we should remain as objective as we can, but the hon. Gentleman sounds dangerously complacent. If he is saying that he relies on the regrading of the structure and payment for specialist nurses—he seems to have admitted that the shortage of specialist nurses is causing these problems for the doctors—surely he must accept that it will take months, if not years, not just for the pay review to consider the matter but for implementation of the recommendations, even if the Government decide to fund them. Meanwhile, these problems keep cropping up with monotonous regularity. This is not acceptable. What will the hon. Gentleman do about it, and how quickly?

Mr. Scott: With the greatest possible respect to the hon. Gentleman, he says that it is not acceptable, but I do not believe that it is unacceptable that the doctors in a hospital, faced with a sudden surge of demand while carrying out the number of open and closed-heart operations which I gave in my answer, should make the necessary arrangements with other hospitals and health authorities to cope with that sort of surgery. That is the short-term problem, which I believe is being handled eminently sensibly. There is a longer-term problem in the hospital—the shortage of skilled nurses. That shortage is not confined to Birmingham children's hospital. We are addressing that problem in the longer term as well.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): My hon. Friend may know, or may wish to know, that there is a hole-in-the-heart child in my constituency who is currently on the list at Birmingham children's hospital. Does he agree that it would be a good idea for the private sector to give some help to alleviate that problem as it affects those working in that hospital? Could some arrangements along those lines be worked out? Will my hon. Friend be good enough to let me have an answer, if not today then certainly during the next few days?

Mr. Scott: I shall consult my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health, but I understand that discussions are in train with the private sector to ascertain whether its facilities could be used to shorten the waiting lists at Birmingham children's hospital.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): Twice in his replies the Minister has drawn attention, correctly, to the fact that this is a decision by the hospital medical committee—all the senior doctors—and not an emotive or political decision of any kind. It is the more serious for that reason. This decision and the one which I mentioned to the Prime Minister earlier this week concerning Oldham have arisen because of the shortage of money. There are no trained nurses to staff the special beds. The new hospital in Oldham is unable to open all its wards because of the shortage of money. The Minister has taken refuge in the review of nurses' salaries and conditions but, if that review is not fully funded by the Government, the knock-on effect will be even more emergency decisions of this kind. I hope that the Minister realises that when such decisions are made by the hospital medical committee, that makes them all the more serious.

Mr. Scott: I thank the hon. Member for the reasoned way in which he put his point. I have already spoken about the longer-term problem. The Government and the Department are discussing with the region and the district, the interim problem of the level of facilities provided at the Birmingham children's hospital and whether there is any way in which it can be improved. Intensive care facilities are fully used at Birmingham children's hospital.

Mr. Corbett: They are being closed.

Mr. Scott: No, they are not being closed. All that the hospital is saying is that it will not accept referrals for cases of paediatric cardiac surgery. If there are other referrals, arrangements will be made with other hospitals in nearby regions or with the Great Ormond Street hospital to provide for those admissions to take place.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Is my hon. Friend aware that some of us who represent excellent hospitals in the regional health authority of the west midlands are getting

[Mr. Ivan Lawrence]

fed up with the strident and emotional reactions from hospitals in Birmingham? Is it not a fact that if the costs per patient in Birmingham were as low as the costs per patient in excellent hospitals like the Burton hospitals, there would be more facilities and better patient care at Birmingham? Is my hon. Friend looking into the cause of the extremely high costs in the Birmingham hospital?

Mr. Scott: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Health is concerned about a number of matters in the west midlands region and is having discussions with the region as well as the district about those matters.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Behind the sensible decision that has been taken, is there not a saga of what appears to be neglect over a number of years by the Government, who did not recognise that the advances in medicine would be creating such situations? Will the Government announce, clearly and unequivocally, that, rather than cut taxes in the Budget, they will use the money to put matters right?

Mr. Scott: The Budget is not a matter for me. My understanding is that substantial extra resources have been made available. The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) is true. Substantial advances at the frontiers of medicine, have meant that children who, some years ago, would have died can now be treated. As a result, we have a shortage of specially skilled nurses. That shortage has been recognised, and the Government are doing something about it.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): Is my hon. Friend aware that, as long ago as 1982, when I held an office in the Department, we were making arrangements, for example, for hip operations? If there was a long waiting list in one hospital, arrangements would be made to have the operations performed elsewhere. Is it not surprising that Opposition Members are putting forward these somewhat strange ideas, because they welcomed such transfers then? I wonder whether they now think that there are votes in opposing them?

Mr. Scott: The Opposition will have to answer for themselves. It seems sensible that medical staff should make arrangements for children who need this help to have it provided for them wherever it is available.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): This is an appalling announcement, yet the Opposition are accused of making political rhetoric. Have the Government no compassion? The National Health Service is not safe in Tory hands. This situation proves that more money is desperately needed in the Health Service and the Minister should pass on to the Treasury the message that it should abandon tax cuts and put money into the NHS so that children do not die—deaths for which the Government will be responsible.

Mr. Scott: As the House knows, substantial resources have been put into the NHS. I am not sure which aspect of the statement the hon. Gentleman finds appalling. Is it that arrangements have been made in neighbouring health authorities or at Great Ormond Street for these children to be admitted? I do not not believe that that is appalling.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the problem is not the amount of money but how that money is used? Will he also confirm that the review being undertaken will examine how the Health Service is managed and the competence of the Birmingham health authority?

Mr. Scott: It is clear from the debates that have taken place and the questions that have been asked that the management of the resources in the NHS is at the heart of the discussions on the future of the service. That is being considered in the review that my right hon. Friend has announced.

Malicious Communications Bill

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

11.15 am

Mr. John Patten: Although the malicious purpose of the sender is at the heart of the offence that my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood wishes to create, that cannot be all. The means used must be illegitimate, and that is an important point. Let us take the classic example of a man who seeks to revenge himself on a woman who has rejected his advances by sending her genuine evidence that her husband has been unfaithful. That is malice, and I would deplore it, but I doubt whether the act could be regarded as criminal, although it would be distasteful and morally wrong. On the other hand, if the same man attempted to revenge himself on the same unfortunate woman by sending her false evidence of her husband's alleged infidelity, that would go beyond the boundary of malicious and distasteful behaviour and into that of unacceptable behaviour. It would become an offence under the Bill, and quite rightly. The force of the criminal law should be applied.

This is a difficult boundary to set, but I think that my hon. Friend has got it right. It is one of the themes reflected in a number of excellent speeches this morning, from my hon. Friends the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight), for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord), for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) and, for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson), who introduced doggy politics splendidly into areas where I never thought they would go. The theme was reflected also in a number of notable interventions by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). In an attempt to make sure that his Bill, which is 13th in the list today, is reached, I shall continue to make as much speed as I can, within the bounds of reason. We are fortunate to have had so many excellent speeches and we look forward to the speech of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett), should he be fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood has got it right throughout the Bill. Only those who pursue the illegitimate purpose of causing distress or anxiety by illegitimate and wrongful means should be penalised. As my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North pointed out, it is important that the person who delivers a grossly offensive letter for the writer, not knowing its contents or the malice that lies behind its contents, will not be caught by the provisions of the Bill. Nor, to take an example that I used earlier, would be the friend who writes in good faith and with honest concern to tell a woman that her husband is being unfaithful if the information on which he relies turns out to be false. The criteria are intent and malice.

The bank manager has come into our debate as someone who might be accused of sending malicious communications. We wish to protect bank managers. The bank manager will not be committing an offence if he writes to someone along these lines, "Unless you take action to eliminate your overdraft, your cheques will no longer be honoured." Such a letter might not be appealing, landing on the mat in the early morning, but in the circumstances of writing the letter, the threatening bank manager himself—or herself—would not be threatened by the full force of the Bill, because he could clearly state his defence, provided in clause 1(2), which carefully protects commercial practices. Bank managers have nothing to fear from the Bill.

Mr. Corbett: Shame!

Mr. Patten: If the hon. Gentleman wants me to interpret any letters that he has recently received from a bank manager with an eye to passing them over to the relevant authorities, I would be happy to do so.

I hope that the Bill receives all-party support and goes through the House quickly, but it is important that we consider its terms with some care.

Mr. Summerson: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the purpose of the Bill is to test the resolve of whoever sends a malicious communication, rather than the effect that it has on the recipient? For example, a truly horrible letter may have not the slightest effect on the recipient, but the recipient may nevertheless feel that action should be taken. Will my hon. Friend confirm that that is possible?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is right. It does not matter whether any distress is caused. I have to tell the House that, when it was suggested by a constituent that rat poison should be put in my tea, I was not caused any distress but, if a prosecution had been pursued, malicious intent may have been accepted by the courts.

The 1985 Law Commission "Report on Poison-Pen Letters" considered these matters. It is an excellent report and we should pay tribute to the Law Commission. It was suggested that it should be an offence in England and Wales — there being an enabling clause to include Northern Ireland—to send or deliver or to cause to be sent or delivered certain types of letter or other article with the intention of causing distress or anxiety. My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow is right—it is the intention to cause distress that counts. An offence would be committed when it was the sender's purpose, or one of his purposes, to cause distress or anxiety to the recipient or another person to whom he intended the nature of the contents of the article to be communicated.

Mr. Cash: I notice that the Bill would not extend to Scotland. We all know that Scottish criminal law is different from that in England and Wales so it would be inappropriate for the Bill to apply to Scotland. May we be assured, however, that our friends in Scotland will have the benefit of similar provisions? I have no doubt that my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), who is a Scot, would be keen for that to be the case, although I have to leave that matter to the Committee.

Mr. Patten: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. I shall draw his views to the attention of our right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, so that suitable account can be taken of them.

A theme of the morning has been the type of letter or article that might be caught by the Bill. For obvious reasons, I do not intend to give any examples of grossly offensive or indecent messages, but, under clause 1(a)(i), it would be an offence to send a letter or other article which conveyed a grossly offensive or indecent message. That provision would catch those who maliciously send letters or other items. They include tape recordings, and my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North mentioned video recordings. It is important to have tests of the nature of

[Mr. Patten]

the item, and that those tests are objective. It will be for the courts, not the recipients, to determine whether the message is grossly offensive or indecent.

We must also consider unwarranted threats. The Bill is well drafted in that it would penalise menacing letters or other material which unreasonably threatened to cause the recipient or those for whom he cares financial or other non-violent harm. There would be defences, for which my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood has provided. A business man or bank manager who sent a fierce letter would not be guilty of an offence if he could show that he believed that the letter was the most effective way in which to secure repayment of an overdue debt or to stop expenditure where an overdraft was not guaranteed, and it is nothing more than standard commercial practice.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: My hon. Friend is drawing a distinction between banks and other organisations which may wish to send such a letter. Does he feel that it might be valuable to ask the joint clearing banks to consider drawing up a code so that the bank manager at Puddletown does not send a letter which is not quite in the spirit of the Bill, whereas a bank manager in High Holborn, who is closer to the centre of things, may know how to do it properly?

Mr. Patten: That is a valuable suggestion. No doubt those who advise the banks will bear my hon. Friend's suggestion in mind. Perhaps it is a matter which my colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry should consider for inclusion in their advice to banks.

The Bill hits hard at spiteful letters which untruthfully inform a wife that her husband has been killed, for example. The requirement that the sender knew or believed that the information was false ensures that honest error will not be penalised.

Mr. Greg Knight: I have a question concerning the scope of the matter covered by the Bill. My hon. Friend may wish to think about the issue before answering, and I would be happy if my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood were to reply to it in his winding-up speech. The Law Commission report said that the Bill would.

"exclude other forms of communication, such as those effected by oral means, by radio, telephone or other forms of electronic communication."

What happens if an obscene or threatening message is put on a computer floppy disc and delivered through the letterbox? Is that another form of electronic communication, or would it be covered by the Bill?

Mr. Patten: I am not torpedoed, but I am holed slightly above the waterline by my hon. Friend's question, which I wish he had not asked. I shall have to leave it to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood, whose masterly Bill this is, and who, I am sure, has such facts at his fingertips, and write to my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North in the most courteous and non-malicious terms than I can manage.

Mr. Cash: Will my hon. Friend consider whether the Bill should apply not only to material that is false, but to material that is true? The object of the Bill is to deter anxiety or distress suffered by the recipient or his family —that is one of the key questions—and the mere fact that information was false would not in itself be enough. Information that was true could cause just as much anxiety or distress and could be just as malicious and unwarrantable. That is an important point. I would add that the Law Commission referred to this point in paragraph 2.4 of its report and seemed to suggest that it did not intend the offence to be confined exclusively to defamatory material in the nature of criminal libel.

Mr. Patten: The Government could not accede in every detail to the Law Commission's recommendations. Perhaps I shall be able to deal a little later in my speech with some of the aspects on which we were forced to dissent from the Law Commission's conclusions. On my hon. Friend's first point—my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood will correct me if I am wrong, and this is an important Committee point—I understand that if the material were true it would not be caught by the Bill.

This is a very difficult issue indeed, and I entirely appreciate the reasons why my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford made that point. It is more than just a debating point, because it involves the question of malice and intent. However, unfortunately, information that is true cannot of itself be malicious by anyone's definition. The question whether the dissemination of information that was true could be construed to be malicious would, I suppose, depend upon intentions. That would take us into difficult territory in trying to produce an offence that would not be caught by the defence, "My Lord, I was only saying that which was true, and we should all seek to do that."

Let me deal with indecent or grossly offensive articles set through the post. I do not want to pursue the argument whether livestock could be used to convey a message, on which we had a full debate earlier. My hon. Friend's Bill would cover the act of putting a package containing excrement through a person's letter box with the intention of causing him distress or anxiety. The test of the nature of the article is entirely objective.

Mr. Butler: That famous organ *Private Eye* occasionally contains advertisements for artificial excrement which one can buy to send to people one does not like. Would that be caught by the Bill?

Mr. Patten: As an avid reader of the small ads in the back of *Private Eye* and *The Digger*, which my private office insists on putting in my weekend box along with other ministerial papers, I am familiar with those advertisements. I doubt whether they would be caught because, using the objective test that the Bill provides, it would be hard to prove that there was malice. The court would probably apply the test: "It was only a joke." However, such an object could be sent as part of a package containing malicious material, such as a maliciously phrased letter conveying false information. My hon. Friend will recall that I said earlier that the package did not have to be wholly malicious in its intention; just one part of it could be malicious. It would be for the courts to decide, on the merits of the evidence.

We must also consider the meaning of the word "sends", which has excited some debate, and rightly so. As I understand it, my hon. Friend's drafting of the Bill—again, he will correct me if I have misunderstood—ensures that a person, or indeed, his or her knowing accomplice, who puts his or her letter or article or package of articles through the letter box rather than posting it —one must not forget the possibility of a postman or

other person delivering the letter or other article — is caught by the offence. That is important. There will be no protection if the accomplice who delivers the material is a knowing and willing accomplice rather than an innocent postman or deliverer of special packages. For instance, the Bill captures the author of a poison-pen letter who asks an acquaintance to post it for him. The postman or friend might be entirely innocent of the true contents of the malicious or distasteful letter, in which case he would not be penalised under the Bill because he would not have the purpose to cause distress or anxiety. Am I right about that?

Mr. Andy Stewart: I confirm that my hon. Friend is, indeed, correct.

Mr. Patten: I am glad, because I did not want to misunderstand the purpose of the Bill. It is important to draw attention to a couple of the Bill's other effects. The first concerns the mode of trial and the penalty. We know that the offence of sending a malicious communication can be serious, and my hon. Friend has rightly made it an offence triable only at a magistrates court, with a maximum penalty of £400. When I deal with the Law Commission's recommendations, I shall explain why we agree with my hon. Friend rather than with the Law Commission on the level at which the offence is pitched.

Alas, we had to dissent from a number of the Law Commission's suggestions. My hon. Friend's Bill, too, dissents on some six points. Again, if I have it wrong, perhaps my hon. Friend will intervene to put me right because I do not want to misinterpret his interpretation of the Law Commission's suggestions.

First, the penalty suggested in the Bill is below that suggested by the Law Commission. Secondly, my hon. Friend feels that the burden of proof that a threat was warranted should be transferred from the prosecution to the defence. Thirdly, the Bill covers certain third party victims. Fourthly, the offence that the Bill would create refers explicitly to the causing of malicious communications to be sent or delivered, which is an improvement on the Law Commission's recommendations. Fifthly, my hon. Friend has omitted the defence of reasonable excuse. I find it hard to imagine how the defence of reasonable excuse could be run in such cases. Sixthly, my hon. Friend has added an important enabling clause allowing for the subsequent application of the Bill to Northern Ireland by the negative resolution procedure. Does my hon. Friend feel that I have correctly interpreted his intentions?

Mr. Andy Stewart: My hon. Friend has, indeed interpreted the Bill correctly.

Mr. Patten: I am pleased to have that clarification. My hon. Friend's views and those of the Government seem to coincide in many respects.

People do not like this offence, and we want to try to stamp it out, but we must get the penalty fixed at the right level. My hon. Friend suggests that it should be fixed at £400. In the trade that is a level 3 fine, and I think that it is probably about right, although we could debate it in Committee. I must explain why we cannot accede to one of the Law Commission's recommendations. We take a serious view of the matter. The Law Commission recommended that the maximum penalty for the offence should be up to level 5, which is considerably higher. It is a fine of £2,000 and/or six months' imprisonment.

Why have we decided to support my hon. Friend in his Bill, which carries the £400 fine? It is because the Law Commission's suggestions are somewhat in excess of the maximum penalty for broadly similar offences. For example, section 43(1) of the Telecommunications Act 1984 refers to "grossly offensive" or "indecent" telephone calls, and section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 refers to using

"threatening, abusive or insulting words"

likely to cause

"harassment, alarm or distress".

Both Acts carry a level 3 fine at £400. My hon. Friend is right, inasmuch as there is no chance of making a significant distinction between the proposed new offence and the present offences that I have just described. I have not picked them out of a hat. I hope the House will agree that they are relevant offences. The Public Order Act and the Telecommunications Act offences relate very much to the potential offences that we are discussing. It follows that there is no justification for a higher penalty.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: I hate to put my hon. Friend the Minister to some trouble, but little notes can come via the Box which may help him. I understand that in Scotland the offences that we are talking about are covered by the criminal law and are statutory offences. By the magic means available to my hon. Friend, the information might come about the level of fines that would be imposed in Scotland for similar offences.

Mr. Patten: That is a test of my memory. I hope that by the end of my speech—no, I think that my memory will fail me. I shall have to write to my hon. Friend.

The six months' imprisonment and/or level 5 fine proposed by the Law Commission is the highest penalty available to magistrates. It is usually reserved for quite serious offences which pose a threat to health or safety, or which are liable to cause substantial or direct damage to the property or interest of an individual or community as a whole. It can also be applied to offences when the perpetrators are likely to gain considerable financial profit from their activities.

While it undoubtedly causes distress, the proposed offence in the Bill amounts to no more than a very serious nuisance, and I do not believe that it warrants the higher penalty suggested by the Law Commission. That is why we have decided to support the penalty in my hon. Friend's Bill. In the criminal law we need to try to keep penalties for similar offences in line with each other, otherwise we get into substantial difficulties. A higher penalty would be inconsistent with those for similar offences.

I thought that it was important to draw to the attention of the House the recommendations of the Law Commission with which my hon. Friend did not seem to agree, and to seek clarification from him. I think that my analysis of his thoughts has proved to be correct. I wanted to try to explain to the House why I felt that the penalties suggested by the Law Commission were a bit on the high side. Having, I hope, satisfied the House why I feel that the offence itself will be properly punished, I should like to say that the balance of the Bill is right and its purpose is right, too. I am sure that my hon. Friend would not claim that it is a major reform of the criminal law. It is not. If the Bill is passed, it will be a small but valuable and justified addition to the criminal law. That is why the Government wholeheartedly support it.

[Mr. Patten]

The mischief that the Bill will prohibit may not be the worst mischief that people can do to each other, but it is a serious mischief. That is reflected in the maximum penalty that my hon. Friend proposes. The activity is criminal and the Bill will try to deal with it. The Bill will provide protection for those who may be the wholly innocent victims of hatred or malice, and whose lives can be blighted by fear, by unnecessary grief or simply by the appalling and undermining sense that someone, usually unknown, is dedicating his time to making their lives as miserable as possible. Such people exist. It is time we gave society protection from them.

If my hon. Friend's Bill is passed, it will be an effective measure, characteristic of my hon. Friend's political career so far, in seeking to be as effective as possible. He wants to give people who recieve such communications effective protection. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I congratulate him on introducing the Bill, on his excellent speech and on the clarity with which he put his arguments. I shall support the Bill, and I hope that the House will give it an unopposed Second Reading.

11.46 pm

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): The House will remember Tuesday's historic vote to admit, as an experiment, television cameras to the Chamber. When that motion was passed, many of us hoped that it would have a direct influence on the length of time that hon. Members felt it necessary to speak. I am setting out to demonstrate that I am the first in the learning queue.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) not just on his luck in the ballot, but on raising what may be a comparatively small but important issue. Probably those whom the Bill seeks to catch are sad and lonely people at war with themselves, often born out of frustration, despair and depression. That loneliness is at its bleakest in many of the pig sty estates in our inner cities, where those people are forced to live. They enter a cycle of despair and depression, which tempts them, and perhaps even propels them, to hit out at random from an isolated and alienated position. That is in no way, a defence for those who originate and send such hate mail, but I think that it is important for us to try to understand their motives.

I have as good reason as any other hon. Member for being in favour of the Bill. A lady came to see me at my advice bureau who had lately come out of prison after serving a sentence for a non-violent offence. Over the months, with help from various departments of Birmingham city council, she was able to pick up the pieces and reunite her family that had been split when she received a custodial sentence. Eventually she got a flat in my constituency. Hardly had she put the key in the door and got the carpets down when poison-pen letters started to arrive to remind her of her past. That was bad enough, but such was their frequency and the intensity of the hate in them that the family, once again, were forced to move to another part of the city. None of us would defend such behaviour. I felt sad for the woman and her family and, in a sense, equally sad for the person who had originated the letters.

The hon. Member for Sherwood and some of his hon. Friends have mentioned hate mail in the context of the miner's strike. I am not seeking to defend the sending of such mail, but it is important to understand that in industrial disputes, as in disputes between neighbours, passions can be aroused and excited so that people are encouraged to use that form of outlet. I do not want to be misunderstood — I am not seeking to excuse what happens—but perhaps it is partly an explanation.

I do not believe that it is right for the Bill to offer the prospect of a custodial sentence for those found guilty of the offence. I believe that it is generally accepted — I know that the Minister shares this view—that there are too many offences on the statute book for which custodial sentences have been considered to be the answer. It is time that we started to encourage the Government to develop alternatives to custodial sentences. In the case of the originators of poison-pen letters it may be that, given some of the motives that I have described, a custodial sentence would be entirely inappropriate. What is needed is the help and advice of some of the caring services and perhaps, in some cases, the offer of treatment for mental illness or disturbance.

Does the hon. Member for Sherwood believe that the Bill could be applied to graffiti? I am thinking in particular of tower blocks and the entrance halls and landings of such blocks. Indeed, any right hon. or hon. Member who has such blocks in his constituency will be aware of the problem. Regrettably, it is almost the norm that many walls of those blocks are painted with the most offensive, personally-directed statements such as, "Joe Brown beats his wife" or "Jane Smith is going about with Tommy Brown". I have known cases where such imputations are literally outside the door of the family concerned. In other cases graffiti has been written in the entrance halls, the lifts or the landings. I regard that kind of malicious communication — regrettably a modern form of communication — as being deliberately and wantonly written with the intention of causing distress, anxiety, pain and suffering.

Mr. John Patten: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need for fewer people to go to prison and, in particular, with his extremely positive remarks about graffiti. Is he aware that most of the circumstances to which he has referred would be covered by section 4 of the Public Order Act 1986?

Mr. Corbett: I am grateful to the Minister.

The Minister, in common with many other hon. Members, will be aware of the enormous amount of hurt, shame and distress that graffiti causes. Graffiti is bad enough in itself. However, I should say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that it is one of my ambitions to meet the person —it must be a man because women are too sensible to do such things—who found a way of putting paint into a can together with a propellant to make it easier for people to engage in such practices.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the uses to which such things are put, but will he bear in mind, first, that for those who are forced to engage in DIY under controlled conditions, paint spraying is a valuable thing and saves a lot of argument between husband and wife? Secondly, nowadays, properly used, paint can be applied beforehand which will make the use of graffiti much more difficult.

Mr. Corbett: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing that out. I admit that spray cans, like other advances, have a proper and—regrettably—an improper use.

Far too often in our inner and outer cities families in ethnic communities are targeted. They feel especially at risk, as the poor social and economic conditions in those areas feed and fuel racial hatred, and picking on people merely because their skins are a different colour provides an outlet for the frustrations of some who see a solution in doing so. Poison-pen letters can and do cause great harm and immense distress within families and to people living in isolation. Typically, they are single parents and pensioners who live alone in anonymous dark housing estates or urban city streets. That is why we welcome the Bill and wish it well for its Committee stage.

11.55 am

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): I want to pick up the first point made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett). I hope that the introduction of television—apart from the experiment—will be long delayed and will not change the practices of the House. We should not change our practices to suit the media.

I came here today because my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) wrote and asked me to support his Bill. I was glad to do so, although I told him I would not be able to be here the whole time. Alas, I did not hear his speech, but I shall take the precaution of obtaining two copies of *Hansard* so that I can read it on more than one occasion. Last week, I responded to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), whose Bill I came to support, but as it was No. 3 it was never reached and so could not have its Second Reading without a debate. I thought that its principles were good. I wonder whether an amalgam of her Bill and my hon. Friend's Bill could have been found.

The House may recall that the hon. Lady's Bill dealt with the right of reply to the press. Many malicious articles appear in the press and the public have no opportunity of defending themselves against them. The point about newspapers, journals and the like was raised earlier in the debate by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). Why was it not possible to find a way of bringing those two Bills together? To judge from the long title of this Bill, that would prove somewhat difficult, although opportunities might exist in another place, where they are not so bound by the niceties of long titles.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend also want to support the principles that lie at the root of my Right of Privacy Bill, which is 13th on the list today? It has the support of no fewer than 265 hon. Members from both sides of the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) is being rather naughty. I was tolerant earlier, but we only have before us the Bill that we are debating, and we must wait patiently for the hon. Gentleman's Bill.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: Anything that has the number 13 attached has my support because I was born on the 13th. Alas, I am a realist and I have not had a chance to read the edifying piece of literature produced by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford.

I have looked carefully at the Bill and have tried to see what is behind it. Having done that, I think that the word "malicious" could be construed as meaning evil. The House is very much like a British jury, because hon. Members are drawn from a wide cross-section of the community, people who inhabit the top deck of the Clapham omnibus—if there still is one. However, I doubt that we would respond to a malicious or evil letter in the same way as an ordinary citizen. For that reason, we need to err rather more on the side of severity than leniency. I shall shortly come to the points about fines made by my hon. Friend the Minister.

Chain letters are frequently circulated in Britain and seem to go through phases. Some chain letters say things such as, "If you do not send this letter to 20 other people grave consequences may follow." We might think that the grave consequence would be that by putting it in the waste paper basket it might never be recycled. In the eyes of worthy bodies such as the Friends of the Earth, that might be a grave error. However, the average citizen who is not used to that sort of threat—and it is a threat—might be quite genuinely worried. I do not know whether that sort of letter is covered by the Bill, but perhaps the Minister will tell me when he replies. I think that it would, but I should like to know if that is correct.

Mr. Summerson: Does my hon. Friend think that in certain circumstances political literature could be classed as malicious communication? For instance, if with a fiendish grin on my face I put one of my leaflets through a door that I know to be the door of a Labour candidate, knowing perfectly well that he will screw it up and hurl it across the room and probably trip over the cat in his outrage, could that be construed as falling within the terms of the Bill?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: Not having drafted the Bill, I can only say that in certain circumstances a leaflet on which there is a grinning face might be taken as an alternative front cover of *Private Eye*. I leave it to my hon. Friend to decide whether that is a malicious publication.

Mr. Greg Knight: I am sure that any literature sent by my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) could not be called offensive, although if it contained a grinning face it could be regarded as rather comic. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow made a good point and I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) to consider the mushrooming over the last 20 years of parties on the extreme Right and extreme Left. If a party such as the National Front delivered what purported to be a manifesto to the home of a coloured or Jewish person, it might be delivered with the intent of causing distress and anxiety.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: My hon. Friend is right. I have an idea, which perhaps the Minister will confirm, that that type of literature may already be covered by various Acts and, presumably, would be referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions who would take action. I see that my hon. Friend the Minister nods in the affirmative. I am glad to know that that point is covered.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) said in his intervention, some literature from political parties that are not on the extreme Right or extreme Left might well be malicious. Literature from the

[Sir Geoffrey Finsberg]

party of the red rose which says that the community charge will involve identity cards or that the Housing Bill will mean that private tenants will lose their security of tenure is malicious.

Mr. Summerson: My hon. Friend mentioned the community charge. A leaflet from my local Labour party that is circulating in my area says that all who do not put their names down on the community charge register will not be eligible to vote.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: I would regard that as my alternative to "malicious". It is evil, apart from being untrue.

We must consider what type of leaflet or other communication is involved. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford has said, we must be certain that the word "article" falls within the narrow boundaries laid down in clause 1.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood has specified a fine at level 3. My hon. Friend the Minister produced a convincing argument for introducing level 3 rather than level 5, and I think that I agree. But why should we not bring about a happy compromise — in typically British fashion — and make it level 4? I understand my hon. Friend's wish for equivalent types of offence to be covered by the same level of fine. I merely ask him to assure me that if, when his memory is miraculously restored, he finds that the level of fine for similar offences in Scotland is above level 3 he will be willing in Committee to up the level from 3 to 4.

We have been given examples of the type of article that might be put through a letter box. I know of cases in which pieces of wood infected with dry rot have been put through letter boxes, and I imagine that they would fall within the definition of a grossly offensive article. If I am wrong about that, I hope that my hon. Friend will consider amending the wording "indecent or grossly offensive". We were talking earlier about the natural processes of elephants, or of other people, being bagged up and put through letter boxes. However, considerable offence and, indeed, danger could be caused if infected wood were left lying around for a few days. The spores could get into the recipient's own wood and cause grievous damage.

I said at the outset that I was sad that it had not been possible to amalgamate the Bill with that of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley, which I supported. Indeed, who knows? When I have the pleasure of reading Bill 13 —which I certainly shall not do during this debate—it may become clear that it could have been added to this legislation. The more potions that can be mixed together, the better the result may be. Unfortunately, we have not been given the chance.

I do not know whether a letter would be caught if it contained a newspaper article that was grossly offensive, whereas the letter itself was not. I am not a lawyer, and I am reading the Bill as a layman. It refers to

"a letter or other article which conveys—
(i) a message which is indecent or grossly offensive;
(ii) a threat; or
(iii) information which is false and known . . . to be false".

Would it be possible for a newspaper cutting, accompanied by a compliments slip — which poses no threat, except to the finger if it is caught on the staple— be defined as an article; and would it be possible for a recipient who found it grossly offensive, or untrue, to claim that the item should be caught by the legislation?

Mr. Greg Knight: I do not know whether my hon. Friend has had the opportunity that I have had to read the Law Commission's report upon which the Bill is based. If he has a copy, he will discover that this matter is dealt with on page 15, paragraph 4.10. The Law Commission considered the kind of examples that my hon. Friend has given in which, for example, a letter may be sent containing some kind of excreta, or where a parcel contains no message but has contents that are clearly designed to be deeply disturbing and offensive. According to the Law Commission, those items will be covered by the Bill.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: My copy of that report has been read so often over the breakfast table that it is in no condition to carry around.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood and my hon. Friend the Minister will assure me that the examples to which I referred—which are covered in the Law Commission's report — are caught within the Bill very firmly and without any chance of equivocation. Perhaps when my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood replies he can give me that assurance. If he is not sure, perhaps he will say that he will take steps in Committee to ensure that those points, which are clearly endorsed by the Law Commission, are covered in the Bill.

I have already mentioned the distress that can be caused by chain letters. If such letters are within the scope of the Bill, much of the stress that they create will be alleviated. I believe that there must be a link in the sending of chain letters because certain types of chain letter are sent at irregular intervals. If it becomes known that people may be caught by this legislation, there may be fewer chain letters, although the Post Office may regret the loss of revenue.

I have referred to Scotland because, as I said, the information available to me is that this type of offence is already caught by Scottish law. I do not pretend to understand Scottish law, but I am told that it works very well. Are there sufficient similarities between the Scottish law and my hon. Friend's Bill to allow people who feel aggrieved or offended by receiving that type of communication to take action? If there are similarities and people will have the same redresses under this Bill as are available under Scottish law, I would be satisfied. That would also satisfy me with regard to the level of fines.

This is exactly the type of Bill that should be introduced by a private Member. It fills a gap in legislation. It is basically non-controversial and it does not try to do a job that should be done by the Government. As the Bill has cross-party support, it stands a good chance of becoming law. It is always difficult to decide what legislation to choose if one is lucky in the ballot. I believe that my hon. Friend's decision to pick up this particular ball and run with it was wise, and many people will be grateful to him when the Bill reaches the statute book.

12.14 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I wish to join other hon. Members on both sides of the House in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) on choosing this subject for his Bill. The question whether one

comes high in the ballot is of some interest to me today, and my hon. Friend has been fortunate in coming high in the ballot. He has chosen an important subject and given a fine explanation of the reasons for his choice. We look forward to hearing from him when he makes his concluding remarks.

I had the good fortune to be with my hon. Friend in the United States late last year. It is always a pleasure to be with him on any occasion. That was a particularly enjoyable time, during which we discussed many constitutional questions. The constitution of the United States provides for an approach to the subject matter of the Bill and it is about time that we had similar legislation in this country. Indeed, I would go further and say that, in many respects, I am astonished that we have not done so already.

I was delighted to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) that Scottish law deals with this issue. It is not just a lacuna, but an extraordinary omission that causing distress and anxiety of the kind that the Bill seeks to alleviate has not been made the subject of criminal law.

If we consider the long title of the Bill, we see that the key question is whether punishment should be imposed on "persons who send or deliver letters or other articles for the purpose of causing distress or anxiety."

That is the crucial point. In an intervention I asked whether the phrase "other articles" might include newspapers or periodicals. We must consider that question in Committee.

As many hon. Members know, I am concerned about the right of privacy. Many features appear in newspapers, particularly in certain quarters of the press, which are clearly unwarrantable invasions of people's privacy. Indeed, one of the greatest problems for hon. Members is that we want to protect the freedom of the press and would, therefore, be reluctant to impose any unreasonable and unnecessary restrictions upon the press. On this point, I refer again to Blackstone. Press freedom is for the protection of the individual. The question relevant to the Bill is whether press freedom can, from time to time, invade individual freedom. If it does, Parliament must step in to protect those affected.

Mr. Greg Knight: My hon. Friend has not mentioned the fact that his Bill is No. 13 on the Order Paper. He and my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg), appear to be attached to the number 13. En passant, I understand that yesterday was the 13th anniversary of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's leadership of the Conservative party. That is another No. 13 for my hon. Friends to consider. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) will not urge, either now or in Committee, that the Bill should cover the press. If he intends to take that line, I could not support that proposal.

Mr. Cash: I am delighted that my hon. Friend has raised that point, because I was about to deal with it. I am concerned that the principles which underpin the Bill and which I have in mind should not be made a criminal offence. That would be a great mistake. It was precisely that matter, which I raised with my hon. Friend the Minister regarding the definition of the words "or other articles", ejusdem generis with letters, that caused me concern.

Following the line taken by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate in amplification of my earlier points, the question whether a newspaper cutting attached to a letter that falls within the ambit of the Bill is made a criminal offence will have to be looked at carefully in Committee. In my judgment there is no distinction in principle between a newspaper cutting attached to a letter that is sent to cause "distress or anxiety" and the sending or delivering of the newspaper containing the identical information whether it is sent in the normal way through the newspaper vendor or, as so often happens today, direct from the press.

I accept that that creates a problem. However, it is our job in Committee to address ourselves to those questions. It would be a disaster for newspapers or periodicals to be found guilty of a criminal offence when, in my judgment, invasions of privacy by the press should be dealt with through a civil action as specified in article 9 of the civil code in France and the first amendment to the American constitution. I do not want to dwell on that point, because to do so would be to move down a different channel.

There is another point that causes me some concern in this otherwise excellent Bill. We all know that the Committee stage is provided for the purpose of ensuring that we have a close look at the Bill, line by line. We should consider whether the Bill should cover letters or other articles sent for the purpose of causing "distress or anxiety" but which contain true material. I began by placing special emphasis on the words, "cause distress and anxiety", because what is malicious is the fact that that communication has been provided, packaged and sent for that purpose and no other.

The fact that the information is false is, some would say, a question of criminal libel. It is defamatory. However, what difference does it make should the information prove to be true? It may be that the person sending the information has a legitimate public interest in communicating that information. However, an example has been brought to my attention of a communication that has been sent annually, over a period of time, to a certain person. It contains information, some of which may be true and some of which may be false. That raises another problem that will have to be looked at in Committee.

A communication can be of a mixed character. It may contain information both true and false. In that instance, on what does the prosecution base its case? Should it be based exclusively on that which is false, or on a mixture of the two? I strongly urge my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood to speak to his legal advisers in the run-up to the Committee stage. There are some serious problems. It is not simply a grey area. It could render the Bill extremely difficult to operate if such things are not thought through carefully before the Bill emerges from the Committee.

I should like to refer to whether it is exclusively the recipient to whom anxiety or distress must be caused or, as it says in the Bill, "to any other person". I gave an example earlier of a family to whom 45 letters had been sent, and a letter in identical terms was sent to all their friends. It is a matter of grave anxiety to the family and all their friends that that communication, which by any standards is malicious and falls within the terms of the Bill, should have been sent. It was not only the recipient who was concerned about it, but all the friends. It was a poison-pen letter aimed at causing anxiety not only to that person, but to all the other people involved—an entire network

[Mr. Cash]

of friends, relations, children, aunts and uncles. Having had this poignant matter brought to my attention, I am glad to be able to support the Bill.

Some hon. Members may recall a film about the sending of white feathers during the Boer war. I cannot remember how many feathers were involved——

Mr. Greg Knight: It was four feathers.

Mr. Cash: I have seen the film several times, and one of its essential characteristics was that those feathers were sent by cowards. Those who send malicious communications—they always do so anonymously—have that one prevailing characteristic. It is one of the worst and most pernicious examples of criminal behaviour, and it should be incorporated in an Act of Parliament. The Minister said that he thought that this matter might be regarded as being on the margin of the criminal law, or on the margin of what should be brought within the ambit of the criminal law. I am not sure that I agree with him on that matter, in what was an otherwise excellent speech. The standards of behaviour that characterise people who send malicious communications is a subject that deserves severe punishment. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate that the level of fine should be considered carefully in Committee.

I referred earlier to the application of the Bill to Scotland. There is a provision in clause 3, which says:

"This Act does not extend to Scotland or, except for section 2, to Northern Ireland."

I am not clear what that means, because normally when drafting a "short title, commencement and extent" clause we make it applicable to Northern Ireland. I suspect that the reason is that legislation in Northern Ireland is dealt with by virtue of Orders in Council, and that therefore one must take account of the difference.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): Does my hon. Friend agree that, apart from any technical considerations, the fact that the Bill states only that Northern Ireland may be covered is rather unfortunate, because of the sectarian and civil strife in Ulster, which has been going on for decades? The Bill is more applicable to Northern Ireland than perhaps to England and Wales. Although I entirely support the Bill, there is another dimension to the problem in Ulster, where there is sectarian bitterness and strife. People may wish to send such communications for reasons that would not appertain to England and Wales, and for reasons that appertain to what my hon. Friend has outlined. Will my hon. Friend comment on that point?

Mr. Cash: I entirely endorse what my hon. Friend has said so far as it applies to the immediacy of the problem in Northern Ireland. However, I would not draw a distinction between malicious communications from any part of the United Kingdom. In reality, there are probably a greater number of instances of what some people would identify as malicious communication in Northern Ireland, for the reasons that my hon. Friend mentioned.

I should like to draw attention to another unusual aspect of the Bill. I wonder whether some of the famous love letters that have been published in the past might conceivably come within the ambit of clause 1(1)(a)(i). Although it would be extremely difficult to weave one's way through that argument, perhaps it should be considered in Committee.

The object of the exercise remains to prevent distress or anxiety to the recipient or to any other person, but circumstances could arise in which a person had received a letter and the person who had sent it thought that the recipient might like to receive it and then discovered that he was at the wrong end of a criminal offence. Although that is a rather unlikely proposition, it could be looked at in Committee.

Many other aspects of the Bill are extremely interesting, in particular the fact that it is based on the Law Commission's 1985 "Report on Poison-Pen Letters." When the Law Commission produces a report on a particular matter and then appends that report to a Bill, as in this case, it is quite difficult for hon. Members to disentangle those parts of the Bill that relate to the report from those that the Government or the promoter of the Bill decided to disentangle from it. I wonder whether, my hon. Friend in drafting the Bill, no doubt with some advice, was aware of the difficulties that arise in extracting parts from a Bill that was originally drafted by the Law Commission? I hope that he will have an opportunity to talk to the Law Commission about the implications of the Bill as it is drafted. It is important to ensure that the two gell, and that in extracting principles from the body of the report one ends up with the objects that one seeks and does not become ensnared in producing a Bill that covers aspects that one had not intended to cover.

This extremely good Bill is in many ways an improvement on the Law Commission's draft Bill. It is more carefully thought through in certain respects, save only those that I have mentioned. The Law Commission's draft Bill contained vague language. Clause 1 stated:

"A person who, without reasonable excuse, sends to another any article".

This caused me some concern. Clause 1(2), of my hon. Friend's Bill, which provides a defence for a person who would otherwise be guilty, gives the person who has sent the communication the opportunity to defend himself. In putting such a provision at the beginning of a Bill one raises presumptions that must be overcome, but I believe that, in the majority of cases, the fact that it is a malicious communication will be apparent.

The next question to consider will be not whether the person had any reasonable excuse for sending the communication, but whether he can afford himself of one of the defences because there was a legitimate basis on which to send the communication. Such a defence would include the fact

"the threat was used to reinforce a demand which he believed he had reasonable grounds for making; and"—

the crucial word is "and"—

"that he believed that the use of the threat was a proper means of reinforcing the demand."

I am confident that the Committee, under the admirable guidance of my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood, will consider the grey areas which I envisage arising from that.

Mr. Greg Knight: Is not this Bill less effective than the Law Commission's draft Bill in respect of clause 1(4)? The Law Commission was of the view that the scale of fines should be level 5, which would be far more appropriate to deal with serious cases, whereas this Bill refers only to level 3, the maximum fine under which is £400, as I am sure my hon. Friend is aware.

Mr. Cash: My hon. Friend may recall that I alluded to this matter earlier. This activity is not just at the margins

of criminal law, but is at the centre of a certain type of criminal action. The Law Commission's suggestion that it should be level 5 is important. I hope that members of the Committee will seriously consider increasing the level.

The Law Commission's report deals with what was the Post Office Act 1953 and is now a provision in the Telecommunications Act 1984. Under this Act it is an offence to send by telephone an indecent or grossly offensive message for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience or anxiety. The Bill is needed because it is not an offence to send the same message by other means. I have not had an opportunity to see whether the fines in the Telecommunications Act 1984 are at level 3. If so, that may be the reason why level 3 has been chosen for this Bill, because the draftsman likes to achieve consistency.

Mr. Andy Stewart: The fines in the Telecommunications Act are at level 3.

Mr. Cash: That is an understandable reason. Last year I served on the Committee debating the Obscene Publications Bill. We had some interesting and useful discussions about the application of that provision in the Telecommunications Act 1984, what it meant and what it was designed to achieve, and what penalties should be applied. It would be a mistake for us to confine the level of the fine in the Bill to level 3 simply because that is the level in the Telecommunications Act, when there is a good case for increasing the fine under that Act. We may have been looking at this problem through the wrong end of the telescope.

Clause 1(1)(a)(i) would make it an offence, with the purpose of causing distress or anxiety, to send

"a letter or other article which conveys"

a grossly offensive or indecent message. This would catch those who sent letters or other articles maliciously, and we have dealt with whether it should include newspapers or periodicals. It also includes tape recordings, and I was interested to hear the discussion on whether it should include floppy discs. The words "or other article" will be construed as meaning more than just a letter, and I believe that the object of the exercise will be to catch communications which convey information. We need to be careful that it does not simply include information conveyed by physical means. I hope that the Committee will take an interest in the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Bill that is going through the other place. In an interesting debate, the other place tried to distinguish between reproduction of information by physical means and that falling within the category of a letter.

Mr. Janman: It has been a great delight to listen to my hon. Friend's legal brain this morning. He has gone through the Bill in great detail. I apologise for not having forewarned him of the matter that I wish to raise with him. I should be interested to hear his views on one point. It concerns the phrase "unwarranted threat". It has not escaped my notice that my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), who should be commended on bringing the Bill before the House, represents a constituency that was right in the heart of the industrial strife that occurred during the last miners' dispute. It may well be the case—he may wish to comment on it in his winding-up speech—that during that dispute there were many people who were on the receiving end of what we may well consider to be unwarranted threats from people who wanted to coerce them into joining the strike when they did not want to. It is conceivable——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Is the hon. Gentleman making an intervention, or a speech?

Mr. Janman: I am about to get to my intervention. I am sorry to have gone around the houses a bit, but the point that I would like to ask my hon. Friend is whether he considers it would be warranted or unwarranted for somebody who is trying to coerce someone else to come out on strike to send what is in effect a threatening letter, calling him a scab——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) has got the point.

Mr. Cash: I am glad to respond to that intervention, because I have miners in my constituency and I made my maiden speech on the miners' strike. I raised the issue of intimidation against my miners and others when I got on the platform in Hamley park in Stoke-on-Trent to challenge Arthur Scargill personally to lay off intimidating my miners. I was aware that a serious quantity of abusive and threatening communication, which caused my miners great distress, was taking place. Some of that communication would have been covered by the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood did much to help his miners during the strike. By following up with his Bill, he will help all miners if such circumstances recur.

Mr. Greg Knight: I notice that that last exchange woke up the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay), particularly when Mr. Scargill was mentioned.

My hon. Friend referred to my question about floppy discs. I have had an opportunity to look at the Law Commission's report, paragraph 4.8 of which leads me to think that they would be included as it says:

> "The fact that the contents and character of the message cannot be determined until the film is projected or the video tape is played back on a video cassette recorder is, in our view, no more relevant than the fact that the contents of a poison-pen letter cannot be ascertained until it is taken from the envelope in which it is sent."

That clearly covers floppy discs, which cannot be read until inserted into a computer.

Mr. Cash: I listen to my hon. Friend with great interest. There has been an enormous amount of discussion in the Copyright, Designs and Patents Bill on the distinction between forms of communication and reproduction. Whether an article is a visual image, and many other arcane definitions, which I find fairly formidable and which many people find eye-glazing and tedious, have been considered. Nevertheless, such matters must be considered. I am sure that my hon. Friend is on to an important point, because the object of the exercise is to catch the mischief.

It does not really matter what form the malicious communication takes if it causes anxiety and distress. That is the object of the exercise that we must all bear in mind. We would not want people to get round the Bill by discovering a new form of communication that it did not catch. I have the greatest confidence that, like Robin Hood, my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood will ensure that he catches his victims.

12.50 pm

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) on introducing and choosing a measure that has so little opposition. To get a measure on to the statute book is a great achievement for a private Member.

I am pleased that, once again, one of the recommendations of the Law Commission has been accepted by the Government as a worthwhile addition to the statute book. The Law Commission does a wonderful job under the chairmanship of Mr. Justice Beldam as it did under the chairmanship of his predecessors. The trouble is that if we ask the Law Commission to examine what is wrong with various parts of our law and expect it to spend a great deal of time working with skill and dedication to produce sensible solutions to the problems only to leave its suggestions to gather dust on the shelf, the intelligent and hard-working members of the Law Commission may easily become disillusioned. One of the great achievements to emerge in the legislative process in the past few years is the importance attached to the work of the Law Commission. I hope that we shall continue to find ways of putting its sensible and constructive proposals on to the statute book.

Mr. Cash: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This causes me some amusement. I sat down because I thought that my very good Friend the hon. Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) proposed to intervene and I am delighted, because it gives us the benefit of his extremely erudite thoughts on the subject. The only question I want to probe—and I do not know whether you, Sir, are in a position to answer it—is whether he intends to make what I was regarding as an increasingly long intervention, or a speech, which would prevent me from coming back on this subject.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think that my feeling was shared by the whole House. I assumed that the hon. Gentleman had finished his speech and I am afraid that we cannot go back.

Mr. Lawrence: I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). He ought to know that, however long my interventions may be, they are nothing like as long as my speeches. He should therefore, have no difficulty in distinguishing between a speech and an intervention.

This is a small but important Bill about which I have some reservations. It is a civil liberties measure. The right to privacy is a vital part of our freedom, but our freedom exists only if those who would abuse it are restrained from doing so. True liberty gives no licence to harm others, so the law must protect the freedom and privacy of decent citizens. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford would have wished to say a little more about his own proposed measure, the Right of Privacy Bill, which is rightly arousing much attention in the media and elsewhere.

As this is such a sensible and important Bill, protecting the liberty of the individual, it comes as no surprise to me that the Government support it. Happy as our society generally is, there is a dark side. There is hatred and a lack of self-control under the surface, sometimes leading to physical violence. The courts protect the individual against physical violence. Sometimes, that hatred and lack of self-control lead to mental violence, and the law has been less good at protecting the decent citizen against that.

The Telecommunications Act 1984 is one example of the way in which the law helps to protect the citizen. It goes a little way. It makes it a criminal offence to send by telephone any indecent or grossly offensive message

"for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience or . . . anxiety".

But to deliver the same message by other means than the telephone is not a criminal offence, so the Bill fills that important gap.

The civil law probably could not fill that gap. The Law Commission looked into the possibility that poison-pen letters could be dealt with better by the civil law, but concluded that it would require a statutory new tort. It also concluded that, in civil matters, the police are reluctant to become involved. Therefore, a protection which might, through the criminal law, be open to the citizen, might be taken away if reliance were placed on the civil law.

The unfortunate strong undercurrent of anger in our society manifests itself in all our surgeries. I speak from experience in what is otherwise the tolerant, moderate, reasonable, well-balanced and sensible constituency of Burton, which is what hon. Members would expect, judging by the choice of Member. I continually hear of cases in which there are neighbours disputes—between neighbours on council estates mostly, but not exclusively. Week after week constituents come to tell me of the anger and underlying hatred between neighbours and themselves. That has been growing in the 14 years that I have been privileged to represent Burton.

With the breakdown of marriage and the ease with which partners can break up, there is a higher level of men and women being scorned and wanting to get back at their partners. I am also noticing the hate campaigns by jilted partners, wronged partners and partners who feel that the best way to demonstrate their dissatisfaction is the poison-pen letter or harassment.

Bitter disputes arose in some of the recent strikes because, from the start, some were likely to end in failure. The miners' strike, which has been mentioned, was never likely to succeed. Those who took part in it and felt driven to do so became more angry as they saw the Government standing firm, so the bitterness that was engendered was great and a considerable number of the offensive mental attacks, which are the substance of the Bill, also sprouted. Anti-semitism seems, once again, to be rearing its ugly head in the world, as it does from time to time with the swing of the pendulum.

Although we have no precise idea of how numerous poison-pen letters and similar activities are—because there is no crime, they do not form part of the statistics—my feeling is that there is a growing problem which needs to be addressed. The Bill addresses that problem in a way that is consistent with the Law Commission's recommendations.

I welcome the Bill, although it raises some interesting matters of detail, some of which cause me concern. The objective test for what is indecent or grossly offensive, which emerges by implication from the terms of the Bill, is worthy of observation. The ordinary courts have no difficulty in deciding what is grossly indecent or offensive. Even now there are offences that come before the courts—indecency in public places and in public lavatories—

for which there is no definition of what is indecent or grossly offensive. However, ordinary people serving on juries and ordinary magistrates know exactly the meaning of those words and there is no problem.

The astonishing thing is that the Obscene Publications Act 1964, which has caused so much trouble and taken up so much of our time, tries to define obscenity, indecency and grossly offensive material. However, in the act of definition that Act destroys itself and fails. Once again, when we come to consider the reform of offensive publication law, we must pause to realise that, on many occasions, as with legislation of the type that we are discussing today, it can best be left for juries, ordinary people, to decide the level of indecency and gross offensiveness. If that were the test, it would be a much more effective way of ensuring that the obscene publications legislation — necessary to the country — worked.

I am not sure that my hon. Friend has got it right by changing what the Law Commission recommended as the format for clause 1 of the Bill. My hon. Friend's Bill leaves out the words "without reasonable excuse." I am not sure that I understand why those words have been left out. If one is defining an offence and there is a qualification to that offence, the clause that deals with that definition should contain that qualification. However, I am bound to say of the Law Commission's draft that, given the words "without reasonable excuse" in ciause 1(1), I do not believe that it is wholly sensible for clause 1(2) to be drafted as it is. As the Law Commission draft had mentioned "without reasonable excuse" in clause 1(1), I should have thought that clause 1(2) should read:

"For the purposes of this section it is a reasonable excuse if the sender—

(a) uses a threat to reinforce a demand that he believes he has reasonable grounds for making, and

(b) believes that this use of the threat is a proper means of reinforcing the demand,

but not otherwise."

I do not know why the Law Commission has drafted clause 1(2) in the way that it has, but, that apart, I believe that the present format of my hon. Friend's Bill, which removes the words "without reasonable excuse", is not good. This matter is tied up with the necessary intent implied in the Bill, and I believe that that should cause us a little further concern. However, before I discuss that problem, may I also state that I do not understand why clause 1(2) of my hon. Friend's Bill uses the words, "if he shows":

"(2) A person is not guilty of an offence by virtue of subsection (1)(a)(ii) above if he shows—

(a) that the threat was used to reinforce a demand,"

and so on. That is a rather unusual form of words—"if he shows". If it means "if he proves"——

Mr. Greg Knight *rose*——

Mr. Lawrence: I am thinking aloud and if I am interrupted I shall get it wrong.

If it is meant to be the same as "if he proves" — where the law requires, if the defendent has to prove anything, that, unless otherwise stated, it is on the balance of probabilities rather than the burden of proof that applies to the prosecution, which is to satisfy the court so that it feels sure—the clause should say so. Then the courts would not be misled into thinking that the words "if he shows" might mean something less than "if he proves". If the clause means something less than "if he proves", what does it mean? What does "show" mean? How does one demonstrate in court so that one "shows"? There is a dangerous possibility of confusion in that, and I ask my hon. Friend to consult his legal advisers to see whether it would not be better to use the form of words that the courts, the solicitors, the lawyers and everyone understand—the simple matter that one has a defence if one can prove on the balance of probabilities that one believed that one had reasonable grounds for making a demand, or was using reasonable means to reinforce it.

Mr. Greg Knight: My hon. and learned Friend has answered my question. I was going to ask him what is the difference between "show" and "prove"? Surely, there is none.

Mr. Lawrence: The answer, if I have not made it clear, is that the courts have a format that does not normally use the word "show". It is ambiguous and could mean anything, whereas "prove" means only one thing as far as the courts are concerned. It is simpler to have it like that than to invent a new word, or apply old ones in a new context.

The third matter that should cause a little concern is the issue of intent in clause 1(2). I understand the reason why it is thought necessary to make this an offence not of strict liability, but one in which the accused must be shown or proved to have intended harm. There are some cases in which a threat might be legitimate if it is a threat of legal action. But the trouble with having an intent in the Bill, framed as it is in clause 1(2), is that if someone is not certifiably insane, but is nevertheless mentally unstable, and believes it is all right to put obscene or grossly offensive tape recordings through someone's door—or excreta, or filthy literature—he is not guilty, because it is a defence for that person to believe that he had reasonable grounds for doing what he did, or that that was a proper means of doing it. So a high proportion of people who will send poison-pen letters or put excreta through the door, or in some way infringe someone's privacy by the excessive degree of unpleasantness envisaged in the Bill, and who are therefore mentally unstable, will be able to say they had a genuine, honest belief that that was the right thing, and everyone will know that they did, because they are mentally unstable, although not insane. In those circumstances there would have to be an acquittal. That makes one wonder whether the number of convictions likely to result from the legislation will be quite as high as perhaps one might expect or wish if one were trying to stop this sort of activity.

The alternative is to make this an offence of strict liability. That is to say, there would be no clause 1(2), which provides a defence if the

"threat was used to reinforce a demand which he believed he had reasonable grounds for making; and (b) that he believed that the use of the threat was a proper means of reinforcing that demand."

Therefore, anybody who sent a letter or other article conveying an indecent or grossly offensive message, or a threat or information that is false and was known or believed to be false or any other such article, would be guilty of this offence. That is the alternative if we do not provide defences and do not require the necessary intent.

My hon. Friend the Minister said that that is going too far. The trouble is that it would catch the letter threatening court proceedings for debt. The solution would be to exclude letters that threaten legal proceedings. I have not

[Mr. Lawrence]

sat down and sought to think about a form of words, but I am sure that a form could be found specifically to provide a defence for dunning letters or anything with a perfectly legitimate reason. That would mean that indecent or grossly offensive messages would not be allowed because, as the Minister said, it is difficult to think of any justification for sending an indecent or grossly offensive message. It would mean that information that is false, and known or believed by the sender to be false, or any article that is indecent or grossly offensive would be banned. However, if the threat was of legal action, which is perfectly proper and fair, it would not have a criminal offence accorded to it.

It would be better if the Bill required strict liability in two of its three clauses, so that anybody who sends anything indecent or grossly offensive, or who knows or believes it to be false and is such as to cause distress or anxiety, should be liable. We should make an exception for the kind of activity that we do not think is necessarily worthy of blame. If it is not too late, perhaps that could be considered. That would enable us to get away from the situation in which a significant proportion of those who will be charged could put forward the excuse, "Look, I am not actually mad, but I am mentally unstable and I honestly believe that this is the right way to go about things." In such a case the magistrates would acquit.

The fourth matter with which I should like to deal is false information.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): I should like to make a plea to the hon. and learned Gentleman to push forward with his arguments so that the debate may be concluded. I am afraid that if he continues at the same speed we will face the great danger that hon. Members will carry out the unlawful acts that the Bill sets out to stop.

Mr. Lawrence: I do not know whether speeding up will stop the unlawful acts, but I think it important that, on Second Reading, these matters are properly examined. If we are to rush through Bills without any discussion, we might as well pack up and go home—and the hon. Gentleman will have wasted his time in standing for election. While I appreciate that there is other business and that we wish to get on, I consider it important to raise these matters, but I shall do so with as much dispatch as I can.

The fourth point that I wish to make concerns clause 1(1)(a)(iii), which deals with

"information which is false and known or believed to be false by the sender".

I suppose that that covers spiteful letters telling a wife that her husband has been killed on a trip abroad or claiming that her husband is sleeping with someone else—which would cause great anxiety and distress — if the information is known or believed to be false.

The courts are getting into considerable difficulties over precisely what is meant by "knowledge" or "belief". I could have brought in a copy of Archbold and a number of other legal tracts, which are becoming thicker and thicker and more and more voluminous as the House of Lords, the Court of Appeal and all the other courts consider what is "knowledge". The boundaries of knowledge have been pushed forward in recent years—or so some authorities say—to involve cases in which the perpetrator is careless whether the information is true or false. Knowing that it is false is one thing; believing it to be false is another; believing that it is probably false is another; yet another is carelessness whether it is true or false. Those categories are causing such difficulties that I ask my hon. Friend to consider with his legal advisers the possibility of simplifying the matter by adding, after the words

"information which is false and known or believed to be false by the sender"

the words "or where the person is careless whether it is true or false", so that the question whether a degree of blameworthiness is imported in the provision is put beyond doubt. We could then avoid the need for the case to be stated to the Court of Appeal, and also avoid what every hon. Member seems to wish to avoid—any more money than is necessary going into the pockets of lawyers. When I look at the Bill, I begin to salivate at the words and phrases that would become minefields for the poor prosecutor, or indeed the poor defender, gladdening the heart of any lawyer short of work.

Mr. Cash: Will my hon. and learned Friend allow me to intervene on what I thought to be technically an intervention, although it has now been going on for some time? Does he agree that the real object of resolving the question of what is true, what is false, and so forth, is to prevent the causing of distress or anxiety; and that, if we keep our minds on that, many of the other questions about shades and degrees of knowledge that lie in the sender's mind are less important than the extent to which distress or anxiety is caused to the recipient?

Mr. Lawrence: It is not as easy as that. The courts have to consider every element in a crime. Very seldom can they say that one element is not as important as another. They must consider whether there is sufficient evidence that a man believed or knew. It is not simply a question of the amount of anxiety or distress that has been caused. That is a different element. We must be careful to ensure that the legislation that we put on the statute book does not mislead anyone, least of all the courts. We must ensure that all the particular elements are properly worked out and considered for their value and importance.

My fifth concern relates to the fines. If someone has a really deep hatred that causes that person to produce very distressing and offensive matter that will cause great anxiety and upset to a former wife, former girl friend, someone who is resisting a strike action or someone whose religion that person despises, what on earth is the deterrent value of £400? Many people, especially if they have a hinge loose, may say, "I haven't got £400, so they will not be able to fine me £400." If someone has £400, it will be worth £10,000 for that person to send such matter.

If the armoury of deterrents is to be placed properly in the hands of the courts, we must not limit the level of the fine as low as £400. The Law Commission's proposal for the appropriate level of fine should be applied in the Bill.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman advise me whether some of the mail that I receive daily would come under the orbit of this Bill? I am referring to the non-replies that I receive from people who clearly have not read the parliamentary questions that I have tabled. I am afraid that the parliamentary answers that I receive to my parliamentary questions rarely, if ever, give me information, especially those from the Department of Energy. On occasions they have certainly caused me anxiety and distress.

Mr. Lawrence: I do not want to be in any way discourteous to the hon. Gentleman. However, he seems to want free legal advice from me. I can only tell him that free legal advice is not worth having. If I were to hazard an answer without looking up all the authorities and considering the matter fully, it would not be worth the hon. Gentleman's while to receive my advice. I hope that he will forgive me and not think that I am in any way being discourteous by not answering.

Mr. Greg Knight: Is it not the case that free legal advice is worth what one pays for it? However, in response to my hon. and learned Friend's comments about the Bill and about level 5, as I understand it, level 5 involves a maximum fine of £2,000. If my hon. and learned Friend is urging that that level should apply in the Bill, he will find many supporters on the Conservative Benches. Does he agree that the offence should carry imprisonment? That point was referred to in the Law Commission's report.

Mr. Lawrence: We want to avoid sending people on the borders of sanity to prison if we can at all help it. We should not rush into providing new offences for which to send people to prison when we are trying to keep the prisons as empty as possible instead of filling them up. I might change my view about that in a few years' time if the prison population falls, but at the moment I believe that imprisonment should not apply.

I have been trying to end my comments for the past three or four minutes. I believe that the Bill is necessary. It will be beneficial. I welcome it, but I ask that the various points that I have had the temerity to raise might be considered as the Bill passes through Parliament. If there is thought to be any merit in any of my points, and they can be incorporated in the Bill, the Bill might be improved. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood for introducing the measure and giving us this opportunity to consider a very important gap that exists in the law at present.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) has the leave of the House to speak again, so be it.

1.24 pm

Mr. Andy Stewart: I shall be brief, because there is much business on today's Order Paper. The hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) is anxiously awaiting the debate on his Bill, the Coal Mining Subsidence (Damage and Arbitration) Bill, which I support. I hope that business will proceed quickly to allow us to reach that item.

I thank all hon. Members who have contributed to today's debate. I am delighted that the debate has been so favourable. I thank all hon. Members who have voiced their support, particularly the 200 hon. Members who have written to me expressing their support and hopes that the Bill will soon be on the statute book. On Fridays the strength of support for private Members' Bills is judged, not by the number of hon. Members here, but by the number who are absent. If they did not support the Bill, they would be here to vote it down. I remind the House that hon. Members who have supported me are today in their constituencies dealing with other important matters.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his contribution and support during the debate and for his counsel in drafting the Bill. Hon. Members will know that I am a professional peasant farmer, experienced in handling some forms of muck, but not able to draft a technical Bill such as we require to deal with the types of muck that we have been discussing today. My hon. Friends in the legal profession have raised some important points about this complex Bill. I assure them that we will take those points into consideration when we debate the Bill in Committee.

The House also knows that the hon. Member for Sherwood is very modest. The fact that the Northern Ireland Office was consulted about the drafting of the Bill may have resulted from the fact that I did a phone-in with BBC Radio Ulster shortly after the Bill was published, thus perhaps showing the people of Ulster how advantageous it would be if they, too, were covered by the Bill.

I should like to deal with three points raised by hon. Members. First, my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) asked whether people requiring medical treatment could be ordered by magistrates to undergo such treatment. Unfortunately, under the Mental Health Act 1983, this is not an offence if it is not punishable by imprisonment. Secondly, the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) regarding computer software were entirely correct. Thirdly, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) was right when he said that the common law of Scotland covers certain aspects of the subject. We shall be discussing other aspects in Committee. However, I have also noted the comments about the level of fines and whether it should be raised from level 3 to level 4. I cannot give any promises about that. We shall also consider the points about infected wood, which could cause serious anxiety.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford talked about newspapers. The Bill does not cover newspapers, but it raises the question whether somebody picking up and sending a newspaper could be offensive. We shall have to discuss that in Committee to see what steps can be taken under the law.

I hope that hon. Members will agree that we have had a good debate. I appreciate the fact that the House has listened to me and I hope that it will now give its full support to this measure.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Access to Medical Reports Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

1.29 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The long title of the Bill says that its purpose is to

"Establish a right of access by individuals to reports relating to themselves provided by medical practitioners for employment or insurance purposes and to make provision for related matters."

Hon. Members will recall that last year I introduced the Access to Personal Files Bill, which has since reached the statute book, albeit in a greatly reduced form. Originally, that set out to allow people to have access to their full medical files. There is enormous public support for that measure, and a recent survey by the Data Protection Registrar found that 86 per cent. of people asked wanted a right of access to their medical records. They now have a limited right in relation to computerised medical records only, under the Data Protection Act 1984 and I know that the Government are seeking a voluntary agreement to facilitate greater access to other medical records. However, I do not believe that either of those moves deals with the area with which this Bill seeks to deal. I believe that the Bill, although it is a finely focused and modest measure, is necessary to fill the gap that exists.

When someone applies for a life assurance policy or a job, he is almost invariably asked to allow the insurance company or the employer to take up a medical reference. On the whole, people have no option but to agree, because to do otherwise could severely jeopardise their job or insurance application. They sign a form which permits the company to contact their current doctor, or any doctor who has treated them previously, for information about their medical and social history.

In doing that, although they may not realise it, they waive their right to have kept secret the information that they have given to a doctor in confidence. The doctor can reveal whatever he or she knows about the patient, whether it relates to a current medical condition or one that has long since passed, whether it is relevant to the applicant's current fitness or not, and even if it relates to personal matters that do not involve a medical problem of any nature. My Bill would allow people to see the report that the doctor proposed to send or had sent to an insurance company or employer in those circumstances.

Many doctors are concerned that their patients do not appreciate the real significance of the consent form that they sign. A patient may assume that the doctor will be asked merely to confirm that he, the patient, is not suffering from a major illness. That is a perfectly reasonable supposition for him to make. In fact, the doctor may be asked detailed and intrusive questions. I have seen some such questions that have caused me concern and I shall share one example with the House.

A medical practitioner was asked to

"State details of any facts concerning health, habits, sobriety or family history or other circumstances which might affect our assessment."

I doubt whether there are many hon. Members on either side of the House who would willingly submit themselves to the full rigour of an investigation on those terms.

The current concern of the insurance industry is AIDS. As an illness it is causing us all concern, but the insurance industry's concern with AIDS has led to questions about patients' sexual behaviour, designed to discover whether the patient is a homosexual or is promiscuous. It may be that employers will soon be doing the same, if they are not already doing so.

Most people assume that their medical records contain nothing but medical information. They do not realise that information about their family, their personal life or sexual relationships may well have been recorded at an earlier stage, let alone that the doctor may be passing such information to other bodies without their knowledge. Moreover, they have no guarantee that the information will not be passed further.

Most insurance companies have a medical officer to whom the GP's report usually goes. He receives the information and deals with it properly within the usual terms of medical confidentiality. Medium and small-sized employers do not always have such a person. Sometimes, the GP's report can be sent to the personnel department and it may be handled by people who have no tradition of protecting the confidentiality of medical information.

There are specific reasons for concern if doctors are allowed to write reports to other bodies which their patients cannot see. First, when people realise that information that they have given to a doctor in strict confidence is in danger of being passed on in this manner, they will become extremely cautious about disclosing sensitive matters to their doctor. That can only be harmful to the long-term doctor-patient relationship, and it may cause problems in securing accurate diagnoses.

Secondly, there is the danger of errors being passed on, particularly by a doctor who does not have direct personal knowledge of the patient and must rely on what is written on the medical record. Clerical errors occur, and some that I have seen have caused me great concern. One doctor who examined the accuracy with which he summarised his patients' notes found that he had made errors in 27 per cent. of his diagnoses, and he regarded 58 per cent. of those errors as fairly serious.

Thirdly, it is by no means unknown for a patient's medical notes to contain information about someone else whose notes have been filed by mistake. The Campaign for Freedom of Information has described several such cases. There was the example of a perfectly healthy woman who was wrongly described as a heroin addict. A young student was falsely described as suffering from convulsions and of having had an operation to remove a brain tumour. Another perfectly healthy woman who visited her doctor before applying for a life assurance policy learnt that the notes forwarded by her former GP included the incorrect statement that she was terminally ill from cancer. A page from somebody else's notes had been placed in her file. Luckily, she discovered that mistake and had it corrected. Had she not had a chance to visit her doctor, the policy would have been refused. As the House knows, the insurance industry keeps a central register of people refused policies on medical grounds, so an initial refusal can permanently prejudice a person's chance of obtaining cover.

Fourthly, the report may involve an unjustified invasion of privacy. The best example that I have of that is of a woman who applied for a post as a part-time teacher in a religious school. She was asked to supply a complete medical history and she had to answer more than 30 questions about her health. She was asked to allow the school to take up a medical reference. If the doctor had provided her full history, he would have had to disclose

that she had had an abortion. Given the ethos of the school, that would probably have ruled out her chances of getting the job. More important, she feared that the abortion would have become known locally, and since the school was run by people who knew her it would have had a devastating effect on her standing in the community. Under the Bill she would have been able to discover what the doctor proposed to disclose and she would have been able to make representations to him. Ultimately, she could have withdrawn her consent for the report to be made, even if that meant forgoing the job, which was something that she would have preferred to do in the circumstances.

I shall deal briefly with the content of the Bill. It requires insurance companies and employers to have the written consent of the applicant before they approach a doctor for a medical report. That consent would be valid for 90 days only. Thus, if, at a later stage—perhaps long after the employee has been employed — the company wants to make further inquiries of the GP, it must ask again for consent. It cannot simply recycle the original consent.

At the time that consent is obtained, the employer or insurance company will have to notify the applicant in writing of the right of access under the Bill — the person's right to see the proposed report before the doctor sends it and, indeed, afterwards.

That could be done by adding a statement about the right of access to the original consent form. It would be up to the applicant to contact his or her GP and explain that he or she wanted to come and see the report before it was sent. If the applicant did that, the doctor would be obliged to refrain from sending in the report until the person had had the opportunity to see it. If the applicant did not get in touch with the doctor, he would be free to supply the medical report in the normal way, without delay.

Reports can also be inspected after they have been sent. The Bill would require a doctor to keep a copy on file for no less than five years, so that there would be a record. The patient would be entitled to make a photocopy of the report, for which the doctor could make a reasonable charge.

The Bill also contains exceptions. I am sure that the House will appreciate the reasons for them. The exceptions are based as carefully and accurately as possible on those that already apply when people seek access to their computerised health records under the Data Protection Act 1984. A doctor may withhold information where it is judged that disclosure would cause serious harm to the patient's health, or where the report contains personal information about someone else, such as another member of the applicant's family.

The Bill applies only to reports produced by a doctor who is or has been responsible for treating a patient, and therefore will have access to information provided in confidence during ordinary doctor-patient consultation. It does not apply to a report resulting from an independent medical examination carried out for employment or insurance purposes by a doctor who had no access to medical records and no previous contact with the patient.

The two cases are somewhat different. In the first, a doctor who has been acting exclusively to further a patient's health suddenly assumes a different role in using information obtained on that basis to advise an insurance company or an employer. Indeed, the doctor is paid by such companies to provide reports. This serious conflict of interest does not arise when an independent medical examination is carried out.

A person who made use of the opportunity under the Bill to see a proposed report before it was sent would be able to discuss its contents with the doctor and make representations about anything that he or she considered inaccurate or irrelevant. The Bill does not allow a patient to demand that anything must be omitted from what ultimately must be a doctor's professional opinion. If the Bill goes into Committee, I would wish to discuss the possibility of a right to correct factually inaccurate material, or alternatively to allow the patient to add a comment to a report that is under dispute.

Patients would have a final sanction against a report which they considered wholly unacceptable. They could simply withdraw their consent for the report to be sent. A doctor who passed on a report against a patient's wishes would be committing an actionable breach of confidence and could also be guilty of professional misconduct.

The Bill has all-party support and is supported by the Consumer's Association, the Patients Association and the Campaign for Freedom of Information. I am pleased to say that the British Medical Association's general medical services committee,—the BMA committee representing general practitioners—strongly supports the principle of the Bill. It has suggested that it should be strengthened in several ways and that its scope should be expanded to include reports made by doctors to third parties other than employers or insurance companies. The Bill is deliberately modest in its scope, but I should be happy to discuss suggestions for improving it should it reach Committee, and I commend it to the House.

1.43 pm

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): I welcome the Bill. Although, as the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) said, it is a modest measure, it is long overdue.

The Bill covers many injustices. Most hon. Members through their constituency surgeries have met people who have been subject to dismissal, or have not been offered a job by employers who have given no good reason for that other than the fact that the medical report that they had received from the applicant's medical practitioner was unsatisfactory in some respect. I have had cases, as I am sure have many hon. Members, in which people have been alarmed about the reasons for an employer's attitude. The employee may feel that he or she should have known and been informed about something in the report. The Bill will go a long way towards remedying these problems.

In some respects, the Bill does not go far enough—as the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire said, it is a deliberately modest measure — to tackle a major problem. We must ensure that, if a medical practitioner is exempted from giving such a report under clause 6, the reasons why the report is not shown to the patient or is held back are made clear to the patient. The fact that the patient cannot obtain access to which he would normally be legally entitled may make the problems considerably worse for him. That point must be closely considered to ensure that we do not create other problems while solving a major one.

There is a tragic aspect of most of the difficulties in relation to the medical profession. The people who come forward with these problems, who are not told why they

[Mr. Matthew Carrington]

were dismissed or not offered a job and who do not have a relationship of confidence with their general practitioner or other medical adviser, such that he says, "This is what I shall tell your employer and this is what you will need to know about what will be in the report", are those least able to exercise the rights which they will have under the Bill.

These people may be desperate for a job and agree to almost any conditions that an employer imposes. They perhaps would not understand the significance of what was said in a medical report, if only because it was couched in such language that a man or woman of perhaps less than good education could not understand it easily without it being explained. There are considerable problems for the most vulnerable members of society, even in the protections implied in the Bill. This point needs to be closely considered in Committee.

We need to ensure that those who will suffer most will be assisted by the type of information provided. Perhaps we should put more onus on the doctor to ensure that if he puts in his report anything to the patient's disadvantage or anything about which he feels, as a reasonable man, the patient should be concerned, he has an obligation to bring it to the patient's attention.

A doctor is always in a position of considerable power in respect of the patient. Many people have a certain fear of going to see their medical adviser. It is not just the fear from which we have all suffered when sitting in the dentist's waiting room—the fear of pain. It is not just the fear that the doctor might diagnose a problem. It is the fear in seeing a person who is highly educated, as the master of a somewhat mysterious science who is in a position of authority over the patient. It is the fear that will lead people perhaps not to ask the right question or even to think of the right question until they have left the doctor's presence. We need to ensure that doctors have an obligation to ensure that the spirit, as well as the words, of the Bill works.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire said that the Bill does not cover the case, which is particularly true with both employers and insurance companies, of an outside medical adviser, frequently attached to the employer or insurance company, and retained as a medical adviser, who is asked to make an examination of a prospective or existing employee to decide whether he meets the medical criteria. That, as I am sure many hon. Members have found, has also led to abuse. I do not wish to go into the rights and wrongs of this case, but a constituent of mine was sent as part of a regular check to a doctor who was not his regular general practitioner. The doctor diagnosed — incorrectly, according to my constituent and his regular general practitioner—that my constituent was an alcoholic.

My constituent was working in a job for which alcoholism would disqualify him from being employed. That medical practitioner, who was on a retainer to the employer, recommended that he could not carry on with his employment, even though my constituent's GP flatly denied that my constituent had any history of alcoholism. That was some seven or eight years ago, and to this day my constituent has failed to get that one adverse medical report changed. It took him five years, assisted by my predecessors in the constituency, to get access to that report. He knows what is in the report, but cannot get anybody to gainsay the medical practitioner who made the original diagnosis, which appeared to have been at fault.

If my constituent had been able to get access to the report before it went in, he would have been in a position to make representations to his employer and to the doctor being retained to make the examination. He could have got a second opinion and had his case reviewed in consultation with his general practitioner. The Bill does not deal with that particular situation, but many similar injustices deny people insurance and employment, and sometimes, as in this case, get people dismissed. They can lead to apparent gross injustices purely because of the secrecy which surrounds the ethos of the medical profession when making such reports. I should like the Bill to be expanded in Committee to cover such situations.

There should not be a fundamental difference in a report from a patient's general practitioner or close medical adviser and that from a doctor brought in from outside to make a consultation. The effect of an adverse report, if it is incorrect or mistaken, on an employee can be devastating. The Bill is an attempt to remedy that.

I should also like the Committee to look at another aspect of the Bill. If, under the provisions of clause 4, the employee objects, looks at the report and decides that he does not like it, he can withdraw his consent and the report will not be sent at that stage. That is fine as far as it goes, but an employer who knows that consent has been withdrawn after the employee has seen the medical report can draw only one conclusion—that the report was so damning that the employee has effectively dismissed himself. That may not be the right conclusion. There is a problem for somebody in employment who may be dismissed if an adverse report is submitted.

An employee could have to decide which is the lesser of two evils—being dismissed, effectively, for withholding consent or being dismissed because the report is adverse. He must ask himself whether he can talk himself out of a problem more effectively when the employer lacks information or when the employer has an adverse medical report with which the employee disagrees.

In the case of the teacher who had had an abortion, the information did not stop her being a good teacher, but if she failed to send the report she could guarantee that she would not be recruited. In her case, going to another doctor might make no difference. We must try to find an acceptable middle route so that more emphasis is put on ensuring that, when a report is strongly objected to, the reporting doctor discusses those objections and possibly takes outside advice or a second opinion.

I am sure that most of us agree that doctors are, by definition, reasonable people who take decisions that are in the best interests of their patients, but I am also sure that one or two of us have come across doctors who, probably through overwork, have been less than willing, apparently, to discuss with patients the finer points of what they are doing.

I strongly welcome the Bill. It is long overdue as it brings greater openness to medical records. The House may like at some future date to consider the secrecy of medical records in general, but that is not an appropriate subject for consideration here. I have the great fortune to have the Charing Cross hospital, which is a major teaching hospital, in my constituency. I am therefore approached

by many people who have had excellent treatment and others who feel that the hospital has been less than successful.

Often, the person who complains about the treatment that he or she or a relative has received does not understand the full facts because the hospital has been reluctant to release any medical records. The hospital is sometimes unwilling for the complainant to discuss what has happened with the consultant in charge. If patients were able to have better access to medical records, such a problem would rarely occur. I am the first to recognise that there are problems associated with such a step.

Doctors need to be able to include in their medical reports the full details of a case—their suspicions as well as confirmed facts. Completely open access might cause more fears than it would allay. There must be a middle course to enable the quite justified fears, concerns and doubts felt by patients to be allayed by allowing them to examine their records, even in an edited version, so that they can understand why certain decisions were made and certain treatments given and see whether they have received the right treatment. We need to achieve that balance. The Bill is perhaps a step in the right direction.

For now, the Bill goes far enough, but I would welcome a measure that went further and tackled the whole problem of medical records.

2 pm

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): I shall continue my self-imposed training scheme in readiness for the cameras and see how succinctly I can make my remarks.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on choosing this subject for his Bill. Along with many other hon. Members, the hon. Gentleman and I welcome any chance to take a pick-axe to the walls of secrecy so needlessly erected around so much of our daily lives.

I am glad that the Bill has all-party support. It will right a wrong, which is that at present we are not allowed to see what doctors propose to say or have said to would-be employers or insurance companies. I agree that it might be useful to see whether we can widen the Bill to cover medical reports to all third parties.

There can be no defence of the present position, and I hope that the Bill will start a process that gives patients a right to see their own medical records and not only reports required by employers and insurance companies. Some doctors already make such records available, and more should do so, the better to aid patients' recovery from illness. Such a partnership can only be for the good, because general practitioners benefit when patients know the details of their condition and understand the reasons for the treatments that they are given. Similarly, when a job or insurance application may well turn on a medical report, it cannot be right for the applicant to be denied knowledge of what the doctor says.

In case the House should think that I do not practice what I preach, let me make it clear that when I get a request for a job reference I unfailingly send a copy of what I have written to the person whom it concerns. That may well account for the fact that so few applicants whom I support are successful in their job applications. Indeed, when my wife and I were asked to give references for two separate applicants for the same job, the applicant whom my wife supported got the job.

I look forward to the Committee stage of the Bill and, beyond that, to more steps to make our society more open, with more freedom of information.

2.3 pm

The Minister for Social Security and the Disabled (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on his success in getting a favourable place in the ballot, on his choice of subject and on his speech. Let me make it clear at the outset that the Government have no intention of seeking to prevent the Bill from reaching its Committee stage, and I hope that the Committee will take a constructive look at the Bill when it gets there.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) on his speech. He made a number of interesting points, particularly about the way in which vulnerable groups are the most affected by the present arrangements. He gave a graphic description of at least one injustice that has flowed from the present system, although, as he said, it does not fall within the scope of the Bill.

My hon. Friend said that he agreed very much with the spirit of the Bill and hoped that that spirit would be carried forward as much as the letter. I emphasise to him and to all other hon. Members how important it is in Committee to get the letter of the Bill right. It is all very well saying what one's intention is, but when the courts start looking at the Act, if the letter is not right, all too often the whole matter can go astray.

My hon. Friend raised the wider issue of the secrecy of medical records, but it is this Bill that we are talking about, and I shall not be diverted into job applications and giving references. It is normally friends who ask one to provide a job reference. I do not know whether one loses faith more quickly in one's friends or in the employers to whom one sends the job reference if one pursues the pattern of activity of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett).

As was made clear, the Bill seeks to give individuals the right of access to reports by doctors responsible for their care, prepared for their employers, past, present and potential, or insurers, past present or potential. It requires the written consent of individuals before any report is prepared on them, limits the life of such consents to 90 days and requires that individuals are informed of their right of access to those reports. It provides that if any individual wants to see a report before it is sent to an employer or insurer, the doctor must arrange for that to be done before he lets the employer and insurer see it. No time limit is set for exercising that right. There are several other provisions, all designed to give increased rights to individuals in that sensitive area.

By our reading of the Bill, it does not appear to give the individual any right to have inaccurate reports corrected or withdrawn; nor does it create a specific right to withdraw consent if the individual dislikes a report, or provide for patient's comments to be added. It does not apply to doctors employed by insurers or employers merely to conduct a specific one-off examination of individuals. That point was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham. Nor does the Bill apply to examinations conducted by statutory authorities, for example, for heavy goods vehicles licences and so on. The

[Mr. Nicholas Scott]

Committee may wish to turn its mind to this matter. The Bill does not seem to provide any penalty for contravention or any means of enforcing the law.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire on his success in introducing the Bill. The House will recall that during the passage of what is now the Access to Personal Files Act in the previous Parliament the Government gave an undertaking to enter into talks with the medical profession, with a view to achieving substantive and timely progress in opening up medical records further, on a non-statutory basis. I am sure the House will be pleased to hear that those talks are taking place at the moment and that significant progress is being made.

On the whole, the Government would have preferred to reach a successful conclusion to those talks, since by making health records more generally available there would be no need for legislation on specific related areas such as the reports covered by the Bill. A non-statutory basis might have been preferable, because we are feeling our way, and we may need to adapt our approach to that sensitive, but important, area quite rapidly if it is seen to be causing unforeseen problems in the care of patients. Nevertheless, as I made clear at the outset, we do not wish to oppose the Bill as it is consistent with the Government's objectives and may give us some valuable experience in extending access to medical information, albeit in that limited but important area.

As a Government, we consider that, as a matter of principle, patients should have the right to know what has been recorded about them. However, it is widely recognised that there will be some circumstances in which the uncontrolled disclosure to an individual of personal health information about himself or herself would run the risk of causing serious harm to that individual. The Bill picks up the necessary safeguards, which are in line with the Data Protection (Subject Access Modification) (Health) Order under the Data Protection Act 1984.

The safeguards were designed specifically to protect the individuals from such serious harm to his or her physical or mental health that such full disclosure of information might cause, and to maintain the confidentiality of other individuals. They are important matters and I am pleased that the Bill is consistent with the Data Protection Act 1984 in that respect.

Should the Bill be given a Second Reading today, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will consider the points that have been put to him by the insurance industry and the medical profession. As I understand it, the insurance industry is concerned about the quality of information that will be provided. It is concerned that if medical practitioners prepare a report in the knowledge that individuals have the right to see it they may dilute the information, and therefore it may be more difficult to establish the true risks. It is also feared that administrative costs will increase and that paper work may add to delays and therefore increase costs. On balance, the insurance industry would prefer the non-statutory rather than the legislative route.

It is not for me to do the hon. Gentleman's job for him, but I believe that, despite all the objections, the principle of letting people know what is recorded about them should be encouraged as widely as possible, with the necessary safeguards. In practice I do not believe that the take-up of that right is likely to be very wide, and I do not believe that the administrative burden will loom particularly large.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will also take into account the concerns voiced by the medical profession. Indeed, the Health and Safety Executive has expressed some concern, and I know that the hon. Gentleman has been in touch with my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Health and Social Security on that matter.

When the Bill goes into Committee, I hope that it will be considered seriously and that the arguments that have been raised on Second Reading will be taken into account. This will ensure that the Bill meets its desired effect without hindering the free flow of information upon which employers and insurers rightly depend, and also ensure approach that is within the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984 and the Access to Personal Files Act 1987.

2.11 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I believe that the Bill shares a number of things in common with other recent Bills.

It is important that a balance is struck. First, one must consider what is genuinely a matter of information that should be available to a person—in a sense his right of privacy—to enable him to have enough information to know what is going on in matters that affect his personal life. On the other side of the coin, one must consider whether freedom of information, which underpins that notion, could be an invasion of his privacy. I believe that that philosophical question will have been carefully considered by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). I am sure that other hon. Members who have sponsored similar Bills have also addressed that problem.

It is a curious state of affairs that in the past few weeks the Unfair Reporting and Right of Reply Bill has been introduced by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), I have introduced the Right of Privacy Bill and today we have debated at length the Malicious Communications Bill. Now we are considering the Access to Medical Reports Bill. At the centre of all those measures is the balance between what information should be reasonably available to people—what is legitimately in the public interest—and what is essentially a private question that should overlay considerations of public interest. It is the balance between those principles that has caught the imagination not only of the House, but of the press. Indeed, only yesterday I was involved in a television debate with David Montgomery of *Today* regarding the balance between those two propositions. For that reason I believe that the Bill is important.

I was glad to hear what the Minister said about the Bill, and to note that the Government have taken a view about a person's right to have information about himself that is different from what we might have expected of previous Governments. This Bill should be brought to the attention of the media, which have gained an impression that the Government are more interested in suppressing than in releasing information. In matters concerning the freedom of the individual we are anxious that people should have access to information, and the dividing line that we seek to draw comes where that impinges on a matter of genuine public interest, such as national security. It is a difficult

issue. These matters are reverberating around the courts almost daily, which is reason to consider the issue at its root, and the Bill provides us with an opportunity in Committee and during its later stages further to consider the principles that underpin it.

I approve of what the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire has in mind, but I want to discuss whether the Bill should be confined to employment or insurance purposes. The hon. Gentleman is restrained, because of the scope of the long title, from tabling amendments that would enable this access of infomation to go beyond employment or insurance purposes. There is a way around that problem—by subsequently altering the long title—but that is a messy procedure. I can only hope that he finds some way round it.

If it is right in principle that a person should have access to his medical records because they relate to his privacy, confining such access to matters of employment or insurance seems unduly restrictive. I do not want to criticise the hon. Gentleman's Bill, but he may want to tackle the issue of widening its scope.

Another aspect of the Bill that caught my attention was the use of the expression, "medical practitioner", which must be defined by reference to the Medical Act 1983. The Bill also refers to "health professionals." The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire and others will know that I am chairman of the all-party committee on complementary and alternative medicine and I provide advice to people on those subjects. It would be a strange state of affairs if people these days were to make the assumption that medical practitioners are exclusively those who are medical practitioners within the terms of the Medical Act 1983. I had to raise that point during discussion of the Data Protection (Subject Access Modification) (Health) Order 1987, which is mentioned in clause 2 as defining a health professional. When that order was going through — I am a member of the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments—I drew attention to this anomalous state of affairs. Not only in this Bill, which is confined to medical practitioners, but in the context of health professionals, to which the Bill does not apply in toto, the people who are excluded from the article to the Data Protection (Subject Access Modification) (Health) Order 1987 are those from the practice of complementary and alternative medicine. Obviously, I include people such as osteopaths, acupuncturists and chiropractors and people in similar areas. It seems quite extraordinary that the schedule should exclude them and include people such as art or music therapists employed by a health authority.

If we are to pass legislation that applies across the board, it is at least worth considering putting health professionals who provide independent advice on the same footing as medical practitioners. In many respects, for reasons of common law that I will not go into, they provide that independent advice not exclusively on referral but in an independent capacity. That is the way it should be and I hope that the legislation will be framed to take account of that. I welcome the Bill and hope that it will be fully considered in Committee and will make its way through the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Optical Appliances (Blind and Partially Sighted Persons) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.21 pm

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I welcome the opportunity to say a few words on the Bill in the time that remains. When one draws No. 11 in the ballot one has to choose between a spectacularly controversial Bill that will be thrown out on Second Reading, or one that is rather more modest, has an opportunity to be discussed and might perhaps even reach Committee. My Bill falls into the latter category. It is modest but well worth while and should be of considerable assistance to those who are affected by it.

I say "my Bill" but I should begin by paying tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), who presented a similar but unsuccessful Bill early last year. I also acknowledge the considerable assistance that I have had from the Royal National Institute for the Blind, which is especially interested in the Bill and which has supplied me with a great deal of background information.

The RNIB estimates that there are about 300,000 registered blind and partially-sighted people in the United Kingdom. Of those, only a small percentage—about 4 per cent.—are totally blind. The remaining 96 per cent. have some perception of light and some residual vision, but are so blind as to be unable to perform any work for which sight is essential. That is the definition in the National Assistance Act 1948 that has to be met before a person can be registered as blind. The Bill would provide spectacles and optical appliances free of charge to those who would benefit from them—and that is about 50 per cent. of people who are registered as blind and partially sighted.

I suppose that the first thought that springs to the minds of Ministers is how much it will cost. Originally, I intended to leave that until the end of my speech, but, because of the shortage of time, I shall deal with it now. The best estimates that those of us who are interested in the Bill could arrive at, after discussion and looking at figures, was that it would cost about £1 million per annum to carry out the Bill's provisions. Standing on its own, £1 million is quite a sum, but, when measured against the total budget under the Minister's command, it is seen to be tiny.

For the last two months I have had the singular pleasure and honour of chairing the Committee examining the Health and Medicines Bill. I do not propose to discuss what has been happening in the Committee, except to say that the estimates of the revenue that will arise from the charges to be introduced for optical testing and dental inspection is between £70 million and £100 million. It has, I think, been agreed in Committee that the money would find its way back into the Health Service. From that £100 million, £1 million might surely be spared to meet the costs of this Bill.

The blind and partially sighted are hit in two ways. First, the optical appliances that they need are more complex than those normally worn by the rest of us, and the lenses are therefore rather more expensive. In addition, the frames that have to carry the heavier lenses have to be sturdier than those normally required.

[Mr. James Lamond]

Secondly, because of their disability, the visually handicapped are often employed in poorly-paid jobs. It is estimated that 50 per cent. of visually handicapped people in work — perhaps, indeed, the figure is nearer 75 per cent. — have such low incomes that they do not pay income tax. There is, of course, a voucher scheme, which I believe is working pretty well, and the Ministers share my point of view.

The other day, I put a question to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security, asking if the Secretary of State would carry out an early review of the voucher system. The hon. Lady replied that the system had been a great success. However, she said,

"In the White Paper 'Promoting Better Health,' we said that we would give special consideration to the voucher values for those with the poorest sight." — *[Official Report, 9 February 1988; Vol 127, c. 168.]*

A helping hand is being extended to those whom I am trying to help in my Bill, and I welcome it. If the Bill does not reach the statute book, it will at least have raised a question and Ministers will try to act when they carry out their review.

In many cases, the vouchers provided are insufficient to meet the costs of a new pair of glasses. Let me give some examples that have been reported to the Royal National Institute for the Blind:

"a pair of new glasses costing £61·85 of which £12·75 was accounted for by frames. Client eligible for a £27 voucher for low power bifocals. Shortfall of £34·85."

That was a considerable sum for the person involved. Here is another example:

"visually handicapped client registered as partially sighted . . . needed slightly more expensive frames (£29) to hold weight of lenses (£60·60). Eligible for voucher for £33".

The shortfall, therefore, was £46·60.

I could give a number of other examples. However, it is clear that the vouchers, flexible and welcome as they are in allowing those who need glasses to shop around, are not sufficient to meet the needs of the people of whom I speak.

The Bill covers not only those who are eligible for vouchers, but all who are registered as blind and partially sighted. The RNIB believes—and I share its view—that, just as wheelchairs are provided for all who need them and hearing aids are provided for all who are hard of hearing — whether or not they are poor — special optical appliances should be supplied by the Health Service to all who need them. Of course, if people want something more elaborate, they can pay for that themselves. However, all people who need the appliances, not just those who are very poor, should be supplied with them.

2.30 pm

The Minister for Social Security and the Disabled (Mr. Nicholas Scott): The hon. Gentleman was not as lucky——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 4 March.

Private Members' Bills

HOUSING (HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 4 March.

COAL MINING SUBSIDENCE (DAMAGE AND ARBITRATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 15 April.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS (PREMIUM SERVICES) REGULATION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Debate to be resumed what day?

No day named.

COMPANIES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Debate to be resumed what day?

No day named.

CHILD BENEFIT (UPRATING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Debate to be resumed what day?

No day named.

OVERSEAS AID (ASSISTANCE TO THE POOREST) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 4 March.

TELEPHONE TALKABOUT (ABOLITION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Debate to be resumed what day?

No day named.

Consumer Arbitration Agreements Bill

Considered in Committee.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Harold Walker): Although there is precedent for taking several amendments and new clauses to a Bill after the moment of interruption, I should point out that we can proceed with amendments to the Bill only so long as they remain unopposed. If at any time an hon. Member signifies objection or opposition, the Bill will become opposed business and would have to be deferred.

Clause 1

ARBITRATION AGREEMENTS

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, leave out from beginning of line 5 to 'except' in line 6 and insert—

'(1) Where a person (referred to in section *(Power of court to disapply section 1 where no detriment to consumer)* below as "the consumer") enters into a contract as a consumer, an agreement that future differences arising between parties to the contract are to be referred to arbitration cannot be enforced against him in respect of any cause of action so arising to which this section applies'.

The Chairman: With this it will be convenient to consider the following:

Amendment No. 4, in page 1, line 9, at end add

'whether in respect of those or any other differences; or

(c) where the court makes an order under section *(Power of court to disapply section 1 where no detriment to consumer)* below in respect of that cause of action.

(2) This section applies to a cause of action—

(a) if proceedings in respect of it would be within the jurisdiction of a county court; or

(b) if it satisfies such other conditions as may be prescribed for the purposes of this paragraph in an order under section *(Orders adding to the causes of action to which section 1 applies)* below.

(3) Neither section 4(1) of the Arbitration Act 1950 nor section 4 of the Arbitration Act (Northern Ireland) 1937 (which provide for the staying of court proceedings where an arbitration agreement is in force) shall apply to an arbitration agreement to the extent that it cannot be enforced by virtue of this section.'.

Amendment No. 5, in page 1, line 9, at end add

'(c) by leave of the court.'.

Amendment No. 7, in clause 3, page 1, leave out line 19 and insert—

'(1) For the purposes of section 1 above, a person enters into a contract "as a consumer" if—'.

Mr. Pawsey: It may be for the convenience of the House if I state that the effect of the amendments will be to reduce, not enhance, the scope of the Bill as agreed with the Department of Trade and Industry. Hon. Members will recognise the somewhat heavy hand of the Government draftsman, who has refined the Bill, particularly as it relates to Scotland. The amendments do not include anything that was not discussed and received substantial agreement on Second Reading on 29 January.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 2, in page 1, line 7, leave out 'differences' and insert 'the differences in question'.

No. 3, in page 1, line 8, leave out 'himself had recourse' and insert 'submitted'.

No. 4, in page 1, line 9, at end add

'whether in respect of those or any other differences; or

(c) where the court makes an order under section *(Power of court to disapply section 1 where no detriment to consumer)* below in respect of that cause of action.

(2) This section applies to a cause of action—

(a) if proceedings in respect of it would be within the jurisdiction of a county court; or

(b) if it satisfies such other conditions as may be prescribed for the purposes of this paragraph in an order under section *(Orders adding to the causes of action to which section 1 applies)* below.

(3) Neither section 4(1) of the Arbitration Act 1950 nor section 4 of the Arbitration Act (Northern Ireland) 1937 (which provide for the staying of court proceedings where an arbitration agreement is in force) shall apply to an arbitration agreement to the extent that it cannot be enforced by virtue of this section.'.—*[Mr. Pawsey.]*

Clause 1, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

DEALING AS A CONSUMER

Amendment made: No. 7, in page 1, leave out line 19 and insert—

'(1) For the purposes of section 1 above, a person enters into a contract "as a consumer" if—'.

No. 8, in page 1, line 26, leave out 'and' and insert 'or'.

No. 9, in page 2, leave out lines 1 and 2 and insert—

'(2) In subsection (1) above—

"business" includes a profession and the activities of any government department, Northern Ireland department or local or public authority: and

"goods" has the same meaning as in the Sale of Goods Act 1979.

(3) It is for those claiming that a person entered into a contract otherwise than as a consumer to show that he did so.'.—*[Mr. Pawsey.]*

Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 4 and 5 disagreed to.

New Clause 1

POWER OF COURT TO DISAPPLY SECTION 1 WHERE NO DETRIMENT TO CONSUMER

'(1) The High Court or a county court may, on an application made after the differences in question have arisen, order that a cause of action to which this section applies shall be treated as one to which section 1 above does not apply.

(2) Before making an order under this section the court must be satisfied that it is not detrimental to the interests of the consumer for the differences in question to be referred to arbitration in pursuance of the arbitration agreement instead of being determined by proceedings before a court.

(3) In determining for the purposes of subsection (2) above whether a reference to arbitration is or is not detrimental to the interests of the consumer, the court shall have regard to all factors appearing to be relevant, including, in particular, the availability of legal aid and the relative amount of any expense which may result to him—

(a) if the differences in question are referred to arbitration in pursuance of the arbitration agreement; and

(b) if they are determined by proceedings before a court.

(4) This section applies to a cause of action—

(a) if proceedings in respect of it would be within the jurisdiction of a county court and would not fall within the small claims limit; or

(b) if it satisfies the conditions referred to in section 1(2)(b) above and the order under section *(Orders adding to the causes of action to which section 1 applies)* below prescribing the conditions in question provides for this sectionto apply to causes of action which satisfy them.

(5) For the purposes of subsection (4)(a) above proceedings "fall within the small claims limit"—

[Mr. Pawsey]

(a) in England and Wales, if in a county court they would stand referred to arbitration (without any order of the court) under rules made by virtue of section 64(1)(a) of the County Courts Act 1984;

(b) in Northern Ireland, if in a county court the action would be dealt with by way of arbitration by a circuit registrar by virtue of Article 30(3) of the County Courts (Northern Ireland) Order 1980.

(6) Where the consumer submits to arbitration in consequence of an order under this section, he shall not be regarded for the purposes of section 1(1)(b) above as submitting to arbitration in pursuance of the agreement there mentioned.'.—*[Mr. Pawsey.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 2

ORDERS ADDING TO THE CAUSES OF ACTION TO WHICH SECTION 1 APPLIES

'(1) Orders under this section may prescribe the conditions referred to in section 1(2)(b) above; and any such order may provide that section *(Power of court to disapply section 1 where no detriment to consumer)* above shall apply to a cause of action which satisfies the conditions so prescribed.

(2) Orders under this section may make different provision for different cases and for different purposes.

(3) The power to make orders under this section for England and Wales shall be exercisable by statutory instrument made by the Secretary of State with the concurrence of the Lord Chancellor; but no such order shall be made unless a draft of it has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, each House of Parliament.

(4) The power to make orders under this section for Northern Ireland shall be exercisable by the Department of Economic Development for Northern Ireland with the concurrence of the Lord Chancellor; and any such order—

(a) shall be a statutory rule for the purposes of the Statutory Rules (Northern Ireland) Order 1979; and

(b) shall be subject to affirmative resolution, within the meaning of section 41(4) of the Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954.'.—*[Mr. Pawsey.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 3

ARBITRATION AGREEMENTS: SCOTLAND

'(1) In the case of a consumer contract to which, by virtue of subsections (2) to (4) of section 15 of the Act of 1977 (scope of Part II of that Act), sections 16 to 18 of that Act apply, an agreement to refer future differences arising out of the contract to arbitration cannot be enforced against the consumer in respect of a relevant difference so arising except—

(a) with his written consent given after that difference has arisen; or

(b) where, subject to subsection (2) below, he has submitted to arbitration in pursuance of the agreement (whether or not the arbitration was in respect of that difference); or

(c) by virtue of an order under section *(Power of court to disapply section (Arbitration agreements: Scotland) where no detriment to consumer)* below in respect of that difference.

(2) In determining for the purposes of subsection (1)(b) above whether the consumer has submitted to arbitration, any arbitration which takes place in consequence of an order of the court under section *(Power of court to disapply section (Arbitration agreements: Scotland) where no detriment to consumer)* below shall be disregarded.'.—*[Mr. Pawsey.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 4

POWER OF COURT TO DISAPPLY SECTION (ARBITRATION AGREEMENTS: SCOTLAND) WHERE NO DETRIMENT TO CONSUMER

'(1) Subject to subsection (4) below, the Court of Session or the sheriff ("the court") may, on an application made after a relevant difference has arisen, order that section *(Arbitration agreements: Scotland)* above shall not apply as respects that difference.

(2) No such order shall be made unless the court is satisfied that it would not be detrimental to the interests of the consumer were the difference to be referred to arbitration in pursuance of the arbitration agreement.

(3) In determining for the purposes of subsection (2) above whether there would be any detriment to the consumer's interests, the court shall have regard to all factors appearing to be relevant, including, in particular, the availability of legal aid and the relative amounts of any expenses which he might incur—

(a) if the difference is referred to arbitration; and

(b) if it is determined by proceedings before a court.

—*[Mr. Pawsey.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 5

CONSTRUCTION OF SECTIONS (ARBITRATION AGREEMENTS: SCOTLAND) AND (POWER OF COURT TO DISAPPLY SECTION (ARBITRATION AGREEMENTS: SCOTLAND) WHERE NO DETRIMENT TO CONSUMER)

'(1) In sections *(Arbitration agreements: Scotland)* and *(Power of court to disapply section (Arbitration agreements: Scotland) where no detriment to consumer)* above "consumer" and "consumer contract" have the meanings assigned to those expressions by section 25(1) of the Act of 1977.

(2) For the purposes of sections *(Arbitration agreements: Scotland)* and *(Power of court to disapply section (Arbitration agreements: Scotland) where no detriment to consumer)* above a difference is "relevant" where, if (disregarding the arbitration agreement) it were to be resolved by civil proceedings in the sheriff court—

(a) the form of process to be used for the purposes of those proceedings would be that of a summary cause; or

(b) the proceedings would come within such description of proceedings as may, by order, be specified by the Secretary of State for the purposes of this paragraph.

(3) The power to make an order under paragraph (b) of subsection (2) above shall be exercisable by statutory instrument made with the concurrence of the Lord Advocate; but no order shall be so made unless a draft has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, each House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Pawsey.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 6

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT, INTERPRETATION AND EXTENT

'(1) This Act may be cited as the Consumer Arbitration Agreements Act 1988.

(2) This Act shall have effect in relation to contracts made on or after such day as the Secretary of State may by order made by statutory instrument appoint; and different days may be so appointed for different provisions and different purposes.

(3) In this Act "the Act of 1977" means the Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977.

(4) Sections 1 to 3, section *(Power of court to disapply section 1 where no detriment to consumer)* and section *(Orders adding to the causes of action to which section 1 applies)* above do not extend to Scotland, sections *(Arbitration agreements: Scotland), (Power of court to disapply section (Arbitration agreements: Scotland) where no detriment to consumer)* and *(Construction of sections (Arbitration agreements: Scotland) and (Power of court to disapply section (Arbitration agreements: Scotland) where no detriment to consumer))* extend to Scotland only, and this Act, apart from sections *(Arbitration agreements: Scotland), (Power of court to disapply section (Arbitration agreements: Scotland) where no detriment to consumer)* and *(Construction of sections (Arbitration agreements: Scotland) and (Power of court to disapply section (Arbitration agreements: Scotland) where no detriment to consumer))*, extends to Northern Ireland.'.—*[Mr. Pawsey.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Bill, as amended, to be reported.

Bill, as amended, to be considered on Friday 15 April.

2.37 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wish it to be known that the objection to the Housing (Houses in Multiple Occupation) Bill came from one solitary Member, the Government Whip. I wish that to be recorded in the *Official Report* as 300 people have died in house fires.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. First, that is not a point of order. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman must not seek to make a speech to explain why he thinks that it is a point of order.

ABORTION (TREATMENT OF NON-RESIDENT WOMEN) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

RIGHT OF PRIVACY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 15 April.

SLAUGHTER OF DEER BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [11 December].

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Debate to be resumed what day? No day named.

NORTHERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

COAL MINING SUBSIDENCE (PREVENTION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 15 April.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 17th February, notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (1)(b) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted Business), Mr. Speaker shall put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Ridley relating to Local Government Finance not later than one and a half hours after the first of them has been entered upon.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 18th February, notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (1)(b) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted Business), if proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. Secretary Ridley relating to Local Government have not been previously disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall at Ten o'clock put the Question thereon. —*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Water (Wales)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

2.38 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The subject of this debate is the fascinating one of Welsh water. Wales is drenched in water and sometimes, sadly, drowned in water. Sumptuous qantities of rain and snow fall and feed our fabulous rivers and lakes. Water has been the inspiration of our artists and poets for generations, whether it be the surging mountain streams of Snowdonia, or the still quiet beauty of the reens of the Gwent wetlands.

Sadly, in the midst of that abundance, there is a great shortage of water, and our task this afternoon is to consider the mundane use of water as a basic necessity of life. Perhaps uniquely in Wales, water has become a politically explosive issue. The story is a joyless one of high charges, exploitation and bitterness that springs from a deep injustice, which is felt widely. However, there is worse to come and the present situation is desperate.

In spite of the great achievements of the Welsh water authority, many of its efforts have been frustrated by the Government. Sadly, it has acted as the punch bag for blows that should more accurately have been aimed at the Government. I am especially grateful to the Welsh water authority for taking a decision that arose out of a complaint from a pensioner who is a constituent of mine.

My attention was drawn to the fact that a new charge was to be levied by the water authority. It was a particularly mean and unjust charge, in that it was planned to charge an extra 50p to all those who took advantage of instalment payments. They are the people who can least afford to pay large bills, and they were to be penalised by a charge of an extra £5 per year for their 10 transactions. Happily, I was informed yesterday that the Welsh water authority, to its great credit, has dropped that charge. As I understand it, it is the only authority in the country to do so. That fair and reasonable decision will lift a little of the onerous burden of those charges that fall so frequently and so heavily on those who can least afford it. That is some consolation but, sadly, only a small one.

For many years the Welsh water authority and the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs has argued that rebates on water rates should be allowed in the same way as rebates are allowed on general rates. The Government have always refused. In Wales we have long been cheated on our water bills. Every statistical analysis, from whatever base chosen, shows the same bleak story. There are high costs, which are getting worse. They are getting worse in real terms and in terms relative to the rest of Britain.

From 1981-82 to 1987-88 the average national total for water supplies, sewerage and environmental services has increased in England and Wales from £60 to £99. That is an increase of £39. However, in Wales alone, the increase has been staggering; from £69 to £122. That is a difference of £54. When compared to the 100 index, in 1981 Wales stood at 114 and it has now leapt to 124.

Perhaps a more telling example was revealed in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes). In that answer the average of total domestic bills throughout the country was reduced to a figure of 100, and a comparison was made to show what has happened to that figure since 1978-79. The national figure has increased from 100 to 214. However, the Welsh figure has leapt from 100 to 268. That is a staggering increase.

As I have said, the story has been bleak. Wales has been treated badly. I do not know of any comparison that can be made from any year, however the statistics are approached, that will not give the same result.

What does the future hold? Again, Welsh water consumers are to be hit for six, with charges that are at least twice the rate of inflation. For those who can least afford it—those living in low-rated properties—the rise will be greater. At most it will be a rise of about 25 per cent, but that will be on top of the other increases this year. The standing charge in Wales will soar to the highest level in Britain. From April it will be a massive £36, compared with £6 in Yorkshire, and it will be more than twice as high as the next highest charge—£17 in the south-west.

Water charges will also clobber Welsh industry. They are probably the most expensive in Britain. They are 50 per cent. higher than the cost in London, and the fixed charges for those in industry with water meters is six times greater than the cost to industry in Birmingham.

It is ironic that those charges are a direct result of Government policy. It is frustrating and mocking all the other Government policies for making Wales a magnet for footloose industry. Again, Wales is about to be cheated and forced into an unjust straitjacket by the Government.

One has sympathy for the embattled Welsh water authority because it is being squeezed from every direction. The crude current cost-accounting system penalises present payers for the debts of the distant past and the cost of water facilities for future generations.

The sins of omissions by our Victorian grandparents have left a legacy of debt, which now stands at £450 million, and which this year will cost £54 million to fund. They have left us the legacy of crumbling sewers and sea outfalls that mean that 30 per cent. of our beaches do not conform to European standards for safe bathing.

We are also funding the future. Some £73 million—the bulk of which comes not from capital but from revenue, although it is capital spending—is being spent to provide services, many of which will last for 100 years for the benefit of future generations. Welsh water ratepayers are shouldering those costs and debts. Many of those debts are British national debts, not specific Welsh debts.

In the summer our seaside towns experience a four or fivefold increase in population from holidaymakers. They are welcome, but they place an enormous burden on the costs of dealing with pollution and sewage, without contributing a single penny to the cost of Welsh water.

There is the daunting future problem of the acidification of our lakes. The problem is growing at an alarming pace and there are no cheap solutions to this national and international problem. We are encumbered by the past, the future, the environment, the polluted beaches, the holidaymakers and by the distortion of the simplified economics being applied to the Welsh water authority. Yet again the Government are insisting on an inappropriate and artificially high rate of return on investment. They are insisting that the Welsh water authority applies an incongruous cost-accounting system, which will lead to the grotesque spectacle of Welsh water rates spiralling yet again beyond sense or justice.

If that were not enough, the Government have decided that the straitjacket that they have applied to the Welsh

water authority should again be tightened. Tougher new financial targets have been set, including an irrationally high rate of return on assets. The long-term capital improvements should be paid for over a long period by those who are benefiting from them. However, the Government are insisting that they be financed by the present generation of ratepayers out of revenue. Water rates are being used to raise money that should be found from the Exchequer. Water rates are being used to collect taxes on an unfair basis because they place the heaviest burden on those families who can least afford it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington, in the recent debate on the Public Utility Transfers and Water Charges Bill, made a convincing case for the claim that the Government are covertly planning to make water meters compulsory. That is an alarming prospect. I shall not repeat the evidence that he produced, as I have drawn it to the Minister's attention, but it fits precisely the Thatcherite view.

Water meters will be an extra obstacle costing about £100 per dwelling, which is equivalent to an initial cost of £100 million to £150 million for Wales alone. Water meters have to be serviced, read, repaired and replaced every seven years. The Government are conducting trials, and it is certainly part of their view and their narrow philosophy that the only mensure of virtue and efficiency is the balance sheet and that everything must be paid for in a precise way.

Water meters seem likely to be forced on us. How else will the Government gauge the charge that people will have to pay for their water rates, which are now based on rateable values? After the poll tax there will be no rateable values, unless the whole panoply of rateable values is to be kept just to assess the level of water rates. Is that what the Government have in mind? The new imposition will be wasteful and unnecessary, and I should like the Minister to explain the Government's intentions.

Finally, compulsory metering is opposed by the water authorities and by most people who know about it. About a quarter of the customers of the Welsh water authority have installed metering because they see it as an escape from the excessively high charges. However, those are the people who use the smallest amount of water. That has exacerbated the situation and led to higher bills for everyone else.

What are the Government's proposals on metering? Domestic rate relief used to be a cushion that Wales was given to compensate for the disadvantages of the terrain and the real problems involved in getting water from the hills into people's homes. That cushion was to compensate for high water bills, and was removed by the Government. What alternative do they now have in mind, or are they content to see our water bills spiralling out of control? Will the Minister tell us what the Exchequer will do to wipe off the legacy of debt which has become increasingly irrelevant?

That is a particularly important point in my constituency. In Newport, a splendid profitable water undertaking was handed over to us which provided cheap water, yet in a few years our water rates have risen by more than 2,500 per cent.

When can we expect national funding to tackle the truly national problems of polluted beaches and acid rain? Those creating the main problem on the beaches are not from Wales. Why should the water ratepayers in Cardiff and Newport, who spend their holidays elsewhere, or perhaps have no holidays because they are saving up for private medical insurance, pay to deal with the problem when people from Stoke-on-Trent and Birmingham, who use the beaches in great numbers, cause the problem but do not pay for it?

When will there be a system of rebate for water rates which every hon. Member on the Standing Committee, which had a Conservative majority, decided would be fair and reasonable? When are we to have realistic rates and targets for Welsh water that can be achieved without continually spiralling costs? If the Minister cannot answer those questions are the people of Wales right to assume that an artificial position is being imposed on Welsh water purely to serve the Government's main interest, to fatten up the industry as a juicy prize for the speculators when privatisation comes about?

2.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ian Grist): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on raising this subject. He was not a Member when the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs considered this subject at considerable length but it may pay him to read the report of that Committee, which was chaired by the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), in which he will find a number of answers to many questions that he has raised. For answers to some of the other questions the hon. Gentleman will have to wait until next Session when we produce our Bill on water privatisation.

The hon. Gentleman was right in saying that this is a warm subject in Wales. It has been for many years. I remember during the 1970s when the Welsh water authority came into its own and we had considerable problems. The authority is a considerable organisation. It employs 4,500 people. It has fixed assets of £2 billion. It provides 2·7 million people with water — and, as the hon. Gentleman said, more in the tourist season. It is responsible for more than 22,000 km of water mains, more than 14,000 km of sewers and 5,700 km of main river. It has within its area a coastline 1,300 km long and the estuaries, the waters of which it has to assess for quality, have nearly 500 km of shoreline. It owns 90 reservoirs, 900 service reservoirs, 250 water treatment works, over 400 water pumping stations, and so on. In 1986-87 its annual report showed an income of £207 million, a profit of £25 million and capital expenditure of £62 million.

The main activities of the Welsh water authority are the provision of water resources, water supply and sewerage and sewage treatment services. These basic activities account for over 90 per cent. of the authority's operating expenditure, but it also undertakes a number of other important activities, including environmental conservation, fisheries, navigation, flood defence and land drainage. It also regulates other users of water. It controls, through a licensing system, the abstraction of water from rivers and other sources. Its consent is needed for the discharge of effluent into lakes, rivers and other places where water might be contaminated. It has, therefore, a wide role and it must be able to fund its activities adequately, bearing in mind the needs of its customers and the contribution that it plays in safeguarding the health of people and developing the economy of the area that it serves.

The hon. Member for Newport, West referred to the financial policy of the Welsh water authority. Its ambitious programme of efficiency measures has been

[Mr. Ian Grist]

taken, and with considerable success, both on the water authority's own initiative and in response to Government controls designed to ensure that the water authority operates within a proper commercial environment. The programme has taken place at a time when there is increasing public awareness of environmental issues and a demand for more resources to be given to issues such as water quality, pollution prevention and bathing water standards — all matters to which the hon. Gentleman referred and which form a growing part of the authority's work. At the same time, the authority must meet statutory requirements in respect of water quality, sludge disposal, dangerous substances and discharges to coastal waters, including the Control of Pollution Act 1974. It has not been easy, but the Government's challenging and demanding performance aims have led to a real reduction in operating costs.

The Government, in conjunction with the water authorities, have set certain objectives. The authorities must provide an acceptable level of service having regard to costs and the environment, remedy deficiencies over a reasonable period, and achieve these aims at least cost by steadily improving efficiency. Three constraints are set. Performance aims set a limit to the amount that the Welsh water authority can spend on running its services—and the figure is reduced progressively in real terms to spur increased efficiency. The financial target requires the Welsh water authority to achieve a percentage rate of return on its net current cost assets. This target has been gradually increased from 0·3 per cent. in 1981-82 to 1·65 per cent. in 1986-87. I am delighted to say that the authority has consistently achieved its targets. The current year's target is 1·95 per cent. and that for 1988-89 is 2·35 per cent.

The third constraint, the external financing limit, restricts the amount the authority can borrow from external sources. The external financing limit has been gradually reduced. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will shortly be writing to the chairman of the Welsh water authority to inform him of next year's limit. The decline in the external financing limit reflects Government policy, which is to reduce the burden that nationalised industries impose upon public expenditure and to ensure that, as far as possible, they make a sufficient rate of return to finance their own activities. However, it is worth noting in this context that the proposals for 1988-89 show that investment by the authority is expected to be £70 million, 30 per cent. above 1985-86, in cash terms. The policy has greatly strengthened the financial position of the authority and reduced the burden of interest payments for consumers.

There is a tendency in Wales — and the hon. Gentleman gave voice to it—to relate water charges to rainfall and to argue that, because we have so much free water falling, its supply should be equally inexpensive. One only wishes that the provision of wholesome water was that easy, but it is not, and the Welsh water authority has to do a great deal to get water of the right standard to the household tap and to dispose of household effluent.

The hon. Gentleman referred to costs. It is worth pointing out that in the period from 1975-76 to 1987-88, six of the nine English water authorities increased their average charges by more than the Welsh water authority. Of the three water authorities whose charges have increased by less, only Severn Trent is significantly lower. The differential between charges is therefore reducing, so that while in 1975-76 the highest charge was 71 per cent. above the lowest, in 1987-88 the differential was only 41 per cent.

This year, the Welsh water authority estimates that it will require to meet expenditure of £260 million—£16·5 million more than last year — resulting in an average increase in charges of 8 per cent. Of the sum required, about half is to meet running costs — the costs of manpower, local authority rates, power, materials, and so on. Over 20 per cent. is needed to pay the interest charges on current debts and 27 per cent. to meet new capital investment. For example, in the south-east division capital expenditure will complete the Wye transfer to protect the area against drought; there will be a replacement water treatment works at Maerdy; major improvements to water distribution systems at Gilfach Goch, Blaenavon and Brecon; supplies to new housing areas; alterations to older dams to bring them into line with new standards; sewerage and sewage disposal improvements at Caerphilly, Troedyrhiw and Llantrisant; continuation of the west Barry scheme which will improve bathing waters at Barry island and the Knap; and expenditure on the Newlands sewage treatment works which serves Gwent's eastern valleys and affects the quality of water in the Usk. Security measures and warnings will be introduced at numerous sites and radio communication and remote monitoring of installations will make the response to customers problems more effective. All this will cost £23 million.

This is perhaps an appropriate point to refer briefly to the hon. Member's call for finance to clean up beaches and improve water quality. The Government fully share the concern to ensure that the quality of water and beaches is improved. I wonder though whether the hon. Member fully appreciates what is already being done. The Welsh water authority already has clear objectives to bring about improvements, and much of its expenditure is designed to meet these objectives. For example, the west Barry scheme, to which I referred earlier, will greatly improve the beaches at Barry island and the Knap. As for the future and what more might be done, all I can say at present is that we are studying the position urgently with the water authorities.

Let me remind hon. Members of how much the picture has already changed since 1974, when the authority was first established. I fear that we take too much for granted. The authority replaced 209 separate river authorities, water undertakings and sewerage and sewage disposal authorities. It took over a mixed inheritance with a complex of assets, some in good condition and others providing a totally inadequate level of service. It also took over a considerable debt. There were some areas where water resources were so inadequate that the supply failed after but a few weeks of dry weather. It is worth remembering how the Welsh water authority was able to cope with the drought of 1984 without having to fall back to the conditions that we had in 1976—a lesser drought. I can remember that Cardiff's water supply was reduced to two hours a day.

In other areas, the mains were incapable of carrying the supply demanded. In the authority's annual report in 1982, Mr. Haydn Rees, the chairman, reported that it had been the accepted practice in west Gwynedd, in holiday periods, for water to be available only on alternate days. In most areas, records of public sewers were poor, and in coastal areas sewage was often discharged to the sea

untreated. Many inland sewage treatment works had been neglected. Some appeared to be abandoned, and, in some instances where treatment tanks were full of settled sludge, there were substantial trees growing in them.

This was the difficult legacy the Welsh water authority took over and it had serious long-term implications for both capital and revenue costs. In the succeeding years, much had to be done, and since then the Welsh water authority has invested over £600 million in fixed assets. Major strides have been made, particularly in the period since the reorganisation of the water authority in 1982. Efficiency and the services provided have been enhanced.

Between 1982 and 1987, turnover increased by 46 per cent. while operating costs rose by only 25 per cent. In fact, at 1986-87 prices, operating costs fell by 4 per cent. between 1982 and 1987 and they are expected to fall by a further £1 million—1 per cent.—in 1988-89. In the same period, total expenditure rose by 22 per cent., but the differential between turnover and expenditure meant that the water authority had turned the loss of almost £8 million in 1981-82 into a surplus of £25 million in 1986-87. In the same period, the number of employees fell by 15 per cent. and capital expenditure, which between 1974 and 1979 rose by only 11 per cent. rose by 33 per cent. The water authority's rate of return on its net current cost assets has risen fivefold.

The hon. Member also raised the question of giro charges for payment by instalments. As he said, the authority did consider not using that method, but it has now reversed its original decision and decided to continue to pay giro charges this year for those who use the Post Office to pay water charges. This will be of direct benefit to lower-income consumers. That policy is not without cost to the water authority and it will keep the situation under review. No decisions either way have been made about continuing the policy after 1989.

The hon. Gentleman raised the point that the increase in the Welsh water authority's charges is above the current rate of inflation. I can assure him that neither the Secretary of State nor I have any desire to see water charges rise by more than is necessary. The water authority is very well aware of our views on this. In fact the Welsh water authority is very conscious of the need to be efficient and to cut costs while meeting statutory needs and providing the highest possible standard of service to its customers, commensurate with efficiency and proper costing. The average household is paying £2·60 a week for its water and sewerage and all the other services provided by the Welsh water authority. This, I understand, is less than the admission charge to one of Newport county's home games. The increase in charges for the average household will be 23p a week—about the cost of one pint of milk.

We are being provided with a valuable service at little cost. That is not to be complacent. The Government still believe that there is room for further cuts in operating costs and thus benefits to the consumer, but increased charges are necessary to allow the water authority to pay for the services and improvements that it demands.

It is certainly true that the Welsh water authority's charges are among the highest in England and Wales—only Anglian's exceed it——

The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at eight minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 15 February 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Imprisonment of a Member

Mr. Speaker: I have received a letter from the chief magistrate of the Belfast petty sessions informing me that Mr. Robert Roy Beggs, the hon. Member for Antrim, East, has been sentenced to imprisonment for seven days following non-payment of a fine for an offence under article 3 of the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987. I shall cause the text of the letter to be published in the Votes and Proceedings and in the *Official Report*.

Following is the letter:

Dear Mr. Speaker,
Robert John Beggs, Member of Parliament for East Antrim, was convicted by me at Belfast Petty Sessions on 11 December 1987, of taking part in a public procession, contrary to Article 3 of the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987. I fined him £20·00, to be paid within 28 days.
As that fine has not been paid Mr. Beggs was today committed to Prison for a period of 7 days.
Yours faithfully,
C. P. McRandal
Resident Magistrate

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY

Power Stations and Overhead Lines

1. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received on Statutory Instrument (S.I., 1987, 2182) on the "Rules of Guidance for Public Inquiries into new Power Stations and Overhead Lines", since it was laid before the House on 18 December 1987; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Cecil Parkinson): In addition to the report by the Select Committee on Energy, I have received two representations from the public on this matter.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Secretary of State agree that if nuclear power deserved even half the affection lavished on it by the right hon. Gentleman, the Prime Minister and the chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board, proposed new power stations, such as Hinkley Point C —which will probably be the first subject of the public inquiry rules which are being promulgated under the statutory instrument — would be able to withstand a comprehensive and proper public inquiry, not one whose rules are rigged in favour of the CEGB?

Mr. Parkinson: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has got it wrong. It was the Select Committee on the Environment that suggested that the rules should be modernised, and that was in 1985-86, long before Hinkley Point was first thought of.

Mr. Colvin: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the object of changing the rules is to speed up public inquiries, and that the Sizewell B inquiry took far too long? Will he also confirm that the public inquiry into Hinkley Point C should take less than half as long as the Sizewell B inquiry, in which three quarters of the time was spent on discussing the PWR? Those arguments are already concluded, and the only question that arises from the Hinkley Point C application is the environmental one.

Mr. Parkinson: My hon. Friend is right. The inquiry at Hinkley Point will, in theory, reconsider some of the ground that was gone over during the Sizewell B inquiry. I stress, however, that the Government have no intention of shortening the inquiry or preventing objectors from having a say. We want a more orderly and comprehensive form of inquiry, which is what the Select Committee said was needed.

Mr. Eadie: How does the right hon. Gentleman dispute the charge that the rules were slipped through two days before the Christmas recess and that no press release was issued — which was very mysterious, because the Department of Energy works through press releases? How does the right hon. Gentleman intend to make clear to the people and Parliament that all this is not contrary to the public interest and that rights have not been taken away?

Mr. Parkinson: I repeat that a Select Committee of the House has said that public inquiries were too long and complex and were unfair to the objectors. It was because of the wishes of objectors, among others, that the new rules were introduced. The hon. Gentleman is basing his argument on a wholly fallacious point.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Does my right hon. Friend agree that all those who want a public inquiry to be a genuine inquiry, rather than a restatement of entrenched positions, will welcome the rules of guidance? Will he confirm that the provision against irrelevant or repetitious statements should enable the Hinkley Point inquiry, which will take place in my county of Somerset, to concentrate on aspects that are relevant to Somerset and to that site, rather than allow a four-year re-run of the Layfield inquiry into a similar power station in Suffolk?

Mr. Parkinson: I believe that the Hinkley Point C inquiry should be comprehensive. I am afraid that, post-Chernobyl, there will be a re-run of some of the Sizewell arguments, but I do not think anyone stands to gain if the appeal procedure is used as a way of preventing decisions. That was never the intention of inquiries. We want a full inquiry, but we do not want a tedious, repetitious inquiry, in which people use the inquiry procedure to prevent a decision being made.

Coal Prices

2. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has on the pricing of coal agreed between the Central Electricity Generating Board and British Coal.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Michael Spicer): The price of coal purchased by the Central Electricity Generating Board from British Coal is governed by an understanding between the two industries agreed in 1986. In accordance with this understanding, pricing terms were reviewed on 1 November last year for the 12 months to October 1988.

Mr. Powell: Will the review create a position in which considerably more imported coal will enter this country? Will the Minister consider the effects of this great importation on the closure of collieries, particularly in the Principality? Will he also consider whether it would be wise to try to expand the mining industry by opening the Margam mine?

Mr. Spicer: The review has nothing to say about imports of coal. British Coal is making its prices more competitive under the terms of the present agreement. However, we have always said that when the electricity industry is privatised it will be able to buy coal in the best market. We say that because we know that British Coal is quite capable of being the best market.

Mr. Andy Stewart: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, as a result of increased productivity in the past two years British Coal has reduced the price of coal by £4 per tonne —costing British Coal £400 million—and that the way to beat foreign competition is through productivity?

Mr. Spicer: That is absolutely right. British Coal has reduced prices, and that reduction has benefited consumers by £500 million since April 1986.

Dr. Marek: If the Minister is happy with the present pit-closure policy, what analysis has he made of the future price of coal on world markets?

Mr. Spicer: The future of coal will be determined by those markets. We have made no particular analysis because, unlike the Opposition, we do not plan on these things. However, British Coal will have to compete in world markets according to how the markets are determined.

Mr. Sackville: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a limit to how much longer consumers, including the elderly, should be expected to pay inflated prices for electricity so that British Coal can continue to sell at nearly twice the world market price?

Mr. Spicer: The coal industry will have to bear that strongly in mind as it faces increasing competition. That is why we want to see new practices introduced into the coal industry and why each working day we are putting £2 million of taxpayers' money behind the coal industry.

Mr. Hayes: I am not surprised at the kind of replies that we are receiving from the Minister today. Is he aware that, unlike him, I fight for Britain? What about the British coalmining industry and British mineworkers? I object to the South African imports, which are produced with cheap, slave labour. It is time that the Minister said, as we are saying, "Let us fight for Britain".

Mr. Spicer: I have already said that the British coal industry should be backed. There is no question about that. However, it should be backed only if it can provide coal at competitive prices. Otherwise the electricity consumers—as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) has said—will be the loser.

Electricity Generation

3. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of the electricity produced by coal-fired power stations comes from stations on coastal sites.

Mr. Parkinson: I am advised by the CEGB that, in the financial year 1986-87, 15 per cent. of electricity produced by coal-fired power stations came from stations on coastal sites.

Mr. Stern: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that it is in the interests of the nation as a whole and in the interests of whatever company or companies are generating electricity that more coastal sites should be encouraged so that the electricity generation industry can take maximum advantage of acquiring coal at world prices, whether that coal comes from this country or abroad?

Mr. Parkinson: As my hon. Friend has just said, when the industry is privatised we will not force it to buy British coal. Equally, we believe that if British Coal continues to be productive and to improve its performance it will become the supplier of choice. We cannot make it the supplier of necessity. We are not prepared to do that. We believe that it is capable of being the supplier of choice.

Mr. Prescott: Will the Secretary of State tell us why he so emphatically believes that the coal industry, after privatisation of the electricity industry, should be dictated by market conditions and choice and that he should not force a decision upon it, when he is prepared to force a decision on the nuclear industry at higher cost to the CEGB? Why this inconsistency? Will the Secretary of State stop dithering and tell us that he will produce a White Paper before the privatisation of the electricity industry?

Mr. Parkinson: The Government believe that there is an important security element in electricity supply which

comes from diversity. We want to see diverse sources of supply—nuclear, coal, gas, oil and renewables. There is nothing inconsistent about that.

So far as the coal industry is concerned, the hon. Gentleman should use his influence with his friends in the National Union of Mineworkers and tell them that the more overtime bans and work to rules there are, and the more problems the industry imposes on itself, the worse its prospects will be.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, with the power stations located on the east coast, the Government will do their best to ensure that sulphur emissions are minimal, because of the effects on other countries?

Mr. Parkinson: Yes. An investment programme of about £800 million is planned to introduce emission controls into some of our coal-fired power stations. All new power stations will have those controls built into them. My hon. Friend is on to an important point.

Wind Power (Wales)

5. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to increase support for wind power development in Wales.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My Department is discussing future plans for wind energy research and development with major wind turbine manufacturers and the generating boards.

Mr. Howells: I have received many complaints from those in favour of wind power that the Government are not willing to support them, financially or otherwise. If this is true, why?

Mr. Spicer: It is not true, so I should not have to answer the second part of the question. However, I can say that the current rate of expenditure on wind power development is £4 million. I hope to make an announcement about our plans for wind farms within the next month or so.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is significant that the energy suggestion of the Liberal party is wind power? Does he agree that such stations would have great difficulty if the wind blew in opposite directions, as it would do under any alliance?

Mr. Spicer: My hon. Friend makes his own point. It is interesting that the Liberal party does not appear to take into account the fact that there are great environmental costs as well as benefits from wind power.

North Sea Oil

6. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what estimates he has made of levels of exploration and activity in the North sea in 1988.

The Minister of State, Department of Energy (Mr. Peter Morrison): I have been encouraged by the general increase in offshore activity in 1987 compared with 1986, and the figures will be published shortly in the 1988 Brown Book. I am cautiously optimistic that the recovery will continue in 1988.

Mr. Irvine: Will my hon. Friend tell the House how those levels compare with earlier levels stretching back to 1964, when exploration began? Will he confirm that the main area of activity is concentrated on the northern and central sectors of the North sea? Will he also confirm that the southern sector suffers a much less favourable tax regime, and will he tell the House what steps he proposes to take to encourage development of oil and gas reserves in the southern sector of the North sea?

Mr. Morrison: In answer to the first part of my hon. Friend's question, it is the third highest level of activity ever. Given the price of oil, which is below $20 a barrel, that is satisfactory.

In answer to the second part of my hon. Friend's question, may I say that he flatters me in thinking that I have the powers of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The point made by my hon. Friend has already been made to me and has no doubt been made to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Against a general and welcome background of increased activity in the North sea, will the Minister give some indication of what possibility there is for security of employment in the oil fabrication yards, particularly those in Highland regions, which are major employers and, obviously, would be expecting some spin-off effects from increased activity?

Mr. Morrison: I am glad that the hon. Lady welcomes the increased activity. She will appreciate, representing Moray, that the time between exploration and development and orders from the fabrication yards is somewhat of a lead situation. One hopes that the activity will improve.

Mr. John Garrett: Now that Britoil is on the point of being taken over by BP, which is one fifth owned by Kuwaiti interests, what steps is the Minister taking to safeguard the national interests in the North sea by the use of the golden share; a share insisted on by his predecessor to ensure the independence of Britoil? What does the Minister judge the national situation to be in terms of jobs in Britoil and the exploitation of Britoil assets in the North sea?

Mr. Morrison: The hon. Gentleman cannot have been listening to what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has said. He has said that he will retain the special share so long as it is in the national interest. Talks are going on between Britoil, BP and the Treasury and they will ensure that Scottish and North sea interests are very much to the fore.

Electricity Prices

7. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what further representations he has received regarding the proposed increase in electricity prices.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have received a number of representations.

Mr. Pike: Has not the Secretary of State said that the rate of increases is faster than that which the chairman of the CEGB would have wished? Does the Minister recognise that this is of serious concern to many industries, which believe that this will put them at a disadvantage in the face of European competition? If the Government do not change their policy, they are likely to put more jobs in jeopardy.

Mr. Spicer: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will be interested in the facts about this. The United Kingdom's domestic electricity prices are among the lowest in Europe and will continue to be so after April. For typical industrial consumers electricity prices will remain at about the average for Europe after the increase in April. After the April increase, United Kingdom industrial electricity prices will continue to be lower than the average prices in the United States and Japan.

Mr. Hannam: Is my hon. Friend aware that the South Western electricity board is proposing a 12 per cent. increase in prices next year? In an area of below average incomes, will this not be damaging? Will my hon. Friend have discussions with the electricity board to try to prevent such a large increase?

Mr. Spicer: We have been enjoying such low electricity prices largely because the industry has been earning an exceptionally low rate of return on investments. As the industry now requires considerable new investment——

Mr. Skinner: It is being fattened up.

Mr. Spicer: Whatever the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) may say about fattening up, whether the industry was in the public or the private sector, it would have to increase its rate of return.

Mr. Hardy: When the Government announced the price increase, it was suggested that it was done to provide the CEGB with an adequate capacity to invest. When the figures were examined, it appeared that the CEGB had already budgeted for £1 billion of investment before the price increase. Is the Minister sure that this increase is necessary, or are he and his colleagues determined that the price increase will go ahead to provide a sweetener for privatisation and reduce the competitive edge of British industry?

Mr. Spicer: Between now and the year 2000 there will have to be investment of £45 billion—in outturn prices —so that the industry can meet demand. To achieve that rate of investment, the industry—whether it is in the private or public sector—has to start to gear itself up to the approximate 5 per cent. rate of return that the Labour party agreed was an appropriate rate of return in the public sector.

Dr. Michael Clark: Should not electricity prices be competitive to the user industry but commercial from the supply industry in order that the massive investment can be properly serviced? Do not some companies, such as chemical companies, use large amounts of electricity, particularly if they have to heat their products first before electrolysing them? Therefore, will my hon. Friend consider a special form of tariff for those high users of electricity in the chemical industry?

Mr. Spicer: I agree with what my hon. Friend has said. There are arrangements whereby heavy users have a 6 per cent. discount.

Mr. McAllion: Does the Minister accept that the rise in electricity prices is the third heavy blow that the Government have dealt to pensioners this winter? Already £3·5 million has been cut from the Government's allocation for home insulation grants, pensioners on supplementary benefit have been expected to meet 10 per cent. of the costs of insulation materials and now the cost of electricity is to increase at more than twice the rate of inflation. Does the Minister not have on his conscience the report from Winter Action on Cold Homes, which is in *The Independent* today? That shows that more than 5 million pensioners cannot afford to heat their homes properly and that up to 30,000 pensioners die every year from cold-related causes. Why is he making them pay the price of privatisation?

Mr. Spicer: First, there will be no rises until April. Secondly, when those rises take place domestic consumers will be 6 per cent. better off in real terms than they were five years ago. Thirdly, pensions have kept pace with inflation over the past five years and domestic electricity prices have fallen by 15 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my hon. Friend accept that most of us are anxious to believe the story that he tells us, but that we find ourselves with a certain complexity? Lord Marshall said that what the Minister now says is not exactitude and the Confederation of British Industry, which is involved in trying to make industry prosperous, also thinks that what the Minister said is an inexactitude. Who should we believe—them or the Minister?

Mr. Spicer: Me, Sir.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: The Minister speaks of the need to increase the rate of return for the industry. Does he not accept the CBI figures, which suggest that a 4·75 per cent. rate of return on Treasury figures is equivalent to a 16 to 18 per cent. rate of return on the normal, non-inflation adjusted figures that business uses and that that rate of return exceeds that of many high-risk, let alone low-risk, industries? Does he accept that many pensioners, industrialists and others are bitter and angry about the increases that are being imposed by the Government, not for a rate of return, but to make the industry privatisable and to increase the money going to those people who can afford to buy it?

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman forgot to mention that if we are taking a historic cost basis of 16 per cent., the average historic cost basis for industry is 18 per cent. We are not even going to reach that level after this rise.

Mr. Rost: Is not the main justification for demanding a slightly higher rate of return now the prospect of cheaper electricity in the future? It will surely stimulate investment in new technology, particularly by the private sector generators, which would allow more competition and lower prices in the future.

Mr. Spicer: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on two grounds. First, it will encourage new and modern investment in the industry. Secondly, as we privatise the industry, there will be increased pressures on the cost efficiency of the industry, which in the long term will bring down the relative prices.

Mr. Prescott: Does the Minister accept that his answers will not be acceptable to the House? Can he confirm that he is to meet the CBI to hear its representations on a study that has just been concluded by the London Business School, looking into whether the claims of the Government that the rate of return on capital and profits are necessary for investment in the industry? The conclusion of that report, which is quoted in the press, is that the rise in electricity prices is unnecessary and inappropriate and does not stand critical examination. In reality, the increase is totally unjustified. The Government

are simply fattening up the industry for privatisation, and the cost is being paid by the misery and deaths of pensioners who are paying price increases of twice the rate of inflation.

Mr. Spicer: I can confirm that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I will be meeting the CBI in the near future. At that meeting we shall be putting forward precisely the same points as I have been putting to the House this afternoon.

Mr. Forth: Is my hon. Friend surprised at the reaction to the increase from, for example, the CBI, which is conceding up to 8 per cent. average wage increases when labour costs represent over two thirds of its total costs whereas electricity represents only a small percentage of those costs? Does my hon. Friend share my surprise at that?

Mr. Spicer: I share my hon. Friend's surprise because electricity prices represent 2 per cent. of manufacturing costs whereas 46 per cent. of the average firm's costs are represented by labour costs, which have been rising in cash terms by 50 per cent. over the past five years.

British Coal

8. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of British Coal; and what issues were discussed.

Mr. Parkinson: I meet the chairman of British Coal at regular intervals to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Mr. Thompson: At his next meeting with the chairman of British Coal, will the Secretary of State raise the question of the abysmal industrial relations that exist in the coal industry at present? At the moment the major miners' union, the National Union of Mineworkers, has no consultations with British Coal; the deputies union, the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers is in dispute with British Coal; the British Association of Colliery Management, the management union in the industry, has no confidence in British Coal, and the only union that consults British Coal is the Government-sponsored Union of Democratic Mineworkers. Does the Secretary of State not feel that there is a necessity for a full discussion of the industrial relations in that industry?

Mr. Parkinson: I am sure that we all deplore the industrial relations record of the British coal industry, which is doing it enormous harm. The present NACODS' overtime ban is a totally mindless and senseless waste of time and money. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will tell NACODS that, in addition to putting at risk the jobs of its members, it is putting at risk the jobs of thousands of miners, and that the sooner it accepts the offer of binding arbitration, which is on the table, the sooner peace will return to the coal industry.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: When my right hon. Friend sees the chairman of British Coal, will he pass on his congratulations to the Nottinghamshire mineworkers, who have exceeded their previous figure for productivity per man shift three times this year? The figures is now 4·28 tonnes per man shift. Will he reflect that that figure would have continued to increase had it not been for the unfortunate disruption caused by NACODS in the coalfields?

Mr. Parkinson: The way forward for British Coal must be through greater productivity and improved performance. If it continues to achieve that its prospects are good, but if there is industrial strife it will get the reputation being an unreliable and expensive supplier, and the future will be grim.

Mr. Eadie: When the Secretary of State has discussions with the chairman of British Coal, will he find out why the South of Scotland Electricity Board decided to go for open tender for its coal supplies; in short, to invite foreign coal to come in and decimate the Scottish coal industry? Is that because the right hon. Gentleman gave the green light: that in the privatisation of the electricity industry foreign coal could be used in Britain by choice, which would mean jobs for foreign coalminers and unemployment for British coalminers? Is that his policy?

Mr. Parkinson: There has been no change of policy. There has always been freedom to import. I hope that British Coal and the South of Scotland Electricity Board will reach an agreement and that it will be British coal, or Scottish coal if the hon. Gentleman prefers it, that is burnt, but that is a matter for British Coal, not for me.

Coal Industry (Productivity)

9. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the increase in labour productivity in the coal mining industry, since 1983-84.

Mr. Michael Spicer: For the week ending 12 December 1987, average deep mined revenue output per man shift was a record 4·11 tonnes. This represents an increase of nearly 70 per cent. on the average of 2·43 tonnes for 1983-84.

Mr. Knox: The figures show a very satisfactory improvement in recent years. Does my hon. Friend agree that Staffordshire miners have made a particular contribution towards that improvement?

Mr. Spicer: Yes, I accept what my hon. Friend said. They certainly have. Indeed, as I understand it, they have been working full-time during the NACODS' dispute.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister say what possible use increased productivity in the coal industry will be in Scotland if there is no deep-mined coal as a result of the impasse between the SSEB and British Coal? Should not the Secretary of State now accept his responsibility to intervene in these negotiations? Given that the relationship between the two public sector bodies has been destabilised by the privatisation policy, will the Secretary of State accept his responsibility and intervene to save the Scottish coalfield?

Mr. Spicer: That has nothing to do with the privatisation policy. As my right hon. Friend said, the policy of the electricity industry in buying coal where it wants has been in place for some time. It is up to the coal industry throughout the country to respond to that. Although it may not be palatable to Opposition Members, there is a thriving opencast industry in Scotland.

Mr. Colvin: Will my hon. Friend confirm that one way to encourage greater productivity is to improve the facilities for the importation of foreign coal into the United Kingdom? Rather than building a new coal-handling facility at Fawley, which the Central Electricity

Generating Board wants to do, would it not be better for Parliament to abolish the national dock labour scheme, as I am sure the House would do if the Government only gave us the opportunity?

Mr. Spicer: The second part of my hon. Friend's question is not a matter for me or for my right hon. Friend, and nor is Fawley at the moment, because we cannot prejudge the results of the various appeal procedures in the planning process that might be forthcoming.

Sacked Miners (Reinstatement)

10. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next intends to meet the industrial relations director of British Coal to discuss the reinstatement of the miners sacked during the 1984-85 coal strike; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Spicer: The dismissal and re-employment of mineworkers is a matter for the management of the British Coal Corporation.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that it is now nearly three years since the end of the strike and that more than 200 miners are still victimised—sacked—because of the fight that they put up in the 1984-85 strike? Is he aware of the famous quotation from Shakepeare's "The Merchant of Venice":

"The quality of mercy is not strain'd; It droppeth, as the gentle rain from heaven"?

Some of that gentle rain dropped on his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy when he was out in the wilderness and he got his job back. Why does the Front Bench not do some negotiating to get these 200 miners their jobs back?

Mr. Spicer: As the hon. Gentleman has recognised, this is a matter for British Coal. He should also recognise that out of the more than 1,000 miners who were initially dismissed the vast majority have their jobs back. Only 62 could claim to have been unfairly dismissed, and they have been fully compensated.

The matter has to be seen in perspective. Indeed, 9,808 were arrested, 10,372 charges were brought, 160 were sentenced, 37 were sent to detention centres, and 2,550 fines were imposed. That is the context in which the dispute was settled, and it is worth reminding the House of those figures.

NACODS

11. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he intends to meet the general secretary of NACODS to discuss the pay levels of colliery deputies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Parkinson: The pay of colliery officials is a matter for the management of the British Coal Corporation.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the recent productivity increase in the coal industry? Does he share my disgust at the totally irresponsible action and behaviour of the NACODS deputies, who are putting jobs seriously at risk?

Mr. Parkinson: My hon. Friend is right. There is a negotiating procedure between British Coal and NACODS, and, at the end of it, binding arbitration. British Coal has referred the matter to the tribunal, and I hope that NACODS will do the same and that we can find an answer to this damaging and totally unnecessary waste of time.

Mr. Hardy: I express my gratitude to the felicitous approach of the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway). However, the Secretary of State's criticism of NACODS illustrates a serious lack of awareness of the fact that this strike, the first in the association's history, is related to a very much wider range of problems than simply salary. It involves the whole question of British Coal's aggressive approach. For the past fortnight I have been urging the Secretary of State and his ministerial colleagues to meet NACODS and discuss these serious matters.

Mr. Parkinson: NACODS had a very strong position in the industry. It had an agreement with British Coal that it alone would supply overseers. The pay structure was adapted at its request, but it has not worked out as it had hoped. British Coal offered to return to the original structure and offered NACODS arbitration. If the hon. Gentleman has influence with NACODS, I urge him to urge it to go to the tribunal and accept binding arbitration.

Mr. Jack: Does my right hon. Friend agree that industrial action outside the Nottinghamshire coalfield area does little to boost confidence in the minds of customers for coal, and thus undermines the long-term future of the industry?

Mr. Parkinson: My hon. Friend is right. Apart from price, people want to feel that the supplier from whom they are buying is reliable. British Coal is earning a reputation as an unreliable supplier because it has a continuing stream of industrial action. I hope that that will stop and that British Coal will get on with the job of producing lower cost coal at a competitive price.

Coal Prices

13. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if the chairman of British Coal has discussed with him the effect the decline in the dollar has had on the price of coal.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of British Coal at regular intervals to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Mr. Jones: These are very uncertain times for the home industry. What plans does the Minister have to assist and protect the United Kingdom coal industry? May I remind him of the announcement last week of two pit closures in south Wales, in areas of very high unemployment where male unemployment is 1 in 4? We are saying to him that enough is enough. What will he do to protect the home industry?

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman does not care.

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) says that I do not care. I remind him that in the last 20 years 70 per cent. of pit closures have taken place under Labour Governments. The hon. Gentleman should remind himself about that when he talks about people who care. On the question of caring, perhaps I should tell the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) that the Government have spent £6 billion in assisting this industry

—that is £2 million every working day. We have nothing to learn from the Opposition about caring for the coal industry.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Does my hon. Friend agree that our opencast coal has nothing to fear from the decline in the dollar? In the private sector at least, firms are anxious to open up new sites and expand the production of coal mined in Britain, at the expense of imported coal, but they are prevented from doing so by British Coal, which is unreasonably delaying the consideration of licence applications.

Mr. Spicer: My hon. Friend is right to say that opencast coal is able to compete with world prices. What my hon. Friend also implies in his question is that the considerable sums of money that British Coal makes — over £200 million a year — from opencast coal go straight back into the development of deep mines. That is often forgotten by the Opposition.

THE ARTS

Education Reform

38. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what discussions he has had with the Arts Council about the role of the arts in the proposed national curriculum.

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Richard Luce): I last discussed this matter with the chairman at our meeting in January.

Mrs. Clwyd: I thank the Minister for that answer. No doubt he is aware of the widespread concern that all arts subjects, not simply art and music, should be taught to all children in all schools. Will he ensure that that is now a part of the Education Reform Bill, and will he assure us that parents will not have to pay extra for these subjects in schools?

Mr. Luce: I know that the hon. Lady has played a prominent role in the past in connection with the Arts Council. As she may know, education is not my direct responsibility. Nevertheless, I am glad to say that art, music and English, are all core subjects. That shows the importance that the Government attach to this matter.

Mr. Jessel: As my right hon. Friend has just said, it is extremely important that, for the first time ever, music and the arts are to be made compulsory subjects in schools. No Labour Government ever did that, thus proving that Conservatives are much more civilised in government than is the Labour party.

Mr. Luce: As always, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. He is right to acknowledge that this is the first time ever that both art and music have been part of compulsory education throughout school life.

UNESCO

40. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what discussions he has had regarding the effect on the arts of the United Kingdom's non-membership of UNESCO.

Mr. Luce: None, Sir.

Mr. Campbell: Does the Minister not agree that the continued self-exclusion of the United Kingdom from UNESCO is damaging to the arts in Britain? Does he not also agree that if we wish to see changes in UNESCO we would be better involved now, rather than standing on the sidelines, especially as UNESCO is now under different direction?

Mr. Luce: As the House knows, I am not responsible for decisions on UNESCO. That is the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. Having said that, I must tell the House that in the past when we have been a member of UNESCO there has been no particular benefit for the arts in Britain.

Government Policy

41. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what evidence he has about the effects of Government policies on the level of confidence among those involved in the arts.

Mr. Luce: I think it fair to say that my recent three-year grant settlement and provision for incentive funding have been widely welcomed.

Mr. Bowis: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the three-year funding for the Arts Council has been widely welcomed, and would be even more widely welcomed if that was fed through to the client groups sponsored by the Arts Council? Will he talk to the Arts Council to see whether this could be achieved?

Mr. Luce: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support for three-year funding. I started by allocating this money to the Arts Council, and it is now up to the council to negotiate three-year funding agreements with its clients. As I understand the position, the council has decided to allocate next year's grants to a number of its clients. The next stage is to negotiate three-year funding agreements with as many of its clients as can convince the council that it is right to have such agreements. The sooner that that takes place the better.

Mr. Tony Banks: In terms of confidence among the arts, what has the Minister been able to do to assure the arts world about the implications of the notorious clause 28 in the Local Government Bill, which was shamefully passed by the House? What discussions has the right hon. Gentleman had with his ministerial colleagues to ensure that there will be no imposition on artistic freedom by clause 28 being used by highly irresponsible homophobic individuals?

Mr. Luce: I am happy, once again, to give reassurances. I have been in touch with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, and I am advised that local authorities seeking simply to provide the public with access to a comprehensive range of artistic and literary material will not be put at risk by this provision. Indeed, recent Government amendments will strengthen that reassurance.

Black Artists and Companies

42. **Mr. Boateng:** To ask the Minister for the Arts how many black artists and companies received financial support from the Arts Council in each of the past five years.

Mr. Luce: The arts present an opportunity for multi-racial activities. Records held by the Arts Council do not differentiate between grants given to black and to Asian

artists and companies. Records are incomplete, but suggest a substantial increase from about 10 in 1983-84 to 64 in 1987-88.

Mr. Bosteng: I am much obliged to the Minister for his answer. He will be well aware of the good work done by organisations such as the Minority Arts Advisory Service and theatres such as Temba and Tara. Does he share with me a concern to ensure that the Arts Council's target figure of 4 per cent. of total funding is met by some of our great national institutions and by the regional art associations? Will the right hon. Gentleman accordingly agree to publish in the Library the results of the survey being conducted by the Arts Council?

Mr. Luce: If the hon. Gentleman will take this in good heart, I should just say, before I answer his question more fully, that I observed his artistic performances at the weekend, and I think that there is plenty of room for artistic improvement in his work.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's question, it is right that the Arts Council has agreed to devote up to 4 per cent. of its expenditure to supporting ethnic art. This year it is devoting about £750,000 to supporting cultural ethnic minority art.

Mr. Hayward: I thank my right hon. Friend for his earlier answer. May I encourage him to keep records and to award money merely on the basis of merit, and on no other basis?

Mr. Luce: My hon. Friend is right. There is a great variety of culture to be encouraged. The more it is encouraged, the more it enriches cultural life.

National Institutions (Funding)

48. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he intends to take powers to fund directly major national art institutions including the Royal Opera House, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre.

Mr. Luce: No, I think it better that funding arrangements should be made by the Arts Council.

Mr. Butler: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the institutions are making very good progress as it is? Will he assure me that things will not change?

Mr. Luce: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his alertness. It is important to maintain the arm's length principle in the disbursement of all the sums of money to the performing arts. It is right that the allocation to the four flagships should be maintained by the Arts Council, and not directly by me.

Mr. Fisher: Will the Minister confirm that the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal Opera House are not only contributing in a fine way to our arts life, but are doing an enormous amount for the economy by attracting tourists? Why, then, is the success of the National Theatre being penalised by a standstill budget this year? If the Minister is serious about his Government backing success in the arts, why is the Arts Council not investing more money in the National Theatre?

Mr. Luce: I have no doubt of the important role of the four organisations, not just the National Theatre. It is for the Arts Council to decide how it should disburse its money, but it is worth pointing out that £30 million of taxpayers' money goes to the four national companies, which constituted about 20 per cent. of the Arts Council's total budget. It is perfectly open to organisations, such as the National Theatre, to bid for three-year funding, which I assume it will do shortly, and to bid for incentive funding over the next few months. I believe that if they can prove themselves they will be entitled to additional money. It is up to them to negotiate it with the Arts Council.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that some of Peter Hall's productions, good as they always are, are extremely lavish and even unduly expensive? Does he also agree that Peter Hall is directing his target at the right base, which is the Arts Council, which has made its decision on the future funding of the National Theatre, not the Government?

Mr. Luce: Yes, generally speaking the standard of artistic performance at the National Theatre is outstanding. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is for the Arts Council, the National Theatre and other big organisations to decide on the level of budgets. It is for them to negotiate direct with the Arts Council.

CIVIL SERVICE

Personal Communication

55. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service to what extent senior civil servants are trained in personal communication skills.

The Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Mr. Richard Luce): The Government place a high priority on training in oral and written communication skills for senior civil servants. Effective communications play a vital role within all Departments.

Mr. Hughes: Does my right hon. Friend accept that these skills are increasingly important for civil servants who deal with the public, for those seeking to give good customer care and, in particular, for those who have to deal with the media?

Mr. Luce: My right hon. Friend is right. There is no doubt about the importance of customer care and the relationship between the Civil Service and the public, especially when one considers the number of Government Departments providing services direct to the public. Individual Departments, such as the DTI, now run several courses which are designed to give special attention to training on customer care.

Mr. Tony Banks: One of the civil servants most acquainted with communications with the press is Bernard Ingham, the No. 10 press officer. By virtue of the fact that he tends to go out of his way to stab Cabinet Ministers in the back, no doubt on the orders of the Prime Minister, is there a course on the back stabbing of Prime Ministers and Cabinet Ministers? If there is, may we on this side have a go so that we can get ready for it?

Mr. Luce: In view of the number of diaries that have been published by ex-Labour Leaders, I would not have thought that the Labour party needed that sort of course.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Is my right hon. Friend aware that DHSS office managers in constituencies are good at writing letters that are both sympathetic and prompt, and

that this is a good example of communicative skills in the Civil Service? Will he ensure that his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment instructs office managers controlling unemployment benefit offices to take an equal interest in this important skill?

Mr. Luce: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am glad that he has made a positive reference to the contribution of civil servants in dealing with the public and in the service that they provide. He is absolutely right. Sometimes they do this in quite difficult circumstances.

Morale

56. **Mr. Terry Davis:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what further steps he is taking to improve morale in the Civil Service.

Mr. Luce: I am always looking for ways to improve morale in the Civil Service.

Mr. Davis: Does the Minister accept that there are serious grounds for concern when 42 per cent.of the Inland Revenue staff vote against accepting wage increases of up to 16 per cent. simply because they do not trust their employer, the Government? Is it surprising that they do not trust the Government, when the Government decided arbitrarily and without consultation to give to charity the money that is due to retired civil servants because of the Government's error in calculating the retail prices index?

Mr. Luce: Civil Service pay is principally a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that we are moving increasingly to a position where we have flexible pay schemes and additions to cater, in particular, for recruitment and retention problems which arise either in specialist skills or in particular areas. That is the best way to deal with the special problems in parts of the Civil Service.

Mr. Holt: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if there is low morale in the Civil Service in the London area it is because of staff shortages? Many civil servants are having to work undue and unnecessary overtime. Much of this could be eliminated if the Civil Service were moved to other parts of the country, such as my constituency in the north-east of England, where there are many who could fill those jobs, and therefore the morale of the people in the north and in the south would be improved.

Mr. Luce: I take my hon. Friend's point. It is worth noting that four out of five civil servants are already working outside London, in various parts of the country, and that is a sizeable proportion. If, on cost grounds, it is justified to move other civil servants out of London, this continues to happen under the relocation process. In addition, Government Departments have been flexible on staffing and there is some room for manoeuvre in Customs and Excise and in the Department of Health and Social Security.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: It is difficult to improve morale in the Civil Service when there is all this talk about breaking up the Departments and hiving off successive parts of their responsibilities. Does the Minister recall the words of the Fulton committee, which stated that any complete separation of policy-making from execution could be harmful? Is the Minister aware that the only way to settle this problem is to publish the Robin Ibbs report as soon as possible?

Mr. Luce: One of the points to stress to the right hon. Gentleman is that all the evidence suggests that civil servants want to enjoy greater responsibility. In the past few years they have, increasingly, been given that responsibility under the financial management initiative, of which the right hon. Gentleman is aware. It is evident from all our discussions with the Civil Service that it would welcome greater responsibility. I believe that that will make for even more professional management in the Civil Service.

Mr. Soames: Does my right hon. Friend accept that a lot of nonsense is talked about morale in the Civil Service? By and large morale is extremely high because civil servants know that most of them do an excellent job. Does my right hon. Friend also agree that there is great scope for civil servants to exchange more with industry and the private sector, and will he now seek to make substantial progress in that matter?

Mr. Luce: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is certainly the case that in the last few years the Civil Service has achieved a number of great things. It is certainly more professional and much more efficient than it was about 10 years ago. As a result of efficiency scrutinies and the achievements of the Civil Service, more than £1 billion of taxpayers' money has been saved.

My hon. Friend and I attach great importance to secondment and interchange. He will know that there has been a substantial increase in such secondments, and it is something that the Government want to encourage and strengthen still further. I hope that after I have completed my discussions with Government Departments, by about the spring, I shall be able to say something further on that subject.

Dr. Marek: Does the Minister accept that arbitrary or high-handed decisions, without consultation, do nothing whatsoever to increase morale in the Civil Service? Did he listen to the "Today" programme on Radio 4 this morning? If so, he would have heard that the agreement of Mr. Keith Mack, the controller of the national air traffic services, to go to meet the IPCS to talk about safety had to be literally dragged out of him. Can the Minister tell us precisely why he did not talk to the trade unions and the employees—the civil servants—before giving their money away to charity because of the recent RPI error?

Mr. Luce: The hon. Gentleman is aiming some of his questions at other Departments and it is for the relevant Ministers to answer them. I believe that we can say without any doubt that the Government's objective is always to take the interests of civil servants and the unions into account. That is what we seek to do, and that is what we shall continue to do.

Performance Assessment

57. **Mr. Summerson:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how the performance of civil servants is assessed.

Mr. Luce: A new staff appraisal system was introduced in 1985, which assesses the achievement of results by staff against agreed objectives. All Departments have introduced, or are now introducing, the system.

Mr. Summerson: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. To what extent is self-appraisal a major reason why my right hon. Friend's reforms have been so widely welcomed in the Civil Service, by both staff and managers?

Mr. Lace: My hon. Friend is right to focus attention on this matter. The new system of staff-appraisal, which applies to all non-industrial staff, has, on the whole, been widely welcomed by the Civil Service. It means that there is much greater employee involvement in their own affairs and in the affairs of the area in which they work. It enables them to set themselves clear objectives, which I think is in the interests of the Civil Service.

Mr. Allen: Will the Minister reassess the position of civil servants who will be in the firing line on 1 April when the social security changes come into being? Those are the people who will have to take the flak over the counter for the Government's policies. They are in the front line. Will the Minister reassess the terms and conditions of those whom the Government are putting in that exposed position?

Mr. Lace: I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services to that point.

Civil Service College

58. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he next intends to visit the Civil Service college to discuss the future of the college.

Mr. Lace: I discussed the future of the college with its management last week, and I shall be following that up when I visit the London site on 2 March.

Mr. Butler: My right hon. Friend has informed me before of the beneficial close connections that the Civil Service college has with the private sector. Is it not time that the college moved into the private sector?

Mr. Lace: It is right that my hon. Friend should draw attention to the fact that there is already close co-operation between the college and the private sector. Some 60 per cent. of all the speakers who come to the college are from the outside world, and a large number are from the business world. We want to develop that still further. The college provides about 5 per cent. of the total training of the Civil Service, its emphasis is upon general management, and some 20 per cent. of all the training is already done through outside organisations in the private sector.

European Council (Brussels)

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement about the European Council in Brussels on 11-13 February, which I attended together with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. The Council's detailed conclusions are being placed in the Library.

This meeting concluded a major and far-reaching review of the Community's finances and policies. At the outset, the United Kingdom made clear, first, that any further increase in Community resources must be accompanied by effective and legally binding controls on expenditure; second, that there would have to be effective measures to reduce agricultural surpluses, to bring supply and demand much more into balance, and that automatic price penalties on individual commodities would be the principal weapon; third, there should be no oils and fats tax; fourth, that we were determined to preserve in full the system of abating Britain's budgetary contribution agreed at Fontainebleau in 1984, which has saved us some £3,000 million in the past three years. All of these objectives have been achieved.

I shall summarise the main elements of what has been agreed. First, on agriculture, we are now setting in place what have become known as stabiliser measures necessary to control both output and spending. The detailed arrangements vary from commodity to commodity. But the central concept is an automatic price penalty if an agreed quantity of production is exceeded.

For cereals that will mean that, if production exceeds a threshold set for the next four years at 160 million tonnes — that is, 8 million tonnes below the expected 1988 harvest — there will be price cuts of 3 per cent. a year. And the full 3 per cent. cut will apply to the whole crop if production exceeds the threshold by a single tonne.

Those cuts will be cumulative so that if harvests continue to exceed the threshold there will be a 12 per cent. price cut by the fourth year. In addition, there is provision for an increase of up to 3 per cent. in the co-responsibility levy.

For oil seeds, where in the last three years there has been a colossal increase in Community production, even more severe measures have been adopted. The forecast harvest for rapeseed for this year, for example, is 6·3 million tonnes. Nevertheless, the guarantee threshold for rapeseed has been set much lower at 4·5 million tonnes. If the harvest is as forecast, it will mean a price cut of 8 per cent. this year, on top of 10 per cent. last year. The price cuts become even larger in following years if production none the less continues to rise.

The Council had also expected to confirm agreement on stabilisers for eight further commodities, including olive oil, wine, tobacco, fruit and vegetables, milk products and sheepmeat, on which we had decided in principle at our Copenhagen meeting. This agreement has been delayed by France until the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council on 22-23 February. The Dutch Prime Minister and I made clear that our agreement to all the measures before the European Council last week was conditional on the adoption of these eight stabilisers as they are.

In the light of experience, we have insisted that all these controls should be in legally binding form. That is provided in paragraph 19 of the detailed conclusions adopted by the Council, which reads:

> "All the elements set out above are legally binding decisions on the general principles of budgetary discipline. Corresponding legal texts will be adopted to replace the 1984 decision and will remain in force for the duration of the own resources decision. The stabilisers will be incorporated into the agricultural market regulations."

To complement the stabiliser arrangements and further discourage over-production, the Council has agreed to the general principles of a set-aside scheme to take agricultural land out of production. In order to qualify, a farmer must set aside at least 20 per cent. of his arable land for at least five years. Detailed agreement was reached on the maximum premium payable and the level of Community contribution.

To improve overall control of the CAP, we have also tightened the discipline of the financial guideline for agricultural spending. The guideline base for 1988 has been set at a figure of 27·5 billion ecu — about £19 billion — and its application has been reinforced in four separate ways.

First, it is agreed that the Commission's price proposals must in future always be consistent with the guideline.

Second, we have eliminated the general provision for expenditure in so-called exceptional circumstances. In future a specific and limited financial reserve will be established to take account of one factor only — the substantial in-year changes in the dollar/ecu exchange rate, with a budget effect of more than 400 million ecu. If the dollar goes up in value by more than that, there will be an automatic reduction in the amount spent on agriculture.

Third, it has been agreed that the cost of depreciating and disposing of existing surplus stocks will be financed outside the guideline, but within the budget, and that new stocks will be systematically depreciated as they are established.

Fourth, it has been agreed that the guideline itself will in future rise at a rate significantly lower than the total resources available for Community expenditure. The new rate will be three quarters of the rate of growth of Community GNP. Over time, that will reduce the proportion of Community expenditure taken by agriculture, so reversing the trend of the past.

As the second main element, the Council completed the review of the level and objectives of the Community's structural funds — the regional, social and agricultural structures funds. The Council concluded that commitments on the structural funds should increase annually over the period 1989-92 by 1·3 becu a year — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a statement that the House has been waiting to hear.

The Prime Minister: That is equivalent to a total real increase over 1987 of some 80 per cent., and will permit doubling for less developed regions. Particular provision is being made within these funds for a programme of industrial modernisation in Portugal.

Third, we have secured a tightening of arrangements for budgetary management. This will limit the use of carry-over provisions and creative accounting devices, such as

[The Prime Minister]

what are euphemistically called negative reserves, to which there has in the past been excessive recourse, and which have been particularly unwelcome to us.

Fourth, we decided on an increase in the resources available to the Community. These will in future be expressed in terms of Community GNP rather than, as now, of VAT. The Commission originally proposed that the own-resources ceiling should be raised from 1·4 per cent. of VAT to 1·4 per cent. of GNP, equivalent to 2·3 per cent. VAT—in other words, a 50 per cent. increase. The Council rejected this proposal. We decided instead that the Community's new own-resource ceiling for the Twelve should be 1·2 per cent. GNP, which is an increase of some 25 per cent. over the current figure and is realistic in the light of recent trends. This ceiling will last until 1992 at least.

In future, the cost to other member countries of the United Kingdom's abatement will be outside the agreed own-resources ceiling.

Lastly, as the House knows, a key United Kingdom objective throughout these negotiations has been to retain our Fontainebleau abatement in full. The need for it, and its scale, were challenged on various grounds, not least the recent rapid growth of the United Kingdom economy; and proposals were made to confine the correction in future to the gap between our share of Community GNP and our share of agricultural expenditure, and progressively to reduce it.

I made it clear that I was not prepared to contemplate any reduction in the benefit that we receive as a result of the Fontainebleau mechanism. I am glad to tell the House that the Council agreed to this. The Fontainebleau mechanism will, therefore, remain totally intact, and it will, once again, last as long as the new own-resources arrangements.

In practice, thanks to the abatement, Britain's gross contribution should remain a little over 1 per cent. of GNP —well below that of other member states.

The decisions reached will now be translated into firm and legally binding texts. Only when those texts have been agreed will the Government recommend to the House the new level of own resources.

Our achievement in securing more effective control of farm spending should benefit consumers, through lower prices, and farmers, through greater certainty about future market conditions. The share of agriculture in the Community's budget will decline. The British taxpayer will continue to get the full benefit of the Fontainebleau abatement.

The way is now clear for the Community to concentrate on its most important goal—the creation of a genuine single market by 1992.

I commend these substantial results to the House.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): If, as the Prime Minister claims, the objectives of her negotiation have been achieved, why has even the ultra-loyal *Daily Telegraph* described it as

"A British retreat on several fronts"?

More intriguing, what brought that retreat about? Why, for example, having dismissed a rate of growth in agricultural spending of more than 60 per cent. as "extravagant and indefensible", did the Prime Minister accept a figure that she admits to be 74 per cent. when on full, proper and accurate calculation the true figure is nearer 80 per cent?

Why, having described a cereal production ceiling of more than 155 million tonnes as an

"attack on the taxpayer and the housewife",

did the Prime Minister accept a ceiling of 160 million tonnes? That, as she knows — the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is confirming it to her now — is worse than the Copenhagen agreement. No doubt the Minister is also reminding her that he rejected 158 million tonnes as an ineffective stabiliser, yet we now have 160 million tonnes.

On the overall budget figures, will the Prime Minister confirm that the new budget ceiling of between 1·2 and 1·3 per cent. of Community GNP, when compared fairly and properly with the old method of VAT calculation, amounts to a very considerable increase—from 1·4 per cent. to almost 2 per cent.? Those are the official figures. It is an increase not of a quarter, as the Prime Minister claims, but of more than one third.

In the words of *The Times*, even allowing for the vaunted rebate,

"Britain's net contribution will increase."

How does the Prime Minister justify that, and will she attempt to do so this afternoon?

The Prime Minister has offered one excuse for her capitulation — that she has opened the way for the internal market. Since the internal market that she proposes will do immense harm to Britain, she must not expect us to rejoice at that. In addition, her apologists have claimed that, without an agreement, the Community might have collapsed. It is true that the CAP might have collapsed, but the CAP and the Community are not one and the same. As the CAP does such harm to the British consumer and prejudices the whole future of the Community, none of us will rejoice that the CAP has been saved by the endeavours of the Prime Minister last weekend.

Having said that, I shall end with a word of congratulation. May I congratulate the Prime Minister on herself writing the epitaph on the summit before she went to Brussels? She spoke of running away from it — accommodating surpluses, not dealing with them. That is what she has done: she has run away.

The Prime Minister: I doubt very much much whether those who live in Community countries would endorse what has been said by *The Daily Telegraph* or the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). May I point out that the French newspaper *Liberation* says:

"The British Prime Minister can boast of having preserved her cheque . . . and above all of having won the point that she was refused at Fontainbleau: the checking of the inflationary spiral of agricultural subsidies."

Le Figaro says:

"It is likely that in the plane on the way back to London the British delegation was exchanging knowing smiles and satisfied hand-shakes."

In Germany, *Die Welt* stresses the financial sacrifices for the Federal Republic of Germany, estimated as costing Germany 4 billion deutschmarks rising to 10 billion by 1992.

Those countries know that Britain got a good deal. It got the Fontainebleau mechanism, the legally binding regulations that we have long sought, and the stabilisers, by virtue of price reductions. Perhaps the right hon.

Gentleman will be aware that, as recently as 1985, Germany invoked the Luxembourg compromise over a 1·8 per cent. price cut. This time, we have price cuts of 3 per cent. over four years in succession, when it was only three years in succession in the case of Copenhagen.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the 160 million tonnes. That 160 million tonnes—a good deal below the forecast harvest for this year — has the stabiliser operating in full at the first tonne over the 160 million.

Mr. Hattersley: Next year.

The Prime Minister: This year, a 2 per cent. price cut is expected to operate on the incremental arrangements that apply if people keep their own wheat and other cereals in store. Normally, they receive an increased amount. That will be cut, and the reduction will equal 2 per cent. price cuts. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) will stop muttering from a sitting position, which means that he cannot listen.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I can listen.

The Prime Minister: No, the right hon. Gentleman cannot listen. But perhaps he will listen now, if it is not asking too much of him—which I suspect it may be.

The 155 million tonnes did not have the 3 per cent. operating immediately. It went up steadily by only 1 per cent., and the full 3 per cent. was not reached until 160 million tonnes. The 3 per cent. operates immediately on 160 million tonnes, as it would have operated previously, and, because there would have been a slight improvement at 1 and 2 per cent. on the 155 million tonnes, we extended the 3 per cent. cut for a further year. Therefore, we have a 12 per cent. price reduction instead of a 9 per cent. reduction. *[Interruption.]* No, I do not expect that the hon. Gentleman understands it; it is, I confess, very complicated.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the ceiling of between 1·2 per cent. and 1·3 per cent. of GNP. The 1·2 per cent. limit is on a payments basis, because it is payments that must be financed—the 1·3 per cent. limit is on a commitments basis—and is equal to 1·9 per cent. VAT, which is equal to 1·72 abatement exclusive. That is the difference.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to take account of the fact that this is a private Members' day. It would be fair for questions to continue until quarter past four. An agricultural debate follows at 7 pm. I will have to take account of those hon. Members whom I call during this statement and those who may be called later.

Mr. Leon Brittan (Richmond, Yorks): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Opposition's strictures ring hollow in the ears of those who know with what bitterness and virulence my right hon. Friend would have been denounced if she had broken up the summit? Will my right hon. Friend also—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has as much right to make his point as anyone else.

Mr. Brittan: Will my right hon. Friend also accept that the system that has been set up at the summit will, over a period, bring downward pressure to bear on output and prices in a legally binding way? Does she accept that this is a major step forward in controlling the common agricultural policy and is to be warmly welcomed?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Sir. One of the battles has been to get Germany to accept that reductions in agricultural production should be achieved by virtue of price cuts. As I have said, only two or three years ago Germany was using the Luxembourg compromise against that. Germany resisted it, but then agreed that this was the best way to proceed. Would Opposition Members like to have their incomes cut by 12 per cent. on one commodity and by 18 per cent. on another? I do not believe that they would. That is what is happening with wheat and oil seeds.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Will the Prime Minister accept that some of us who have been critical of the CAP recognise that this agreement represents significant progress towards control over the agricultural budget — from 70 per cent. of the Community's budget to 50 per cent. by 1992? That should be welcomed as at least a step in the right direction.

The Prime Minister referred to the disposal of surplus stocks. Was that discussed in the context of Third world need? How will this country benefit from the increase in the regional and social funds in the light of the Government's reduced commitment to regional development in Britain? Will she accept that, unlike the official Opposition, those of us on this Bench accept that the collapse of the summit would have been much more costly to our national interests? The failure to reach a common market by 1992 would have been far more expensive for the Community as a whole than the present budget. Thank goodness that for once the lady was for turning.

The Prime Minister: With regard to surpluses, the right hon. Gentleman is aware that we have always said that we must operate on two fronts simultaneously — one to reduce surpluses, and the other to reduce production that has risen year by year. There has been a great effort with regard to surpluses over the past year. Surpluses of skimmed milk powder have decreased by 34 per cent. and surpluses of butter have been reduced by 31 per cent. Of course the cost of disposing of those surpluses comes within the budget as it will in future. However, in future, when material enters surplus store, it will be depreciated immediately by 20 per cent. and will depreciate slowly within the coming five years. It is likely that the existing surpluses will be disposed of and we shall get rid of the overhang.

That is accompanied by very substantial price penalties, as I have said. There will be a 12 per cent. penalty if it is triggered on wheat and cereals and even heavier price penalties on oil seeds. That will act on the production side to reduce prices and surpluses and possibly enable us to sell what we do not need. I should state that we are not self-sufficient by any means in oil seeds. We produce only 45 per cent. of our requirements.

With regard to the structural funds, we give something like — *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) is entitled to a reply. We receive about £750 million from the structural funds. Indeed, we do fairly well out of the funds. We hope that that figure will increase to about £1,000 million in 1992. If we did not belong to the CAP, we would need very considerable subsidies by way of enormous

[The Prime Minister]

deficiency payments or there would be considerable price increases in other directions through the imposition of even heavier levies at the port of entry.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Is not the decision to give a real increase in spending of 25 per cent. to an organisation currently spending £233 million a week on dumping and destroying food and £40 million a week on financing fraud a bit of an insult to every local council and health authority struggling to keep within their agreed limits? With regard to the so-called legally binding controls, does not my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agree that, last year, the Commission was obliged to stick to 1·4 per cent. under a legally binding control, but, despite that, it spent 20 per cent. more by a whole host of devices, including the famous metric year of 10 months? Is there anything in the agreement which will stop the Commission doing that in 1991?

The Prime Minister: As I said in reply to the previous question, surpluses of powdered milk and butter have gone down considerably by one third in the past year. We have to finance exports of cereals, in which we are more than self-sufficient, but if we pull out totally of allowing our farmers to export some of their grain, or if the United States and other countries allow their farmers to export, it is bad for the countryside. On oils and proteins, where there is a severe price reduction, we are not self-sufficient, but we thought it important, from the viewpoint of the Third world, not to have an oils and fats tax.

With regard to legally binding mechanisms for each of the agricultural stabilisers, I understand why my hon. Friend is sceptical. He and I have always wanted them to be legally binding and, hitherto, we relied on the word of the European Council. That is why, this time, we were not prepared to do that. This time, all of those stabilisers will be embodied in legally binding regulations, which will come before the House, or go into the agricultural regulations, and will, therefore, be enforceable. Unless and until that is done, I am not prepared to recommend to the House that own resources be increased.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): In spite of the bravado of the Prime Minister's words about achieved objectives, the House will recognise that this is a sad day for her and a sadder day for British taxpayers and consumers. Is it not a fact that, in exchange for extremely insecure and untried restraints on agricultural production, the Prime Minister has conceded an increase in the Community's budget of not 25 per cent., but, compared with last year's outturn expenditure, of almost 45 per cent.?

Further, is it not a fact that the right hon. Lady has agreed to introduce a new and fourth Community tax on the British people? Will she tell us whether there will be a larger British net contribution to the EEC in 1992 than there was in 1987? Will she also make it plain whether the £550 per annum that the Treasury told us the average British family was paying each year because of the CAP will be larger or smaller in four years' time?

The Prime Minister: First, on the agricultural point, there is evidence that stabilisers work, and the right hon. Gentleman knows it. He knows that we have tried very effective stabilisers on milk quotas and that they are working and reducing surpluses substantially. They are not untried mechanisms; they are tried mechanisms.

Over the past year, we have tried to persuade Germany to accept stabilisers by virtue, particularly, of price reductions. The Germans were anxious not to do that and proposed various other mechanisms which explains why they used the Luxembourg compromise only two years ago. We have persuaded them to reduce prices by 3 per cent. per year for cereals, if the amount produced goes over the threshold. That is a cumulative 12 per cent. to which is added an extra 3 per cent. co-responsibility levy, to which will be added another 2 per cent. this year for those who keep their own produce in store for very much longer. That is about 17 per cent. and is an effective price reduction over the coming four years. The price reductions for oils are even sharper. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members would not like it if we came forth with a similar income reduction for them.

Secondly, there is a substantial increase in structural funds. People have often wanted to take a larger proportion, provided that we could get stabilisers on agriculture. We have got those stabilisers. The increase in structural funds was required to give the southern countries of Spain and Portugal, which have come into the Community, some hope of having a better deal. It was clear from the eight sets of minor stabilisers that they would not be able to produce surpluses as has, until now, happened in the northern countries. Those two matters have been dealt with.

The fourth resource, that allied to gross national product, does not make any difference to us because of the Fontainebleau rebate. We have arranged to get precisely the same amount as we would have received under the Fontainebleau mechanism related to VAT. That cancels out any different effect from the GNP, so long as the Fontainebleau mechanism continues. As I said, there will be an increase, up to 1992, of a maximum of about £300 million a year compared to the 1·4 per cent. VAT this year is over the rate at which we are spending this year. It is an increase of about £150 million to £200 million.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask for brief questions. [HON. MEMBERS: "And answers."] If long questions are asked, they attract long answers.

Sir Charles Morrison (Devizes): That agreement was reached against all the odds and forecasts is a remarkable achievement and undoubtedly will provide a far better basis for farmers' planning in future. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the more effective the set-aside system turns out to be, the less need there will be for the application of stabilisers? Will it be up to the Council of Agriculture Ministers collectively to agree on the set-aside system or will it be up to the individual nations?

The Prime Minister: We have agreed on a ceiling available for set-aside which is of the order of 600 million ecus, and a maximum amount which can be paid. The precise amount which separate nations agree will be determined by themselves, but there is a maximum amount which can be found from the FEOGA guarantee. Set-aside is new country. Some people think that it will work extremely well and others are sceptical. That is why there is quite a severe ceiling on the amount which can be allocated from the common agricultural policy.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his thanks. We got about 95 per cent. of what we set out to get, and anyone who thinks that 95 per cent. would have been available at Hanover is thinking in cloud-cuckoo-land.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Why were these complex matters not put in the official communiqué in the Library before the statement was made? Is it the fault of the EEC or of the Foreign Office? When speaking about the new ceiling, the Prime Minister used two old figures —1·9 and 1·7 per cent.—on the old VAT formula. Does not this represent an increase in EEC expenditure of between 70 and 90 per cent? How does she justify it? How will the EEC, in the meantime, raise money for the 1988 budget? How will the new draft decision be placed before the House and when and how can the money be raised legally?

The Prime Minister: At the moment, the limit is 1·4 per cent. VAT, as the hon. Gentleman knows. He also knows that by various devices, to which I referred and which both he and I hate, such as carry-over and what is called negative reserve which we wanted to test in the courts but we were advised was legal, the Community is spending at 1·6 per cent. VAT, including the abatement. The 1·9 per cent. VAT would be the equivalent to the new ceiling, abatement inclusive. The 1·72 per cent. is the equivalent with the abatement excluded. Our abatement is now to be financed separately, so 1·72 per cent. is the equivalent figure to the 1·4 per cent.

The regulations will be brought before the House in the normal way. I entirely accept and agree that I should not recommend an increase in own resources until we have got those recommendations in a legally binding form. We did not get it at Fontainebleau. This time we have, and it is a major achievement.

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): In view of the effects that these proposals are likely to have on the level of farm incomes over the next few years, has any assessment been made as to the impact the proposals will have on the countryside and our rural areas as we know them today?

The Prime Minister: I think that our farmers were prepared to have considerable price reductions on cereals —wheat and barley—and on the oil seeds. I think that they preferred us to have quite a tough settlement, as this one is, on the ground that, if we got a settlement, they would know how to plan for the future. Some of them will want a set-aside scheme and will take advantage of it. Others will not, and will prefer to have different kinds of crops. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend: unless we have a reasonably prosperous farming sector, our rural communities will die and the state of the rural environment will be appalling. Apparently, the Opposition do not care about either.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Is the Prime Minister aware of the grave concern in those areas of Wales of marginal land where there is subsistence sheep farming? Can she give an assurance that, in announcing the doubling of the structural funds towards less developed areas, there will be a doubling for the western seaboards, which are dependent on elements that may be hard hit by the changes in the agriculture regime?

The Prime Minister: No, I cannot guarantee that there will be a doubling for a particular area. We do well from the social fund of the structural funds, but we shall not do quite so well from the regional funds because there are areas much worse off than we are. Nevertheless, we hope overall to have the amount that we receive now, £750 million, going up to £1 billion by 1992. Alas, I cannot give the hon. Gentleman, nor would he expect me to, a guarantee on exactly how it will be distributed.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): The Prime Minister should be commended for the progress that she made, in difficult circumstances, at the summit, which might best be described as kicking for touch as far up the field as is humanly possible and in the face of tremendous odds. After her meeting with Mr. Haughey, does she know whether he is aware of the threat posed to people north and south of the border by the IRA which has murdered more than 250 RUC officers?

The Prime Minister: I had a meeting in the margins of the European Community with Mr. Haughey. It lasted half an hour and was calm and dignified. We both agree that the Anglo-Irish Agreement must continue. Mr. Haughey recognised that there would soon be a Council meeting under the agreement. We agreed that security co-operation across the border is vital not only for Northern Ireland but for the Republic of Ireland as well. The IRA and its tactics are a challenge to democracy in the Republic of Ireland, as they are in Northern Ireland. We recognise that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will be making a statement as soon as possible on the other measures with regard to the RUC which are within his jurisdiction.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will take it after questions on the statement.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): When the Prime Minister was sitting in the middle of the night reflecting on the fact that she was being sworn at by Frenchmen and that the Common Market had interfered with almost everything in this country from cabotage to the size and shape of our passports, all at a cost of more than £10 per week for every family in the land, which is likely to increase in the next few years, did she not think that when, according to her, we are doing so well in this country with everything improving, employment going up, the balance of payments being right and productivity increasing, it is time to get out of the Common Market and stand on our own two feet for a change?

The Prime Minister: I really rather thought — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is no good the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) continually shouting out from a sedentary position. It does not contribute to our debates.

The Prime Minister: When the Leader of the Opposition visited Brussels, I thought that he had made a statement saying that the Labour party had no intention of pulling out of the Common Market. It seems as if he did not know what his Back Benchers were thinking.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): If, as is said, the EEC has so many noble and important objectives other than the gross subsidy and grubby protectionism of the common agricultural policy, why did

[Mr. Nicholas Budgen]

not my right hon. Friend exercise the veto, run the risk of breaking up the CAP and allow the member states to subsidise their own farmers as they wish?

The Prime Minister: The effect of not agreeing when we had achieved 95 per cent. of what we wanted would not have been to break up the CAP. Do not let my hon. Friend delude himself. The CAP would have gone on. He knows that if we were not in the common agricultural policy, the amount we would have to pay in deficiency payments would probably cost more than the CAP does, because of the amount we would have to put on in levies to protect British agriculture and to prevent it from returning to something like its position in the 1930s, which my hon. Friend would not wish.

Having achieved so much, the effect of having a row would have been to have gone back to Hanover and not been able to get the Fontainebleau mechanism but to have something much more damaging to this country. What we have now is what we have wanted for a long time. We have legally binding and enforceable regulations, stabilisers on agricultural products, which will deal with the surpluses, and a mechanism of writing down and disposing of the surpluses that will get rid of existing surpluses by 1992.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): Could not the Prime Minister better achieve her negotiating position if she admitted that she had not achieved all her objectives, not even 95 per cent. of them, but that she had achieved the best deal available in the circumstances and that she will compromise no further? Does she believe that next week the French intend to reopen the eight other commodity stabilisers that have been agreed previously? If they do, I am sure that she will be supported by all hon. Members if she resists it totally.

The Prime Minister: It will come as no surprise to the right hon. Gentleman to find that I do not quite agree with him. We did very well in getting the price reductions on cereals to an extent greater than at Copenhagen and against the wishes of the Germans, who were not prepared to have so many price reductions. The Germans also compromised on having considerable price reductions without a ceiling on oil seeds, which affects them very considerably. I should have liked to have got away with a smaller increase on the structural funds. However, we decided, I think rightly, to give special aid to Portugal because it is the poorest country and one of our oldest allies. I think that we achieved a good deal for Britain, and a good deal for Europe.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the overwhelming interest to the United Kingdom in the Community is the pursuit of the genuine internal market? Does she agree that the compromises she made, however reluctantly, are an important contribution to that? Will she also resolve that she will not listen to the carping of the Labour party, whose defence of British interests in opposition is always more effective than when it is in government, as is shown by its last farcical renegotiation?

The Prime Minister: I think that we achieved a settlement on agricultural matters at Brussels of the sort we achieved on our abatement at Fontainebleau three years ago. That will hold until 1992 when, once again, we will have to look at our own mechanism.

I take the view that we ought to have made more progress towards the internal market. We have been pressing for that. It is an objective independent of the CAP and in the treaty. Some of the people who proclaim that they believe in full open markets are not always ready to do so when we say, "You get down your lorry quotas, you allow our insurance people to sell in the Common Market, you allow us to have a freedom of movement in services such as that on manufactured goods." It is vital that we go ahead with that. It would be to the advantage of this country.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Will the Prime Minister accept that we welcome a reasonably prosperous farming community? That being the case, why has she not been as generous to British nurses as she has been to French and German farmers?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, we have been very generous to British nurses, more generous than any other Government at any time— *[Interruption.]* I was just waiting to see how far we would be in order in going on with that the whole catalogue. The Labour party gave nurses, doctors and the National Health Service a shabby deal. They got a good deal from this Government.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall seek to take into account during the debate this evening those who have not been called to ask a question on the statement.

Mr. Orme: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In reply to an earlier question, the Prime Minister referred to the meeting with the Taoiseach and the Anglo-Irish Agreement. That had nothing to do with the Common Market negotiations. She made a statement to the House that we were not able to question. Therefore, I call on you, Mr. Speaker, to protect hon. Members and to ask the Prime Minister to make a separate statement on that issue.

Mr. Speaker: I anticipated what the right hon. Gentleman wished to say. Of course, until an hon. Member asks a question I do not know what he is going to say. As the Prime Minister stated, she had a meeting with the Taoiseach during the negotiations and she answered the question.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You got the support of the House earlier when you yet again exhorted the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) not to keep shouting. However, immediately after your request to him he shouted out that it was official Labour party policy to withdraw from the Community. Therefore, would you guide us, Mr. Speaker, on whether official policy comes from above or below the Gangway?

Mr. Speaker: One of the problems faced by the occupant of the Chair is that the microphones are tuned so that when I listen to a right hon. or hon. Member from the Government Benches I do not always hear, thank goodness, what is said from the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Shore: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), the background to this inevitably complex and difficult statement—the EEC communiqué—was not available in the Library up to 3.30 this afternoon. That is a disgraceful oversight. As

there are Ministers present — not only the Prime Minister herself but Ministers from the Foreign Office— I hope that we shall hear that that sort of treatment will not be meted out to the House again.

The Prime Minister: If that was the case, I apologise sincerely. I thought that the communiqué had been placed in the Library in the normal way. I assumed that it was available and that, if it was not, right hon. and hon. Members would have let me know. If they will do that in future, we will certainly ensure that the documentation is there in good time so that right hon. and hon. Members can study it.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will not take further points of order that are a continuation of the statement.

Mr. Skinner: It is not a continuation.

Mr. Speaker: I was pretty certain that it would be.

Mr. Skinner *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman would be the first to complain if he were cut out of a debate as a result of points of order that were a continuation of questions on the statement. I have——

Mr. Skinner *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat.

Mr. Skinner *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must resume his seat.

Mr. Skinner: Anybody else bar me.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman gets called in the same way as every other hon. Member.

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I am not taking a point of order unless it has nothing to do with the statement.

Mr. Skinner *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Has it anything to do with the statement?

Mr. Skinner: It is to do with what the hon. Member said.

Mr. Speaker: Which hon. Member?

Mr. Skinner: You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Member for Harrow—*[Interruption.]*—yes, without an "H"; that is what they say where I come from. The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) said that I made an intervention regarding official Labour party policy on withdrawal from the Common Market. I want to place on record that that is the case and that the official Labour party policy is for withdrawal from the Common Market as the last option. It would be handy if that went into *Hansard*.

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is one of the reasons why the hon. Gentleman wanted to get himself mentioned during his sedentary comments; normally that would not go into *Hansard*.

Ireland and United Kingdom (Relations)

4.21 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland following the talks between the Prime Minister and Mr. Haughey".

The specificity of the subject speaks for itself. There has been a clear breakdown of understanding between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Its importance is all too obvious. It affects nothing less than the security of the realm. It deals with relations between the United Kingdom and its closest neighbour. It concerns the enforcement of the law within the United Kingdom and mutual law enforcement between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, dealing with such important matters as terrorism.

In my submission, the matter is urgent on two grounds: first, because of recent reaction to the Sampson-Stalker report and the very limited reaction to that of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; and, secondly, the very recent meeting between the Prime Minister and Mr. Haughey and the frost that clearly grew on the walls of that meeting room. The House needs a debate on that issue. Although we heard from the Prime Minister during her statement that there would be a statement very soon from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic, a statement is not an opportunity to discuss such an important issue. It is for that reason that I make an application under Standing Order No. 20 and am not willing to wait for a statement. In other words, this is an important matter that requires discussion and not simply a series of questions.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. and learned Gentleman asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland following the talks between the Prime Minister and Mr. Haughey".

I have listened with care to what the hon. and learned Gentleman has said. I listened also to exchanges on the statement that the Prime Minister has just made. I regret that I do not consider the matter that the hon. and learned Gentleman has raised as being appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20 and I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House.

Self-Employment

4.23 pm

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): I beg to move,

That this House calls upon Her Majesty's Government to ensure that its policies and procedures maintain the substantial increase in self-employment: calls attention to the encouragement given to it by the Government's policies of encouraging enterprise and individual initiative; and calls on Her Majesty's Government to reduce obstacles to the spread of self-employment.

I begin by declaring three interests. First, for over 10 years I have had a friendly association with the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses Ltd. and have co-operated with it on many projects, both before coming into the House and since. I should like to place on record a personal tribute to the work of its former parliamentary officer, Mr. John Blundell, and its present parliamentary officer, Mr. Ralph Jackson, who work hard for the cause with which they are associated. Secondly, since October 1987, I have been the co-proprietor of a small business involved in the manufacture of high quality furniture for kitchens, bathrooms, bedrooms and public houses. In my interest in that area I have come across some of the problems of small businesses. Thirdly, two years ago I was the co-sponsor of the Right to be Self-Employed Bill that was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), who, I am glad to say, is now the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland.

I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Employment, will speak in the debate. Like manyof his predecessors, he has taken a close interest in the health of the self-employed sector and I pay tribute to his work. It contrasts with many of the activities of the Opposition parties. Given the paucity of the attendance of Opposition Members this afternoon, their interest in the self-employed must be in doubt.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not include the Scottish National party in that. My party and the Liberal party have both taken a great interest in the self-employed. Indeed, I was personally involved with the beginnings of the national federation. If the hon. Gentleman is criticising, he should direct his criticisms accurately, rather than inaccurately.

Mr. Jones: I would happily exempt the hon. Gentleman were it not for the fact that during my period of office on Fife county council, prior to reorganisation, the Scottish National party's representatives on that council were extremely hostile to small businesses. I advise the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) that I shall comment on the alliance, or the mis-alliance, in due course. Perhaps it would be better to wait for that.

I attended the 1982 Labour party conference—not, I hasten to add, as a member of the Labour party, but as an observer. During that conference a debate was held on local government and a motion was passed urging Labour groups in local authorities to take action against contractors. Section (b) stated that they should insist that contractors are

"bona fide and employ all the people who are working for it (ie, not self-employed)".

That illustrates the attitude of the Labour party to the self-employed. I shall be interested to hear the contribution of the Labour Front-Bench spokesman in explaining how his party is now terribly sympathetic to the self-employed, whereas historically the reverse has been the case.

The hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) referred to the party of the hon. Member for Gordon and perhaps I should say——

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Does the hon. Gentleman not know that the Balcombe committee, which was set up by Tony Crosland and the Labour Government 19 years ago, created the job of his hon. Friend the Minister responsible for small businesses and that there has been a continuing interest in, and promotion of, small businesses by Labour Governments and by the Labour party when in opposition? We have nothing to be ashamed of on that score. Let us get the record straight in historical terms.

Mr. Jones: Working parties are no substitute for policies. It is this Government's policies that have been conducive to the growth in self-employment. It is significant that under the previous Labour Government self-employment declined.

I referred earlier to the hon. Member for Gordon, who was alleged to be a friend of the self-employed. When the Right to be Self-Employed Bill received the leave of the House to be introduced, I put a press release in my local paper welcoming the measure. My then SDP opponent, Mr. Nick Hollinghurst, described the Bill as barmy and irresponsible. That hardly indicates that he was sympathetic to the self-employed. Nor was he well-informed, because the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) voted for that Bill, as did other alliance Members.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: Not at the moment.

The Government have done much to promote self-employment and to redress the imbalance of the 1960s and early 1970s, when the figures for self-employment were in decline. Since 1979 the number of people becoming self-employed has risen by more than 1 million. At the beginning of the year the total number of people classified as self-employed was 2·7 million—just over 10 per cent. of the total labour force. The reasons for that growth are many, but the principal factor has been the general ethos of the Government and their determination to remove the state from the activities of businesses, and the sustained drive for deregulation and a lessening and removal of some of the onerous burdens that affect small businesses.

Among other Government initiatives is the enterprise allowance scheme, which became national in 1982, and which has helped 300,000 previously unemployed people to set up and run their own businesses with some initial state support. Provision has been made for more than 100,000 new entrants this year, and some 110,000 people in 1988-89. That emphasises the popularity of self-employment.

The loan guarantee scheme, introduced in 1981, was designed to supply finance to small businesses to which no conventional loans were available. Despite initial teething problems, the scheme has been popular with very small firms which found it difficult to attract start-up investment finance, and about 20,000 guarantees have been issued. Those measures greatly help the self-employed and,

together with general economic progress, highlighted by tax reductions, there has been a sustained attempt to create a conducive climate within which businesses, and specifically the self-employed, can thrive.

Despite the many excellent Government initiatives to promote self-employment and the small firms sector, which is reckoned to constitute one third of the economy and to contribute 20 per cent. of the GNP, some areas need attention if the self-employed are to sustain their renaissance. We can help to encourage the numbers of the self-employed by stimulating growth through taxation initiatives and by introducing greater flexibility and mobility in the labour market by clarifying the status of self-employed people.

The taxation or employment status of people regarded as self-employed is the key to the growth in self-employment. There is much case history about the definition of self-employment which often confuses people, and which, together with the statutory definitions, form a mosaic of conflicting rulings which need to be resolved. Tax inspectors determine employment status according to section A of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970. North sea divers are exempted from schedule E employment status under the Finance Act 1978. There is another definition in the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978. Perhaps the most ridiculous definition of self-employment comes from the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 which states that a self-employed person is someone who is gainfully employed in Great Britain otherwise than in employed earners employment, whether or not he is also employed in such employment. It is no wonder that with such terminology the DHSS has been called the author of modern Church liturgy.

The case law definition comes down to whether individuals are or have been performing a contract of service—that is, employed—or are under contracts for services — self-employed. Individuals should have the right to determine their own classification of status, bearing in mind that they have to make a decision about the benefits and disbenefits of self-employment.

The one-customer test is particularly absurd. Under current classification criteria for self-employment, supposedly operated jointly by the Inland Revenue and the DHSS, a contract with one customer alone would not constitute a contract of service or self-employment, but would be a sign of employment. It is also absurd that the criteria that can be applied to reclassified self-employed individuals in the private business sector are not applied in a similar way to those who receive state support for their business ventures.

It seems natural that if people are made redundant from a business because it has decided to carry out that particular service by contract instead of by direct employment, they should club together to form a group which would then bid for the work that they had previously carried out. Under such circumstances, the Inland Revenue normally regards those people as directly employed. Clearly, it is a halfway house between their previous employment direct with the company and going into business with more than one customer. Similarly, if someone is employed to carry out a computer contract and contracts to a company, installing programmes and ironing out any gremlins in it, that work may well continue for one or two years, or for more. The Inland Revenue would regard such a person as employed rather than self-employed, although, manifestly, that is an increasing trend.

As retirement tends to occur earlier, there has been a growth in "release and re-engagement". This is where senior staff are released from direct employmen.: but are able to continue to do work for their companies, thus easing the burden of retirement. This is to be welcomed, but the Inland Revenue does not see it in the same way.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): Does my hon. Friend agree that someone starting in business for the first time is unlikely to start with a bank of 40 or 50 customers, but is more likely to start with one or two customers with whom he has personal contact in a particular industry? Would it not be more fair for the Inland Revenue to make a judgment on the start-up of new companies after three or four years to see whether their customer banks have expanded, instead of hitting them hard on day one?

Mr. Jones: I agree with my hon. Friend's first point. He has great experience in small businesses and has played an important part in promoting their interests. I am concerned about the second point. If there were a review after three or four years and the Inland Revenue reinterpreted the employment status of an individual, that could create a large and unwelcome tax bill for the person concerned. Therefore, I do not entirely agree with my hon. Frend.

Mr. Page: I do not want to leave the House with an impression that I was trying to put any tax on small businesses. I suggested that if after three years a company had not made a breakthrough and achieved a wider bank ofcustomers, the Inland Revenue should say, "Unless you can demonstrate that you have more customers, we may have to interpret you on the basis of being employed by the company." However, I was not suggesting any form of back taxation.

Mr. Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for his clarification, and I agree with his point.

Perhaps it would be helpful if I gave an example of that. The partners of a light engineering firm in Slough, called Andron Engineering, were told by the Inland Revenue that eight of their engineering sub-contractors should be put on PAYE. Those self-employed engineers had their own keys, worked hours to suit themselves, and during that year had worked for other companies, as was shown by their respective tax returns.

Another example is that of a husband and wife team, Tom and Rita Fearon, who had worked for many years as self-employed children's entertainers. One of their contracts was with Pontins holiday group, where they undertook to work a summer season for roughly three months. Pontins assured the partners that they were confirmed as schedule D taxpayers and were self-employed for national insurance purposes. That did not stop the local tax office querying their status under that particular contract.

I move on to the question of 714 and 715 certificates — the particular interest of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer). In the construction industry in the 1960s and 1970s, mass tax evasion led to a tightening of the rules regarding contracts and sub-contracts, and through successive Finances Acts the

[Mr. Jones]

eventual establishment of 714 and 715 construction industry tax exemption certificates. At that time many people regarded such certificates as little more than a licence to work. Others saw them as the legitimate way to self-employment, as they virtually meant that their tax status was inviolate. In practice, and especially latterly, the system, in seeking to regulate lump workers, has meant that it is expedient for many contractors to designate their skilled work force as self-employed sub-contractors and for both to enjoy whatever substantial benefits accrue. The test of the criteria or eligibility for the certificate is not always strict and certainly does not consistently conform to other criteria of the Inland Revenue and the DHSS.

I should like to quote from a speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling. He said:

"That system is thoroughly wicked. It effectively operates as a licence to work. To get an exemption certificate to be treated as a self-employed sub-contractor, one must show that one has been employed for three of the past six years. If one cannot show that, one cannot become self-employed."—[*Official Report*, 4 February 1986; Vol. 91, c. 148.]

That is plain discrimination against unemployed people and is quite outrageous.

I should like to make some suggestions about where we go from here. First, the Inland Revenue should be obliged to publish its criteria for judging these matters so that they can be debated and properly challenged. Secondly, it is vital that we have an independent appeals system that can judge this, quite apart from the Revenue. Thirdly, it should be axiomatic that people are self-employed, if that is the status that they seek, unless it can be proved otherwise.

I shall now move to other matters which are of concern to self-employed people and which need action. The first matter is the retention of profit. The self-employed unincorporated business is currently at a disadvantage in terms of taxation compared to a limited company. That is because the profit from that business is taxed in the same way as personal drawings from the business and there is no ability to defer part of that profit for future investment purposes. That is quite unlike limited companies, which have some form of deferment arrangements.

If the self-employed, small, unincorporated businesses had some control over funds for the exclusive use of investment in the business or for employment purposes, it would greatly help the newly established small firm and give encouragement to more people thinking about self-employment. They have to struggle in the early years, especially when tax and inflation wipe away their endeavours.

The operation of the business expansion scheme is also a problem, because its increasing institutionalisation and that of other funds means that it is much easier to raise sums in excess of £100,000 than it is to raise lesser sums. That is clearly an impediment to the smallest businesses about which I am especially concerned.

I shall make one point about planning. There is still too much hounding and persecuting of small businesses. There should be only three relevant criteria: whether the business is causing noise problems, problems of pollution or traffic problems. The simple existence of a business operating in a redundant farm building or something such as that should not of itself be sufficient grounds for the local authority to take action against it.

The matter of Government inspectors has been of great concern to small businesses over many years. Although the Government started to do something about this, legislation is such that a great deal more bureaucracy seems to have sprung up. A study by the Forum of Private Business reported a couple of years ago that someone starting up in business had to do more than 24 hours of essential reading. This included reading on VAT, tax, health and safety requirements and employment regulations. I went into business fairly recently and I can confirm that an immense amount of reading has to be done in order to be familiar with such matters.

The National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses Ltd. published a report entitled "An Inspector at the Door", which detailed more than 200 different authorities which had a great number of inspectors who had the right to enter, search or seize and so on. That report was published in 1979 and it led to a review of those powers, which saw about 30 of them being scrapped and another 50 being revoked. Unfortunately, new provisions seem to have turned that tide and, to give one example, data protection legislation has resulted in more powers for inspectors.

If the Government are to maintain an equitable balance between enforcing the law and relying on the business community to act as unpaid tax collectors, the role and the powers of inspectors should be subject to some scrutiny. Each Government Department, possibly with guidance from the Enterprise and Deregulation Unit, should undertake yearly reviews of the number, type and extent of its own inspectorate, together with the levels of financial penalties that it can impose. More powers should be reduced than should be produced.

The final sector in which beneficial action can be taken is that of the public sector contractor. It is quite difficult for a small business to get beyond the tender lists held by local authorities and Government Departments. Some countries set aside a percentage of work each year for which small businesses alone can bid, and the evidence shows that rather good value can be obtained from that. I commend that system to the Minister.

This is a short debate and I do not wish to occupy an undue proportion of it. The self-employed have an enormous amount to contribute to our society, both by their intrinsic economic efficiency and through the self-reliance and independence that they promote socially. All the measures that the Government have taken have encouraged the growth of that sector, and I hope that during the coming years they will do more so that Britain can generate even more self-employment and raise it to the level of self-employment that exists in our competitor countries.

4.45 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I welcome this debate because we all recognise that the expansion of self-employment in small businesses in recent years has been and can continue to be an important source of new employment and wealth.

It is worth looking at the pattern of self-employment because we need to get to the bottom of why it is that in certain areas a high proportion of people are self-employed while in other areas the proportion is low. We need to see what can or should be done to try to alter that. An interesting point is the myth sometimes put about that self-employed people are by definition high earners or

particularly wealthy.The proportion of self-employed people is highest in rural areas. Those people are the providers of essential services for the community and are often on small incomes in relation to the services that they provide. It is sometimes difficult for them to provide all the services that the Government expect of them.

A year ago I asked a question, the answer to which included a list of the proportions of self-employment in every constituency. The highest percentage is in rural constituencies in the Highlands of Scotland, in Wales and in the west country. The lowest percentage is in urban areas, especially urban areas in central Scotland. The middle range is in the suburban and rural areas in the south of England. That shows that, in a country such as Scotland, overall the percentage of self-employment is very low. However, the reason for that is fairly apparent: the opportunities are not so great.

That brings me to my second point. Why can people in some parts of the country thrive in self-employment? The most important answer is that they can find a market. The ability to find that market is the most important reason why a business can thrive and prosper. That is why the many areas of Britain that are most deprived are not getting their full share of self-employment.

Access to finance, especially finance to start a business, is crucial. There is clear evidence that the availability of risk capital is somewhat variable. The joint stock banks tend to look for security, for personal guarantees. If a self-employed person tries to launch a limited company, the immediate objective of the bank is to circumvent the whole benefit of limited liability by demanding that personal guarantees are put up front. It is an obvious disincentive to anybody starting a new business if he has to put everything on the line, especially if he is moving into an area where he could be competing with larger established businesses that could effectively cut him out.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the loan guarantee scheme, which was an imaginative attempt to circumvent this problem, has been much less useful than it should have been because the banks have continued to insist on a level of security that is completely absurd?

Mr. Bruce: I wholly concur with the hon. Gentleman's comments. I have had complaints, as I suspect has the hon. Gentleman, from people in my constituency who feel that they have been led up the garden path in terms of the availability of finance. They have found that the security requirement has been such that they might well have wasted their time. We must find a way of improving the method of financing.

One proposal which is worth exploring, and which the Government could usefully initiate, is to promote the establishment of local investment companies or local banks that would specifically provide risk capital, some of it unsecured, for small businesses — both established businesses wishing to expand and new businesses wishing to come on to the market. Of course, the proper safeguards — trustworthiness, the assessment of a business plan, general professionalism and understanding — should be taken into account, but it is unreasonable automatically to expect every applicant to put up his entire life savings without security when he advances a potentially viable idea out of which the backers can make money collectively but for which it is difficult to secure risk capital.

This idea, which my colleagues and I have put forward for some time, is now supported by the CBI as an appropriate venture. It marches sensibly alongside the enterprise trust scheme, although it should be separate from it. Enterprise trusts have expanded rapidly in recent years and been valuable in providing new and existing businesses with practical advice on how to proceed. Often that advice is not to proceed—good advice, if one's idea will not stand up—but at other times people are advised before they start their businesses how to ensure the greatest chance of success. The evidence is not so much that enterprise trust schemes have been responsible for creating jobs or for ensuring that businesses are better, but that they have ensured that a higher proportion of businesses succeed rather than fail in the first year, which is the regrettable experience for many.

The back-up of local investment banks providing risk capital for investment separate from, but marching alongside, the enterprise trust scheme would be extremely valuable. It would help if some funds were diverted from the City. Too often those funds are concentrated on large projects, because providing the finance for small projects is thought to be too fiddly, cumbersome and tiresome and because many of the City institutions do not have the necessary knowledge of the locality or the individuals to feel able to put up the money with any reasonable chance of a return. There is much evidence to show that such a development could have the double benefit of helping individuals to move to self-employment, thereby strengthening the economy in those areas.

Crucial to the new, successful, self-employed business is the ability to find a viable market. Without it, no amount of finance, advice or tax breaks will ultimately succeed in making a business successful. In a number of ways — the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) touched on them—central and local government could help to strengthen the market that is available to small businesses. Local authorities and central Government agencies should be encouraged to give small businesses a fairer opportunity to compete for contracts. I do not ask for positive discrimination—of course, the taxpayer and the ratepayer must be protected in terms of getting value for money—but the local authorities and agencies should ensure that small businesses get full and equal opportunities. Many of us have heard the complaints that small businesses are effectively prevented from taking such opportunities.

Large businesses have a responsibility to consider buying services from small businesses. The main customer for small business is often the bigger business. Large businesses have not been as helpful as they could and should be to small businesses.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: One problem with large businesses placing custom in the direction of small businesses is that the large businesses do not pay on time. In a way, that is more of a disadvantage than not getting business in the first place. GEC is an outrageous late-payer.

Mr. Bruce: I do want to comment on that particular example, but the hon. Gentleman was anticipating a point that I was about to make.

In recent years there has been a tendency for large companies to become much larger and for the corporate headquarters to draw into themselves companies that they

[Mr. Bruce]

have absorbed, bought out or merged with. The consequence is that more and more goods are bought centrally. Central purchasing tends to be directed towards the locality of the corporate headquarters and companies that are known to those headquarters. The opportunity for small businesses to supply locally is thereby proportionately reduced.

I understand that in Liverpool the local enterprise trust and the local council put pressure on Marks and Spencer to buy a significant percentage of goods locally. Marks and Spencer agreed to increase its local purchasing by 1 per cent. The upshot was that there was a useful injection of purchasing into the local economy, but it was interesting that this boosted the profitability of those goods to Marks and Spencer, which had not previously made the effort to find companies that could supply locally. Those companies were not big enough to supply the whole corporate enterprise, but they could supply the local branch. A mechanism that encouraged large businesses to behave in that way would give many small businesses the opportunity to supply goods which they are currently prevented from supplying.

The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West touched on the fact that often big businesses do not pay fast enough to enable small businesses to do business with them. The small businesses cannot afford to fund the slow payment of some large companies. Action is needed to ensure that small businesses can guarantee prompt payment and not be penalised by the fact that they have secured that business.

The impact of large retailing developments on small local retailers is a controversial and difficult issue but it concerns retailers throughout the country. One may argue that consumers must have choice and the opportunity to buy competitively-priced goods at attractive stores. We must recognise, however, when we read in local newspapers that a major corporation is to establish a large development that will employ hundreds of people, that often those jobs will be at the expense of jobs in firms that will be put out of business by that expansion and that the net effect will not be so beneficial overall. There are many examples of the predatoriness of some large corporations. They are by no means necessarily as efficient or as knowledgeable about the local market as the established companies, yet they have the resources to squeeze out their competitors and draw business up from the smaller businesses below them.

The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West referred to the somewhat arbitrary changes in the definition of self-employment. Do not the Government intend to give a clearer idea of the definition and how consistently it can be applied?

The new proposals from the Department of Trade and Industry—the Department for Enterprise, as we are now supposed to call it—have raised questions as to the availability of advice from consultants. I have mentioned aspects which are more important than a consultant's advice. In any case, the enterprise trust scheme is doing a good job for little or no charge. The Government's proposed fee for consultants seems to be betwixt and between: it is not enough for a good consultant, but it is more than necessary for basic advice. I have certainly seen one or two newsletters which state that the quality of advice will not be of a particularly high standard.

The implication and impact of rates and rating changes on small businesses must also be considered. As a Scottish Member I found the whole rating debate on the introduction of the poll tax slightly bizarre. When we had our revaluation in Scotland the uproar came from small businesses. The National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses was one of the leading protagonists in criticising the Government and in demanding change. The immediate abolition of domestic rates was then proposed, with a deferred proposal to change the business rate. But many of the small business people with whom I have dealt feel that the change will be worse than the existing system. The uniform business rate will not help them. Indeed, in many cases it may make their circumstances even worse.

The proportion of turnover spent on rates is, generally speaking, higher for small businesses than for big businesses, so the burden falls unevenly on them. The uniform business rate is not the answer to the problem. I urge the Government to consider a system of business taxation that takes some account of the ability to pay and allows for local variations. A consequence of the change is that local authorities will have no incentive to be efficient in order to attract and encourage the development of new businesses in their areas.

Small businesses are often literally one-man or one-woman businesses, and the burdens imposed on them in terms of financial difficulties and administrative requirements are often extremely demanding. I ran a small business and can certainly testify that the endless form filling required caused genuine anxiety compared with the fundamental job of finding the market and ensuring that the product or service is delivered on time and competitively. The Government should do more to reduce that burden, instead of continuing to treat small businesses as their unpaid tax collectors; to provide some assistance to allow small businesses to cope; and to ensure that they are given the practical support that may make life easier.

What most people setting up in business find irritating is, first, that they must put up securities against borrowing; secondly, that they are a bad risk compared with established businesses, so they must pay a higher rate of interest; and, thirdly, that they must spend the first few months setting up systems for VAT, sickness benefits and other administrative burdens to please Government Departments. The Government have set up those systems, always thinking in terms of large companies which have the bureaucracy to deal with them and underestimating the difficulties facing small businesses.

Small business self-employment will be a growing component of employment, but there are great unevennesses in different areas. We must find ways of encouraging people to develop businesses, we must give them the necessary finance without always demanding securities and imposing penal rates, and we must ease the administrative burdens. If we do that, some areas, which so far have not shared fully in the prosperity from which most parts of the south are benefiting, can start to have a fuller say. I hope that the Minister will address some of those issues.

5.4 pm

Mr. Graham Bright (Luton, South): Much of what the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said will strike a chord on this side of the House. I was particularly

interested in his point about directing money from the City to many of our small start-up buinesses. I believe that we must pursue that.

I welcome today's debate on the self-employed and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) on choosing this subject. It is important for the House to recognise the vital contribution that self-employed people make to Britain's economic prosperity. All too often in the past that contribution has been overlooked. Perhaps it is even more important to acknowledge the challenge facing them as our economic recovery gathers pace.

The truth is that for many years after 1945 successive Governments were preoccupied with policies designed to serve the interests of large organisations. We went a long way towards the corporate state, with huge public corporations, nationalised industries and public utilities striking deals with excessively powerful and privileged trade unions. In that process, the House was partially eclipsed and the interests of the self-employed, private individuals, small traders, professional people and small businesses were disregarded. As a result, the nation was impoverished, not just economically but socially and politically.

It was not surprising that the number of self-employed people had fallen dramatically by the time the Bolton committee of inquiry reported in 1971. What was surprising was the fact that so little was done until 1979 to relieve the burden of taxation and regulation pressing down upon them.

My hon. Friend the Minister is perfectly entitled to claim the credit on behalf of the Government for the transformation in the situation since then. There has been a remarkable expansion in the number of self-employed. A decade ago, there were only 1·9 million, and today there are more than 2·7 million — an increase of 800,000. Almost one in 10 of the work force now works for himself or herself. The figures for VAT registrations and the labour force surveys show continuing growth. It is heartening to see that about half the new jobs created since 1983 have come from self-employment.

We are witnessing part of the economic and social revitalisation of Britain. I do not accept the criticisms that the decline of the old manufacturing industries with their grotesque overmanning could have been avoided. These changes have taken place all over the world, and we could not have insulated ourselves against them. It is not in anyone's interests to deploy our work force inefficiently.

Nor do I agree that putting out subsidiary functions to competitive tendering is self-defeating. If large corporations or Government Departments can secure better catering, cleaning or secretarial services from outside agencies, the savings can be used to perform their essential tasks more efficiently. I seriously question whether we have yet gone far enough in opening up nationalised industries, local authorities, and big business and, dare I say it, even the National Health Service, to this process.

I am a strong supporter of the Government's measures to reduce the burden of taxation and regulation. They have undoubtedly helped to stimulate the number of those setting up in business on their own and to improve the prospects — this is particularly important — of those already in self-employment. But getting the state off the backs of the people is only the first step. There are other problems that must be positively tackled if we are to build on the success we have already had.

The great bugbear for people setting up on their own is red tape. There is still a great river of it flowing out from the town halls, the Inland Revenue, the Customs and Excise, and so on. It deters new entrants to business and actually encourages the black economy. We all know of people who will do household or other jobs for cash, provided that there are no records and no questions asked. That is deplorable.

A prime policy objective for the future must be to reduce the tidal flow of bureaucratic paper. I see no reason why a simplified system of business regulation should not be introduced, with all the statutory obligations for new small businesses with regard to health and safety, fire precautions, insurance, employment protection and sick pay set out on a single A4 sheet of paper. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West mentioned the inspectorates. I am frightened every time I look at the number of such inspectorates. I believe that we should have one inspectorate rather than so many. I also believe that a standardised form setting out tax and national insurance on one sheet of paper is perfectly feasible.

I am aware that a White Paper on deregulation is to be published in the summer and that the enterprise and deregulation unit of the DTI considers all new proposals regarding requirements for businesses. However, the burden of compliance on the self-employed and their operations is not generally known or appreciated. Figures supplied by Graham Bannock and Partners — the country's leading small firms' consultants—suggest that small businesses and the self-employed have to bear a burden of compliance that is seven to 10 times greater than that borne by large firms. That cannot be right. For example, ICI and other such large firms have advisers to help them overcome all the mountains of paper and regulations. In comparison with ICI, we must remember that the small business man bears a burden that is seven to 10 times greater.

The problems are illustrated further by considering our VAT system. I have always believed that VAT has the merit of making small firms keep proper records. That element of discipline is desirable as it enables small firms to know how they are doing and whether they are about to face trouble before they go broke. However, the United Kingdom system is more complicated than elsewhere in Europe. As a result, it imposes a disproportionate burden on self-employed traders compared with larger firms. The cost of administration is also proportionately higher, even though input tax can be reclaimed. I am talking not about upping the thresholds, but making the system simpler and reducing the burden.

In general, the tax system encourages investment in property, pensions, insurance schemes and quoted shares. The hon. Member for Gordon also mentioned this. However, the tax system does not offer any comparable incentives for investments in small, self-financed enterprises. Therefore, small firms and newly established self-employed people are at a disadvantage.

I do not expect my hon. Friend the Minister to offer us a preview of the Budget. None the less, I hope that he will convey to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer—as have my colleagues on the Back-Bench Committee on smaller businesses and the Small Business Bureau—our concern about the weight of taxation and the demands of the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise on the self-employed.

[Mr. Graham Bright]

A reduction in the standard rate of income tax will undoubtedly be welcome. What would be even more welcome would be a simpler tax regime with far fewer forms. That is the only way to diminish the attractions of the black economy. That must be an important task for any Government to consider. Such measures are, of course, in the interests of large firms as well as the small ones. A competitive environment offers the best guarantee of the efficient use of our resources. Large companies must be encouraged to contract out as many non-essential functions as Government Departments, local authorities and the nationalised industries have done.

Small and large firms must make every effort to pay their bills promptly. We all know of companies, some of them big ones—GEC has been mentioned—that are not prompt payers. Recently, as a small business man, I had a run-in with a large distribution group. Fortunately, I was in a good position because not only was I supplying that group—it owed me a vast sum of money—but I also suddenly discovered that it was supplying me. I owed that group a small sum of money, but there appeared to be one rule for the rich and one for the poor. That company demanded payment from the small trader within 28 days, or no goods. However, as a small trader I had to give that company 120 days credit on some occasions. That is an example of the big company making money out of a small company.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Name it.

Mr. Bright: I do not want to name it, but it is one of the large food distribution companies.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Do not be shy; name it.

Mr. Bright: All I would say is that it deserves the Booker prize.

It is not always clear when bills become due. I believe that if legislation was introduced it would make contracts much more complicated. However, big companies must be educated in this matter by the Government, the CBI—I am pleased that the CBI has put its weight behind such a campaign—and by the House.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My hon. Friend says that the CBI has put its weight behind that campaign. Does my hon. Friend agree that it could put more weight behind such a campaign if it expelled those firms that broke its guidelines on the payment of bills?

Mr. Bright: That is certainly an interesting concept for the CBI. Unfortunately, the CBI derives its income from those very companies, and that makes it rather difficult. However, if such a measure was introduced it would certainly concentrate minds. Perhaps the small firms section of the CBI could push for such a measure. If small, self-employed traders have to wait too long for payment they will simply not be around to offer competitive services in the future. We must consider that problem.

When there are large numbers of self-employed, operating small and medium-sized enterprises, the best conditions for sustained economic growth exist. They provide a pool of enterprise that stimulates the exchange of information and technological advance. Some of those firms will grow into substantial businesses. However, in Scotland, the north-west and the north-east, where such people are thin on the ground, we find over-mature, declining industries and pools of unemployment. That is the price we have had to pay for neglecting the self-employed and small enterprises until 1979.

The Government have laid the foundations for economic recovery. The benefits are now coming through in the form of rapid growth, a rise in real incomes and falling unemployment. What we must now do is to ensure that the burden of taxation and of regulations is reduced still further. Removing the obstacles to self-employment is the way forward to a more competitive and flexible economy. I know that the Minister understands that and I believe that the House and country will support him in achieving those objectives.

5.17 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I join the hon. Member for Luton, South (Mr. Bright) in thanking the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) for tabling the motion.

I believe that there has been some confusion over the question of small businesses and support for them, as against the concept of self-employment, particularly in the construction industry.

I have a great feeling for small businesses. Most of my family were small business people. After coming out of the armed forces my father became what was known as a "snob", though not in a certain sense of the word. He was a shoe repairer and shoemaker. He was a small business man. I had uncles who ran fruiterers, florists and butchers shops. I understand the struggle that small business people have and the difficulties that they face, especially nowadays, when we consider the growth of monopolies and the fact that small business men have increasingly been pushed to the wall. Indeed, the hon. Member for Luton, South made the case for the small business man against the monopoly, whether private or public. I have great sympathy with that. None of us in the Labour party has ever argued that everything in this country should be run and controlled by large corporations and monopolies, which push small business people to the wall.

If my wife wants to have her leather bag repaired, she does not go to a large company in Liverpool—there is nobody there to do it anyway. She goes to a small business man, who does a fine job. The Soviet Union and East European countries are having to take such things on board. If one wants things done at that level, one must go to the small business. No Socialist has ever argued that there is anything wrong with small businesses.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heffer: The hon. Gentleman would not let me intervene——

Mr. Jones: I offered.

Mr. Heffer: The hon. Gentleman did not offer. I shall not make a long speech. I wanted to make this point.

When I was a Minister at the Department of Industry, the Labour Government encouraged and helped small businesses. A section of our Department was concerned only with assisting small businesses. No one in the Labour party has ever said, "Crush the small business man." On the contrary, we have been very much in favour of helping to extend and develop small businesses.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Can he remember saying on 4 February 1986:

"it is rubbish to suggest that the answer to our unemployment problems is self-employment. It has done great damage to the people of this country and to our industries". —[*Official Report*, 4 February 1986; Vol. 91, c. 149.]

How can the hon. Gentleman justify what he is saying now, having said that?

Mr. Heffer: The hon. Gentleman has just made the point that I was coming to. I was talking about the construction industry. I was born and bred in it, and spent my apprenticeship and worked in it most of my life, apart from my years in the war, when I was in the Royal Air Force. That is a different matter. The hon. Gentleman is confusing helping small businesses with the growth of so-called self-employment — lump labour — particularly in the construction industry. That has been pernicious, dangerous and has not helped the industry—it has done the opposite. That is the point that I wanted to make.

Competition leads to the growth of large companies and monopolies, and the destruction of small businesses. If Conservative Members do not understand that, they do not understand the nature of the society in which we live. Competition does not lead to the growth of small businesses. It leads to the very opposite. It leads to the growth of monopolies, and monopolies destroy competition. If Conservative Members do not understand that, they do not understand capitalism or the society in which we live. It is no good the Conservative Whip, the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown), laughing. That is the truth. Monopolies grow out of competition and destroy small businesses in the same industry. On an international scale, the great international corporations take over and, even on that scale, squeeze out other people.

The Government have been much in favour of privatisation in the aircraft industry. One of the competitive firms has now been taken over by a bigger firm. A private monopoly, as opposed to a public monopoly, is growing up. If Conservative Members do not understand that, they do not understand the nature of the society in which we live.

The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West referred to the CBI. The idea of the CBI expelling those who break its guidelines is ridiculous. Those concerned know where their bread is buttered and who determines the position in industry. I see that Conservative Members are with me on that. It is true, and they know it, as I know it.

People like myself in the Labour party were against lump labour in the construction industry. I tried to introduce a private Member's Bill to ensure that lump labour was outlawed from that industry. It was not passed by the House, but the Labour Government tried to introduce such a Bill. We were defeated in the election in 1970, and the Bill fell. The Bill raised the question of what was happening to people who were not paying taxation or national insurance. The Government had to act. Even the Conservative Government rightly had to act on that issue. That is why we had 714 and 715 tax certificates for the self-employed. It was not the best way to deal with the matter, but it brought in revenue for the Government which otherwise would have been lost. It was wrong that those who were employed by direct labour—whether private or public—had to pay taxation and national insurance, but that those who were not were getting away with it and not paying their contributions to the nation. The Conservative Government had to introduce the new measure, because it was vital that people paid their contributions.

Let us look at lump labour, or self-employment, in the construction industry. It has been growing, certainly under this Government. Let us consider the problems that it causes. Despite the mass unemployment in the construction industry, we are now beginning to suffer because in certain areas we do not have the skilled labour that we should have. How do we get skilled labour? In the old days, large firms and local authorities employed apprentices. The apprentices were trained, and when they had finished that period of training — whether it was after five or seven years—they were able to do the job that was required of them as trained workers.

I am a joiner, and every time I come into the Chamber I look at the beautiful woodwork. It could have been done only by the trained joiners of my trade. I am always proud of that. When I look round, I think what a wonderful job those joiners did. When I worked on the big liners that sailed from Liverpool and I went into a first-class cabin or a great dining hall, I admired the beautiful work that had been done by trained joiners.

But what happened? My Government rightly decided to allow local authorities to have housing action areas where there could be modernisation to bring the houses up to a good standard. Bathrooms and so on were put in. Because we did not have the trained workers, the cowboys moved in. In those areas, people were sometimes worse off after the development than before the non-trained workers went in. That is what has happened in the construction industry. There is now a lack of skilled personnel. The work being done on some sites is not as good as it should be, because the workers have not been trained.

Training is only one aspect of self-employment. There are also the cowboys—half-trained, under-trained, non-trained — who move in, believing that they are trained workers. The result is a poor job. It upsets me that some employers, especially in the construction industry, put their hands on their hearts and say that they are not in favour of lump labour, but then, behind the scenes, encourage it because it removes their overheads. They do not have to worry about them and can avoid them. In this way they also avoid payment if there are accidents on the job. One of the problems in the industry is the growing number of people who are injured — largely self-employed people who are not receiving the support they would have received if they had been directly employed. Usually, they do not have a union to fight for them, and are thus left in a position in which they should not have been left.

So far I have discussed training, health and safety, the lackof apprenticeships and the cowboys who have spread through the industry. People like me are not against small businesses. We want them to develop, and we shall encourage and help them. We believe that the banks should help them, without charging high interest rates. It is marvellous when someone who has been made redundant starts up a small business on his own, develops it and realises his potential. We are not against that, and we never have been. However, we are against self-employment in the form of lump labour, which is undermining one of the greatest industries in this country. Sooner or later, we must control it.

[Mr. Heffer]

Many years ago, when we started developing in the big cities, in urban areas and in housing action areas, I suggested to my union that we should organise teams of our people to take on the contracts for this employment. It did not agree with me—or rather, it ignored what I said, so I assumed that it did not agree with me. Fair enough. However, in the long run, if we are to deal with these matters, self-employment will not be the important issue. There will have to be a growth of co-operatives at local level to do the job. I want the trade unions to play a full part in that and to involve themselves in the co-operatives' development.

The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West has raised an important matter today. I did not know that Hertfordshire, West was on the Hemel Hempstead side. I was born and bred in Hertfordshire, which includes Hertford, Ware and Hoddesdon, and that is where I learnt about small businesses. My people were involved in them.

We in the Labour party are not against small businesses. We are against the growth of self-employment in the construction industry. It is undermining and doing great damage to an important industry.

5.33 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. John Cope): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) on his luck in the ballot, and even more on his choice of subject, as did the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer).

The encouragement of self-employment and small business is central to our concern to encourage innovation, enterprise and growth. As has already been mentioned, many people tend to think of the self-employed as one-man or one-woman businesses; but, of course, self-employment covers all unincorporated businesses, whether or not there are employees in them — there often are — and partnerships and unincorporated co-operatives. In fact, self-employment covers anyone who is working, does not work for a company and is not an employee.

The growth in the numbers of self-employed has been a striking feature of employment trends since 1979. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Mr. Bright) said that in that year it was estimated that there were 1·9 million self-employed workers. That had risen to more than 2·6 million by 1986—a rise of more than 40 per cent. That growth is continuing strongly now. The ratio of self-employed to employed is now about one in nine, and the growth in self-employment has occurred in a wide section of industry — manufacturing, construction, transport and services. I accept what the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said about the differences in the scale of self-employment in different parts of the country, but growth has occurred in all the regions of Great Britain. For example, there has been a 61 per cent. increase in Yorkshire and Humberside and at the same time an increase of 36 per cent. in the northern region, so the growth is widely spread.

The Government believe that self-employment has an important role to play in the regeneration of the economy and the reduction of unemployment. It brings benefits to individuals, to businesses and to the economy. The hon. Member for Walton made an interesting point about competition. He seemed to think that competition always works against the small business. It can work against it at times, especially if there is a monopoly, but often the small business can take advantage of its competitive edge and flexibility to make competition work in its favour. That is why there has been such a growth of small businesses in recent years.

The growth of self-employment has shown that there is a wealth of entrepreneurial talent in this country — among unemployed and employed alike—which, in the past, has been somewhat stifled by the economic climate but which, in the right economic climate that we now have, can flourish. Self-employment is a source of enterprise, innovation and growth and an important means of fostering the enterprise culture. It is also a valuable source of employment, a seedbed for new business formation, and one of the ways of increasing labour market flexibility, to the benefit of industry and the consumer. All those things are advantages to the economy, to the country and to individuals.

Self-employment provides opportunities for people to be their own bosses and to develop their own business ideas, entrepreneurial skills and job satisfaction. Many people, particularly women, also enjoy the flexibility in working hours that self-employment can provide; it can help them get on with the rest of their lives, too. Such independence of action also means that self-employed people must take far more responsibility for their own future — not only responsibility for the risks of their businesses, but for the provision of their pensions, and so on. However, the continuing growth in self-employment shows that people are willing and able to take the risks and responsibilities because of the satisfaction that they gain.

People, not Governments, create jobs. What we can try to do — and have done, I think, with success — is to create the conditions that encourage the growth of new and independent enterprises. That is the foundation of our employment and economic strategy. Our task is to remove the disincentives to enterprise so that people can exploit their potential and skills for their own good and that of the economy. A number of the steps that we have taken as part of that task are directly concerned with encouraging the creation and growth of small businesses, including those of the self-employed.

The flagship of all our efforts to support small business is the Government's small firms service, which offers a comprehensive nationwide service to all small businesses, giving advice on any relevant topic or problem, backed up by an excellent counselling service. No one in business, or thinking of going into business, is too small to qualify for help.

The small firms service is an important gateway for business in Government Departments, including the established DTI schemes and the new ones announced recently. It is a valuable institution and I am keen that it should be developed to realise its full potential. We should ensure that it is known to everyone who might be able to benefit from it. It is expanding. In 1986-87 it handled over 280,000 inquiries and held over 38,000 counselling sessions. That represents increases of 12·3 and 8·8 per cent. respectively on the previous year's business.

I am anxious to do more to make that valuable service more widely available. The computerised reference book is central to the information service. It is a substantial database and is of direct relevance to small businesses. It is the main tool used by the inquiry officers when people call at or telephone the small firms centres.

The reference book has sections detailing all the relevant Government schemes and gives particulars of the various interfaces between Government and business, including matters such as patents, company formation, export assistance, ACAS and more obvious matters. It has a section on Government purchasing. I very much agree with what was said earlier about Government purchasing, particularly the fact that small businesses can provide value for money when supplying to Government as well as to large companies.

The reference book contains a lot of information about training schemes and courses — not only Government schemes, but all the others — that are available in the area of the small firms centre and nationally. Open and distance learning are important to small businesses.

The reference book contains information on where to go for help with all sorts of problems. It gives particulars about franchising, European Community information, and so on. There is a national reference book that contains much national information, and regional reference books, held in the local offices, contain more local information.

I can announce that we have decided to make the small firms service's computerised reference book available to outside bodies, together with an updating service. It will be available to firms on their own computer systems, and they will be able to read it direct. Comprehensive and up-to-date information is essential to small businesses, not least on the purchasing side. Many other organisations, such as local enterprise agencies and chambers of commerce, make substantial use of the small firms service information when dealing with members and clients. Access to it at present is by telephone, but we shall improve on that in the way that I have just announced.

Local enterprise agencies have become a vital source of assistance to businesses. They are able to offer advice and counselling that is of particular relevance to those starting their own businesses, and they are of great help to businesses that are already off the ground.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: The Minister mentioned the many incentives that are available, to which we give a broad welcome. However, is he aware that other parts of Government policy act as a disincentive? Is he aware of an article in today's *Glasgow Herald*, which points out that many small businesses in Scotland are currently at a tremendous rates disadvantage? That will be insignificant compared to the problems that will arise if the uniform business rate is introduced in Scotland but not elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Is he aware of the many problems that that will pose for Scottish industry, especially small businesses?

Mr. Cope: I am not sure whether that is relevant to this part of my speech. As a rule, I do not see the *Glasgow Herald* very promptly, although I am devoted to it. I shall look for the article that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned. The issue of rates in England and Wales is under discussion elsewhere.

In many cases, local enterprise agencies provide a wide variety of services, including managed workshops, financial advice and other specialised forms of assistance. There are nearly 400 local enterprise agencies, which are supported by over 3,000 companies, organisations and individuals. It is extremely important that those agencies should keep their roots local and in the private sector. There is a need for a period of strengthening and consolidating established local enterprise agencies. We shall not see much more of the rather explosive growth in the numbers of agencies that we have seen in recent years.

The Government want local enterprise agencies to be firmly-based permanent features of the local economies in which they operate. It is important that they retain their independence and do not become permanent pensioners of the Government, with all that that implies for governmental and parliamentary direction and interference in their work. The local enterprise agency grants scheme is geared to that end. Agencies are encouraged to play a focal role in networks of organisations and people who are similarly committed to helping economic growth.

Many different groups of people are seeking to start their own businesses — young people, women, ethnic minorities, and so on. LEAs must be aware of the needs of those specialised groups. Moreover, it will contribute to the strength of the LEA movement if they can assure that, where appropriate, they make special provision for those particular groups. Some agencies are designed to help certain groups, but I hope that such agencies will contribute to the common effort to assist small businesses and that they will not over-emphasise different sectors.

One of the most successful programmes of the Department of Employment is of particular benefit to the unemployed — the enterprise allowance scheme. It helps the unemployed to start their own businesses by paying them an allowance of £40 per week for one year to help to overcome the disincentive of the loss of benefit as soon as they stop being available for work. I am glad to tell the House that more than 315,000 people have taken advantage of the scheme to start their own businesses or to become self-employed on an individual basis. Over 100,000 places are available this year, and there will be 110,000 next year.

The scheme does not simply provide jobs for people during the year in which people receive the allowance; it encourages — and is intended to do — the formation of viable businesses, preferably those with a potential for growth and job creation. Recent survey results showed that, of those who received the allowance for one year, 65 per cent. were still trading three years after starting up. At that point, for every 100 businesses still trading, 114 additional jobs have been created. Those results are encouraging, but we must not be complacent. We are examining ways in which the survival, growth and job-generating prospects of those in the scheme can be enhanced.

By way of encouragement to those who may be considering entering the scheme, I shall mention two examples of how it has helped unemployed people to set up successful businesses. First, four unemployed people on Merseyside formed an independent bus company called Fareway Passenger Services in February 1987. It now operates a fleet of 25 buses throughout the Merseyside area, and I am told that it employs more than 50 people.

A slightly younger business was started by Mr. David Rafferty, from Northumberland. He joined the enterprise allowance scheme from the dole in April 1987.

Mr. Heffer: The Minister has mentioned bus services. However, deregulation meant that a number of employees were thrown out of work. Although a small company may have achieved growth, the number of workers in the industry has not been enhanced.

Mr. Cope: The service to the public has certainly been enhanced in some areas, and that has enhanced the number of people working on the buses and able to supply the service. The point of bus deregulation was to permit people to start bus services wherever they thought that they were required, and I believe that that, too, has been achieved.

I was about to tell the House about Mr. Rafferty from Northumberland. In April last year he started Superior Cleaning Specialists. He had been unemployed for some time, but he identified a gap in the market and succeeded in winning a contract with British Telecom to clean telephone kiosks in Edinburgh. He now has over 100 employees and a turnover of more than £500,000 in a year. Thus, an unemployed person has started a very successful business with the aid of the enterprise allowance scheme.

Of course, not all businesses which take advantage of the scheme grow quite as quickly; nor can they be expected to do so. However, my examples show how the scheme can enable entrepreneurial talents among the unemployed to flourish. It has also contributed to the re-establishment of the enterprise culture. People are aware that, through the scheme, they have a chance to create their own businesses, even if they are unemployed. We have therefore deliberately kept the administration of the scheme as simple as possible, so that applicants are not deterred by bureaucracy. Moreover, we do not intend to pick winners from among the applicants. That is always very difficult to do with new businesses starting, and I do not think the Government are well placed to do it. In any case, it would conflict with the idea of the scheme.

Young people are another group to whom we give special attention. We believe that self-employment can provide them with many opportunities. About a quarter or those joining the enterprise allowance scheme are under 25, and measures aimed specifically at encouraging them include the technical and vocational education initiative, and the various schemes that help them to try out businesses while they are still at school.

The House will also know of the success of the youth training scheme. The Manpower Services Commission intends that, by 1990, enterprise training will be made available to all YTS trainees as an integral part of their courses. The introduction of enterprise training into YTS will be project-based and in partnership with the YTS managing agents.

My Department is also supporting the Prince's Youth Business Trust, which helps 18 to 25-year-olds who wish to become self-employed or to expand their existing businesses. We match the money raised by the scheme pound for pound until 1989, to make loans to young entrepreneurs. That is likely to result in a contribution by the Department of some £15 million by that time.

There are other schemes of the same kind, but I shall only mention Project Fullemploy, which provides young people with enterprise training, and is particularly concerned with establishing access to training for ethnic minorities.

In the past, there has been a temptation to think of self-employment as primarily a male preserve. Of course, that is not true at all. Self-employed men still outnumber self-employed women, but self-employment among women has almost doubled, from 356,000 in 1979 to 708,000 in 1987. That is a much steeper rise than for men.

Mr. Rowe: The Minister may wish to note that a new organisation has been started called Women Into Business, which is showing a remarkable capacity to attract and encourage women entrepreneurs.

Mr. Cope: I am indeed aware of that organisation, and I commend its work.

The Government also believe that self-employment and the establishment of small businesses can help to tackle the difficulties faced by some of our inner cities. We recognise that, while self-employed people running small businesses offer excellent potential for the creation of wealth and jobs and revitalising areas, they can face particular disadvantages in the inner cities. That is why the small firms service and the enterprise allowance scheme are made particularly readily available to local businesses and residents in such areas, together with the other national initiatives offered by our Department and other Government Departments.

Finally, let me mention the Manpower Services Commission's training for enterprise programme, which aims to equip potential and existing entrepreneurs with the skills and knowledge required to encourage and develop small businesses. More than 100,000 people will be helped in 1987-88, at a cost of £19·3 million. That is another important initiative.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Department accept that there is a need for an additional source of venture capital for small businesses? I appreciate that the Minister is concerned with grants aimed at training for enterprise, but does his Department believe that it could promote initiatives to encourage the setting up of local investment banks or financial companies, as the CBI and others suggest?

Mr. Cope: We are always willing, particularly at this time of year, to listen to proposals involving finance. However, the hon. Gentleman cannot expect Ministers to comment on them in advance of the Budget. I am, of course, very conscious of the suggestions made by previous bodies to which the hon. Gentleman has drawn attention.

I have been outlining the various measures that the Government take to encourage and assist the creation of businesses. It would be illogical if we were also burdening them with a mountain of Government regulations resulting in a disproportionate cost to small firms, and there is always the danger of that happening. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South rightly emphasised the necessity for continuing and renewed vigilance, and for the greatest possible efforts to reduce the administrative and legislative burdens that the Government impose on businesses, especially small businesses.

It has been suggested that people should be able to choose self-employed status for tax and other purposes if they wish, without having to argue about it with the tax authorities. However, if we were to allow the individual to choose whether to be treated as self-employed or employed, I have no doubt that some firms would see it as being to their advantage to classify all their employees as self-employed, and so avoid their obligations as employers—not least the obligation to collect PAYE tax and national insurance. That is why the proposal is usually expressed not as a simple matter of providing a choice, but as a matter of changing the rules in less sweeping ways. It is also why it is, I believe, necessary for the various

Government agencies involved to retain the ability to argue about the facts in individual cases, rather than merely having to accept the decisions of others.

We are very conscious of the problems of those individuals whose status is not clear-cut. That is why we have taken action to alleviate the difficulties faced by some self-employed people in establishing their status for tax and national insurance purposes. When people start up in business as self-employed, they wish to ensure, as quickly and simply as possible, that they will be treated as self-employed for tax and other purposes. To overcome the problems, the Inland Revenue and the Department of Health and Social Security, with our support, have taken a series of measures. They have issued better publicity on what constitutes self-employment — for example, the Inland Revenue leaflet "Tax: Employed or Self-Employed"—and people are encouraged to seek advice.

Since April last year, each tax and social security office has had one official responsible for decisions on employment status, which can save people much time in explaining their circumstances. They can request a written ruling on their status, which will remain in force unless their circumstances change. It is perhaps still more important that a ruling by one Department will be accepted by the other, which ensures consistency and saves time. We are continuing to monitor the position to ensure that the measures alleviate the problem sufficiently.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West for the opportunity to discuss our policies and the measures for securing the continued growth of self-employment. I have noted the suggestions made by my hon. Friend and by others. No doubt other suggestions will be made, and I will consider them with care. I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury will take pleasure in examining the suggestions that concern them, and no doubt there will be many in that category.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West is aware that the Government fully share his concern to encourage more growth in the number of self-employed people and in the number of small businesses generally. More people recognise the opportunities that exist in the United Kingdom today. People have the confidence to set up their own businesses in the knowledge that if they are successful they will be rewarded for their enterprise. Indeed, the country as a whole will be rewarded by their enterprise. I am glad to commend the motion to the House.

6 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I also congratulate the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) on choosing self-employment as the subject for this afternoon's debate. It would be wrong of me to cast doubt on some aspects of the hon. Gentleman's motion. However, the Opposition consider the specific terms of the motion to be far too congratulatory of the Government. Part of my duty will be to expose the differences between the Opposition and the Government on this subject.

The Government are extremely good at presentation. Indeed, if they get top marks for anything, they get them for presentation. However, the presentation and the hype do not always lead to a true presentation of the facts as most objective observers would see them. This is certainly the case with self-employment and small enterprises. The present official Opposition, like previous Labour Governments, are tremendously in favour of small businesses and self-employment, as long as that self-employment is carried out for the right reasons, that what people choose to enter freely is rewarding, and that it leads to a reasonably good life for those involved in it.

One of the problems that we face in the debate is that the Government repeatedly present the facts in a distorted way. Very often self-employment can be a brutal and unhappy experience. It can often lead to an unhappy home life, insecurity, low pay and other uncertainties. The cost in human terms might be great. Someone may lose a job and then invest savings and lose them as well, in a vain and ill-advised attempt to embark on self-employment. Self-employment is excellent where it is right for an individual. However, it is not the be all and end all, at all times, for all people.

I corrected the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West earlier when he did rough justice to the historical record. The fact is that in 1969 a Labour Government initiated the small business enterprise bandwagon. Tony Crosland, that much respected figure on the Labour party Benches, as the then President of the Board of Trade, set up the Bolton committee to consider ways to help develop small enterprise and small businesses, and to develop the environment in which those businesses could grow. Certainly the efforts of Harold Lever—now Lord Lever — in that direction are well known. The Bolton committee recommendations — many of which were accepted by the then Labour Government—led to the creation of the post now held by the Minister of State, Department of Employment, with its responsibility for small businesses.

I listened to the speeches made by Conservative Members and by the Minister with some surprise. The Minister did not refer to the role of local government in this very important area. I have visited many new enterprise initiatives around the country. The Minister has also visited initiatives, and he cannot be unaware of the fact that local government — consisting mostly of Labour-controlled local authorities — has made an outstanding contribution in terms of a partnership between the private and public sectors. Where that relationship is at its best it provides the environment for small businesses and self-employment to develop much more rapidly than they would normally do so. I have seen local economic development units in local authorities working closely and happily with local businesses to achieve common objectives.

The Labour party should receive credit for the wide range of initiatives that it has promoted for small businesses and self-employment. I want to refer to an example that the Minister has glossed over. ILEA has developed a scheme in association with the London enterprise agency, which is considered to be one of the premier agencies in the country. They have constructed the London education business partnership. The aim of the partnership is to bridge the gap between school and industry. The partnership between ILEA and local business is regarded as one of the most interesting and innovative in the country, but we have not heard a word about it because of the Government's prejudices against local government.

We cannot take all the credit for helping and encouraging people into self-employment. Sadly, the Government have done their best to force people into self-employment in the most savage way possible. We can draw

[Mr. Barry Sheerman]

a parallel between what is happening now and what happened in the 1930s. As unemployment went through the roof in the 1930s, self-employment was the only bitter alternative for many of our citizens. The Government have glossed over the fact that for many people self-employment is not something that they rush to, welcome or embrace because it is a wonderful life. For some people it is the only alternative at a time when unemployment has risen by between 300 and 400 per cent. It is no wonder that self-employment has risen by 40 per cent., when unemployment has risen by 400 per cent. under this Government.

We must get the perspective and the balance right. We should not claim that for some people self-employment is not rewarding, good or a better way of life, but we must recognise that many people are forced into self-employment. Some people invest their life savings or redundancy payments and then lose that money. The Minister referred to two glowing examples of people on the enterprise allowance scheme who had done very well. I could recite a catalogue of people who, perhaps inadvisedly, were forced to make some provision for their families and their future, who did not end up employing 50 people or making a £500,000 turnover. I could refer to people whose experiences were worse than that.

I do not want to dwell simply on that side of the coin, but we must recognise the reality. I believe that in the 1980s we have replicated the experience of the 1930s. Perhaps the Minister would like to challenge me on the statistics. I recently read a research paper by Dr. Martin Binks and Dr. David Storey. According to their research, 50 per cent. of self-employment start-ups are what they term "desperation led".

People did not embark on self-employment because they saw a hole in the market or because they had a wonderful innovatory idea. They did so because there was no alternative for them. Perhaps that introduces a note of reality into the wonderful hype that the Minister has given to self-employment. Given that, under the Government, unemployment has increased by 2 or 3 million, none of this is surprising.

Set-up rates may have been high since 1979, but, on the dark side, so have failure rates. Two thirds of small firms still operate on such a shoestring that they cannot offer good wages and conditions to staff. Surely the Government must recognise that. The general household survey and the labour force survey show that low wages and uncertainty are features associated with many self-employed people. Sixty five per cent. of start-up schemes never create any jobs at all, except for the people who found the schemes. That is another part of the story that we did not hear from the Minister.

The Labour party recognises the need for enterprise. For example, it had a policy of extending the enterprise allowance scheme to firms successful in creating jobs during their first year. I should have thought that the Government would have taken that on board by now. We do not begrudge the fact that the enterprise allowance has given many people the opportunity to have a go in small businesses. As a nation we should be tackling new markets and technology and trying to create wealth, so small businesses with potential for growth must be identified and winners picked.

The enterprise allowance scheme has been in place long enough to have been modified and developed to help those businesses with an opportunity to move forward to grow. The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West, who is not in the Chamber at present, believes that there is no Labour party policy for small enterprises. We always have a manifesto for small businesses. The manifesto that I helped to launch just before the last general election included many changes and modifications to the law that would have made small businesses grow more rapidly.

Mr. Rowe: May we take it that the policy of municipalisation, which was rampant in the Labour party in the late 1970s, is now a dead duck and that legislation such as the West Midlands County Council Bill, which would have municipalised half the small businesses in the west midlands, will never appear again?

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that what he calls municipalisation was part of a policy of partnership between democratically elected local authorities, local businesses and local trade unionists. We try to foster such creative partnerships, and that is what we were trying to foster when we launched our 12-point plan just before the election last year. Part of our emphasis was on a shift away from Whitehall to the communities in which jobs and wealth creation are needed.

If the Minister considers the history of the past nine years, he will see that hon. Members have shown repeatedly that the real gap in financial provision is in the £100,000 and less category of finance. If one wants £1 million or £2 million, one can get it from the City. One can obtain finance in the £100,000 to £1 million league, but sensitivity to local needs, personalities and markets must come from the local area. That is why local government were so successful with local business and why the small business lobby wants to return to such a partnership. Creating such a local enterprise partnership to encourage small business growth is what the Labour party is all about.

The Minister spent some time talking about local enterprise development. When local enterprise development is good it is very good, but when it is not so good it is pretty average. We need to generalise and spread quickly what is happening in the best areas of that partnership between the private and public sectors. The Minister did not suggest that the Government were planning to spread those best practices sufficiently rapidly to those areas that need help.

That part of our policy was very valuable, as was our emphasis on building in training. I was pleased to hear some of the Minister's remarks, but it was a case of too little, too late, when he referred to building enterprise training into the education system and youth training. Labour Members have been recommending, since the inception of the youth training scheme, that enterprise awareness should be taken seriously and not be seen merely as a couple of hours thrown in during the first week of youth training induction.

The Labour party has presented many policies to the electorate and the Government to improve the conditions in which small enterprises can flourish. The Labour party realises, much more than the present Administration do, that if this country is to be fit to move ahead and create wealth in the difficult conditions of competition over the next 10 or 20 years we must go in for high technology.

Technology does not stand still. If we compare this country with West Germany, the United States and Japan, we see that small to medium companies in the hi-tech area are not developing as rapidly as are our international competitors. Some of the small start-up schemes never employ anyone, and we are lagging behind seriously in establishing the small to medium firms which will be the technology leaders over the next 10 to 20 years.

The gloss of public relations from the Department of Employment and the Department of Trade and Industry, or the Department for enterprise—I am not quite sure what it is called these days—does not fool people. I wish to refer to the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) when he recently addressed the British Institute of Management's annual dinner. He said that we need enterprise in Britain and an enterprise culture, but, unless it is linked to an investment culture, a research culture and an education and training culture, it will not mean very much at all. Without these other vital ingredients, the enterprise culture may be not so much a culture as an adventurous spasm, thrilling to some while it lasts, but transitory and ineffectual in its results.

Labour Members care very much about wealth creation. Self-employment and small businesses have an important part to play in that, but the Government are hoodwinking the nation if they believe that they are progressing as rapidly as they should in that vital area.

6.19 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me in this important debate. On only one previous occasion have I had the pleasure of addressing such a crowded House.

We are a nation with few natural resources. We have some coal, and some gas and oil. Therefore, as a nation we have little to sell other than our labour. As one of the world's most populated countries, we have a surfeit of labour. Fortunately, as a race, we have always demonstrated resourcefulness, inventiveness and independence which have, in large measure, compensated for our lack of natural resources. Our place in the history of the world is in no small measure due to these attributes, which today are so typical of the many people who have become self-employed.

Anyone who has chosen to become self-employed will testify to the fact that this is not a soft option—quite the contrary. Sadly, in this post-war period, there is too much evidence not of encouragement but of downright hostility towards the small businesses and the self-employed. Regrettably, this hostility has stemmed largely from Governments—not just central Government but local government. The self-employed have been on the receiving end of blatant political hostility and a torrent of legislation by which successive Governments have sought to regulate and control the wealth-creating sector of the economy. This includes consumer protection legislation, employee protection legislation and fiscal legislation, where the employer now stands firmly in the shoes of Government as the unpaid collector of taxes.

What of the employer? To my knowledge, there is no protective legislation for him. Nor until recent times has there been much by way of recognition or reward. The Government have changed much of that. Today there is more incentive, more reward and more encouragement for those who demonstrate enterprise. It is important to recognise that the average entrepreneur—because that is what everybody starting in business is—does not look for Government assistance. On the contrary, all he wants is for the Government to keep out of the way. He wants not handouts but an environment which is sympathetic to business and in which enterprise and initiative can flourish. That means not more but less legislation and not more but less Government involvement.

The small business man seeks an environment in which he can do what he is best at—running his own business, identifying markets, satisfying those markets, buying and selling at a profit and employing people. Businesses which are established on their own are likely to survive on their own. I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister's examples of the unemployed who have become self-employed, but we must appreciate that not all unemployed people are frustrated entrepreneurs who can do a crash course in business studies and become tomorrow's employers. In the main, entrepreneurs are born, not made. In the main, they neither want nor expect the state to prop them up. Sadly, in this as in all other nations, they represent only a tiny fraction of the population.

For this reason, we must nurture and encourage these people. The future health and prosperity of the nation depend on them. We must do what we can to facilitate their progress. Here I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), who has proposed constructive improvements in this important sector. I also congratulate the Government, who have done more than any other Government since the war to nurture the small business sector, on their progress to date. I wholeheartedly support my hon. Friend the Minister's initiatives to reduce the burden of bureaucracy on small businesses and to create a climate in which they can prosper and grow.

6.24 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) on initiating this debate, because he has done a great service to the self-employed and small businesses, and to the House, in attracting attention to this important sector. However, I take issue with him over his remarks about the Scottish National party. The SNP was the first party to appoint a parliamentary spokesman on this subject. It then became trendy, and the other parties did so. The SNP also controls the Angus district council, of which I was provost, which was drawn out for particular attention by the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses and congratulated on its attitude and co-operation with non-domestic ratepayers, in consultation on rates. The SNP is proud of its record in assisting what we believe is a vital sector of the Scottish economy.

The Government are proud of their record, but for Scotland a caveat must be made, because figures given by the Minister to show increases in the number of self-employed do not apply in Scotland. Between 1979 and 1986, the number of self-employed rose by 40 per cent. throughout the United Kingdom but by only 19 per cent. in Scotland. Between 1983 and 1986, while it rose by 28 per cent. in the United Kingdom, it rose by only 14·5 per cent. in Scotland. I should like those figures to be vastly improved, because there is great scope for increasing the amount of self-employment and the number of small businesses in Scotland.

[Mr. Andrew Welsh]

One of the problems is that Parliament is not built to discuss the problems of the small businesses and the self-employed. It is designed for the two-party system. It is entrenched in vested interests—the management on the one side and the trade unions on the other. Last week's debate on employment showed this vested interest gulf only too clearly. This is all happening at the centre of British political power. The system is designed to suit the unions or the management, and no one seems to speak exclusively for the self-employed or the small businesses. Perhaps that is not a complaint but a hope, because if their cause were taken up across the parties it would be of benefit to the economy.

The Bolton report, which was itself a breakthrough, is now more a historical document, and it must be updated to meet present-day needs. The period of discussion to which the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) alluded has produced a recognition of the role of small businesses. There has been some advantage in the form of special small business governmental organisations — I acknowledge the Government's move on this — and a Minister for small businesses. In spite of all that, as yet there is no integrated small business or self-employed policy in the United Kingdom.

If the self-employed and small businesses are to play a more important role in the economy, there must be a more serious attempt to meet their specific and specialised needs. There should be a package for them which would shore up their weaknesses, caused by their size and their starting difficulties, and which would also play on their strengths. In particular, I point to the problems over the status of the self-employed and their classification. An act catering for the self-employed would clearly define who the self-employed are and would greatly assist them in carrying out their tasks. Special attention must be paid to the early days of such small businesses in terms of advice, back-up services and finance. There is always the irony that once they are established everyone wants to give them funds, but when they need the cash and are being established people do not want to know them.

The self-employed require a taxation package to allow them freedom of decision making and maximum help, especially in the first years of any new business. The self-employed must be given a better deal on the welfare state and various benefits. Benefits should be available, if they are available at all, to all citizens. The self-employed get a poor deal in terms of the benefits from which they are excluded. That acts against the self-employed and must be considered.

I should like to see the role of the Scottish Development Agency extended to allow assistance in the retail and service industries, as happens with the Highlands and Islands Development Board. Current regulations favour industrial or manufacturing processes at the expense of valuable opportunities in the retail and service industries. There is room for great expansion there.

I should like to ask the Minister questions relating to the unified business rate and the 1990 revaluation. When will small businesses be told the exact level of the unified business rate? When will that become "uniform" throughout the United Kingdom? I hope that I have intrigued the Minister enough for him to rush out and buy the *Glasgow Herald*, because the article in that paper points to some real fears and difficulties for businesses in Scotland. The Government must act to clear up the fears and worries facing small businesses and the self-employed over the present rating system and the proposed unified business rate.

Currently Scottish businesses are being massively disadvantaged when compared to their Welsh and English counterparts because of our increased rates burden. That burden has less to do with any local government spending than with the Government policy of withdrawing rate support grant. It is a worry because Scottish businesses will face yet another revaluation in 1990 and everybody knows the problems that hit them during the previous revaluation.

People want to know the details about how the unified business rate will work. Will it appear in 1992 throughout the United Kingdom as was scheduled or, as is becoming increasingly more obvious, has that timetable now gone? Will Scottish businesses again be the losers because we have a tax burden shared nowhere else in the United Kingdom? I should like to hear an answer to that question, whether now or at an early opportunity. I noted that the Minister, perhaps wisely, skated over such questions.

That tax is a potential death trap for Scottish jobs and businesses and is causing great concern. I remind the Minister of what was said by Bill Anderson, the Scottish secretary of the National Federation of Selfemployed and Small Businesses. He said:

> "A uniform business rate is likely to hit industry and commerce in lower rated areas and could clear businesses out of rural Scotland like the highland clearances."

How will any of that "encourage" the self-employed and small businesses as this motion urges us to do? It will do the very opposite.

The Government must carry through their promise to recognise the role of the self-employed and small businesses in germinating new ideas and new services and providing the yeast for the industrial system. Although a start has been made, I believe that co-ordination in the form of a package for the self-employed and small businesses must be created. That package should include finance, welfare, back-up and resources. Do that and Parliament will at last be recognising the true importance of small businesses and the self-employed to our economy, and that is a day I shall certainly welcome.

6.33 pm

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): As the richness of an area lies in the energy of its people, I am truly a lucky man to represent Stroud. Within the towns and valleys of that part of Gloucestershire there is a great diversity of interests and enterprises that readily adapt to ever-changing markets. When my hon. Friend the Minister has finished reading the *Glasgow Herald*, he may care to look at the business section of *The Times* today. There is a headline which states:

> "Pagoda winner for tents that are too hot to handle."

The article goes on to say:

> "Traditional bedouin tents are facing a new and startling rival in the desert—a high-tech 'space cover' produced by a fledgling company in the chillier climes of Stroud in Gloucestershire."

That company has received £2·7 million worth of orders in the first year. The article goes on:

> "Several Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Oman, have been among a score of countries queuing to buy the Pagoda tents".

It may interest hon. Members to know that one of those pagodas will be displayed in the exhibition hall in about a month. As they give protection from hot air, I can recommend close inspection.

In addition, and only last week, I received a letter about another company which said:

"We are a relatively young company, incorporated in 1984 for the purposes of supplying solutions to Engineers, based on personal computers. As a husband and wife team, we set out with minimal capital and have now grown to provide employment in this area for a staff of 10 . . . The climate for young companies, like ourselves has never been better, owing to the management of our excellent Government who have set the long-term future of our country on course. Our products and services are aimed at the small to medium sized companies who have the foresight to invest in new technology for designing and manufacturing their products. As with most young companies, we are reasonably proud of our enterprise and long term success and would like to share our news. We anticipate having an official opening".

In the last month I have met two high-tech firms which together employ more than 250 people in my constituency. They were both founded in the past 10 years. In fact, they were both founded and funded by people still in their thirties who have good ideas and, just as important, the energy to implement them.

There are many other companies like that and their contribution is vital. The traditional large employers in my constituency, and I suppose in many others, have declining labour forces. The traditional employers in my constituency are largely engaged in engineering, textiles and the manufacture of diesel engines. They have one thing in common — they employ less labour than they did 20 years ago. For instance, the manufacture of diesel engines employed 4,000 people at its peak, but it now employs 1,300. It is equally certain that in future they will become more capital-intensive and even less labour-intensive; that is if they are to be able to compete in the future.

It is a great privilege to be self-employed and we must do all we can to encourage such people and help them to achieve success. Initially, the self-employed are likely to be not just managing director but designer, shop floor worker, financial controller, teamaker and bookkeeper. Any new business is more likely to survive those first few crucial months if the founder's mind can focus on the business rather than on peripheral activities such as puzzling over national insurance contributions.

How can we help the growing ranks of the self-employed, which are increasing at the net rate of some 500 every week? Increasing the threshold for VAT purposes would certainly help in the near future. Increasing the threshold at which a full audit becomes compulsory would be useful. In this country we have more auditors as a proportion of the total population than any other major country. Let us look again at employer-employee relationships in small firms. Surely it is essentially an agreement. At its most basic it is the payment of money in exchange for the provision of a service, either full or part time.

What is the difference between an employee and a sub-contractor? Why should they be taxed on different bases? The Inland Revenue should not be obliged to differentiate between an employee who works for one person and is provided with a hammer and a sub-contractor who works for perhaps two people and, more importantly, supplies his own hammer. By all means let us ensure that employers subtract the standard rate of tax from payments to all those supplying a service in the form of labour, but let us simplify taxation and the deductions from wages and salaries so that each looks after his own. Perhaps it is too much to hope that every employee with a small firm could be a sub-contractor.

The pattern of employment is changing fast. The taxation of employed people has changed little, but I suggest that it should change more.

6.39 pm

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I shall be brief in the interests of other hon. Members who want to speak. I have an association with the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses in Nottingham. We meet regularly to discuss various problems.

I should like to refer to what the Government said in 1979, pre-election and after the election, and since about self-employment and small businesses being the areas in which jobs will be made. I take note especially of the end of the motion, stating that the House

"calls on Her Majesty's Government to reduce obstacles to the spread of self-employment."

I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) on his motion and accept that part of it to which I have just referred. Indeed, it is those obstacles about which I should like to speak.

I am bothered by big businesses steamrollering little businesses. Not long ago I experienced that in a public inquiry concerning a massive retail firm that wanted to set up a store just outside my constituency. The end result would have seriously affected many small businesses, employing a fair-sized number of people in my constituency, which would have closed.

I want to make a political point. Indeed, I feel that I must do so because the big steamrollering firm that I am talking about contributes to Conservative party funds. That is not helping but hurting. The Minister is ducking out because the issue of East Midlands airport concerns other Departments, such as the Department of Transport and the Home Office. Several small businesses in my constituency do a fair amount of exporting. However, they find difficulty at the airport because not enough customs officers are on duty to clear the warehouses so that those exporters can bring in their products, put them on the aircraft, and fly them out. If the warehouse is chock bang full because there are insufficient customs officers to do the necessary inspections, those small firms that are making a massive contribution, not just in my constituency, but right across the country, have to lay off people.

I praise some of the things that the Government have done concerning the self-employed and small businesses. I praise also Nottinghamshire county council, which has done a marvellous job. I served on that council for 15 or 16 years before I came to this place and realise exactly what it is doing. Its industrial development committee is doing a marvellous job. I praise councillor Paddy Tipping, who is leading the committee in the direction that it should be going, by providing land on which entrepreneurs can set up small businesses and create employment, because there is a fair amount of unemployment in my constituency. Therefore, I have nothing but praise for what Nottinghamshire county council is doing. That relates also to Ashfield district council and to the co-operation between the county and the district in what they are doing to encourage small businesses to create jobs and to help the economy.

[Mr. Frank Haynes]

Small businesses are upset about the incoming poll tax. It is no good the Minister saying, "It is not the responsibility of the Department of Employment", because there is a connection. The Minister must consider this and use his influence and that of his Department on the Department of the Environment. The self-employed people I have met are frightened to death that they will go out of business because of the pressure that the poll tax will put on them. They do not know what is going on or what will happen if the community charge goes on the statute book. Therefore, I ask the Minister to talk to the Department of the Environment and to cool it off because the direction in which it is going will not help small businesses or the self-employed.

I have made my point and hope that it will be considered in the interests of those people who are trying to set up firms in my constituency and, at the same time, give employment to those who do not have it.

6.44 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): If there is one measure which will be of immense help to small businesses and the self-employed, and which will help to reduce the black economy, it must be to raise the VAT threshold to a much more realistic figure. I have called for that consistently, as have many of my hon. Friends over the years.

If the turnover for VAT registration were £100,000 today, it would effectively release hundreds of thousands of small businesses and entrepreneurs from the time-consuming burden of VAT registration and administration. It would cost the Treasury nothing because the cost of administration is about as much as the revenue obtain from that source. Indeed, it serves only to keep civil servants in jobs unnecessarily.

I shall, of course, be referred to the European Community's sixth directive which prevents such an initiative on our part unilaterally. However, the Minister will be aware that such a move is recommended in the White Paper "Lifting the Burden". I hope that the Government will not allow themselves to be beaten on such an initiative which must surely benefit all small businesses throughout the community.

I want to use the opportunity of this debate to refer to a situation allowed under current law which detrimentally affects self-employed traders and those operating small businesses in areas subject to a local redevelopment plan. It arises from the experiences of several of my constituents, which have since been confirmed by a report last month from the local ombudsman.

Briefly the facts are as follows. In 1980, my local borough council began to prepare a plan designed to revitalise a local shopping centre. The draft plan, published in 1982, contained proposals for the pedestrianisation of a busy local high street, the construction of a new link road to take the diverted traffic, and the redevelopment of the area including a new bus station and multistorey car park. Thus, it involved two local authorities; the borough council as the developing authority, and the county council as the highways authority.

Today, nearly eight years later, while most of the properties concerned have been purchased by the developer, no start has been made on the development. As the House will appreciate, the effect of the uncertainty and of the inevitable blight on business has been devastating on some of those who live and work in the area. Three such people complained to the local ombudsman that, in their view, there had been an inordinate delay on the part of the local council in implementing the development.

In his report, which was published last month, the ombudsman accepted that there had been certain delays but stated he did not see them as being of the council's making or that they could realistically have been foreseen. He did not, therefore, uphold the complaint. He did, however, accept that there had been maladministration in the way in which the council had responded to the blight notices that had been served — in seeming not to be concerned at the hardships caused by the time taken to determine which of the two authorities was the appropriate one upon which to serve blight notices under the Town and Country Planning Act 1971. He recorded the sad case of one of my constituents whose blight notice on the borough council resulted in a counter notice, reference to the Lands Tribunal, ultimate reference to the Secretary of State whose decision was then the subject of a judicial review, and a fresh counter notice.

As the House knows, the findings of the local ombudsman are not for us here but are for local councillors to determine in the light of the remedies that the ombudsman has proposed to compensate for the injustices caused to the complainants.

However, in the light of that experience and, I am sure, many hundreds of others throughout the country, it must be right to ensure that when a council decides to prepare a local development plan it should be absolutely clear which is the "appropriate" authority before it publishes that plan so that blight notices can be served and accepted without delay as soon as it appears that hardship is threatened.

Furthermore, the statutory compensation code as it stands today does not allow businesses the same loss payments as are allowed, as a moral gesture, to those residents who will be displaced from their homes. Few councils will exercise any discretion to compensate for the anxiety and hardship which blight imposes on businesses affected by such plans. The lives and livelihoods of self-employed people are at stake. I believe that the House should no longer tolerate such a situation and I hope that the Minister will take note in advance of the further representations that I propose to make.

6.49 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I shall be brief because time is very short. I wish to make three points. First, it is encouraging to find that, at least at rhetoric level, there is considerable agreement in the House about the important part to be played by self-employed people.

It is not unreasonable to make a distinction between those who are self-employed by choice and those who are self-employed by necessity. I accept the Opposition argument that we need to do more to make sure that those who are self-employed by necessity get the support that the Minister is busily engaged in extending to them in a variety of ways. I hope that they will be able easily to obtain information about where to go for help, and that they will go for help early enough to be able to benefit from it. Too many people seek help too late.

Secondly, although it will not happen this year or next year, we need to change the benefit rules so that people can

ease themselves into self-employment by working part time in a way which does not deprive them of the benefits to which they are entitled. The enterprise allowance is one method of doing that. I had hoped that it would be part of the introduction of a whole range of attacks on the tremendous barriers against self-employment. I believe that the black economy would shrink dramatically if people were allowed to top up their benefit to the taxable level openly by working as self-employed people while they tested the market to see whether they could grow a business.

Thirdly, I should like to re-emphasise the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) about the bumph that falls on the desk of anyone rash enough to imagine that he would like to take on an employee. That is probably the largest single reason why so many self-employed people remain at the level of employing themselves alone and do not take on anyone else. We have to make a distinction between those who have one or two employees and those who go the whole way. At the moment that would be quite impossible.

Some big companies come in for a lot of stick in the debate, and some behave extremely badly, but there are some remarkable examples of companies that have taken imaginative steps. I found on my desk the Shell guide to would-be suppliers, a remarkably clear and admirable publication for small firms to study. I very much hope that many other companies will follow suit.

There is the great experiment of what is called the Xanadu option whereby Rank Xerox could provide full-time employees who wanted to become self-employed with a network build-up for their small businesses. It has been an enormous success and was very well worth doing.

As the secretary for the all-party group on franchising, I must say that, for those who find that being self-employed without any back-up is too frightening, franchising is filling a remarkable gap in the market, is growing extremely fast and is encouraging a large number of people to go into business.

6.54 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I have a considerable vested interest in the subject as I represent the borough of Gravesham. Only eight years ago, the economy in my borough was based on heavy industry, and during the recession there was a decimation of employment within those industries, yet the borough recovered, largely due to the success of a considerable number of brand new businesses and self-employed people. In the census of 1981, the borough of Gravesham had 3,657 self-employed people. Today there are well over 5,000. That is due not least to considerable practical initiatives by central and local government.

This afternoon my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment spoke about the work of the enterprise agencies. I should particularly like to commend the Gravesham enterprise agency which is financed mainly by local industry, commerce and banks. It works through taking in people with ideas for small businesses and presenting to them the facts and the problems of going into business, particularly the problems of marketing. The most valid question that it asks such people is, "Why should anyone buy products from you? Why should anyone use your services?" A significant number of people have good ideas but have not thought about marketing.

The results of the Gravesham enterprise agency are quite significant. Of those who have consulted the agency, 29 per cent. have gone on to self-employment and have set up small businesses. By asking the enterprise agency to sort out their ideas, they have achieved a failure rate of only 10 per cent. compared with a normal rate of some 30 per cent., which shows the quality of such an agency. I should like to get across to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench that those enterprise agencies are based on the community and on the voluntary participation of industry and commerce and they have great value.

Although I have great enthusiasm for the Government's small firms service, I believe that we should take care not to extend it at the expense of support and encouragement to the enterprise agencies. I have seen such enterprises springing up in my borough because of the provision of starter units which have been a great success and are a basis for future growth. I commend such activities to the House.

6.56 pm

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have had an excellent debate, and I should like to thank all hon. Members who have put their points of view on this important issue. No doubt the Minister will carry away a great bag of suggestions to pass on to other Departments and to consider in his own Department. That was one of the purposes of the debate.

Hon. Members have spoken from personal experience and from experience in their constituencies with advisory groups that help small companies and the self-employed and from their contacts with such pressure groups as the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses. I am sure that that has led to a better-informed debate.

The message of the debate is clear. I draw the attention of the House to the comments of Graham Mather of the Institute of Economic Affairs in an article in the Journal of Economic Studies:

> "Self-employment is the employment success story of the year since 1979. It is growing. It could grow faster if the remaining legal obstacles were removed. The result would not only be more jobs, but more independence and personal provision, not only more flexibility in the labour market but more choice and freedom to choose a congenial pattern of work. To the economic benefits would be added the social benefits of fostering a work force confident in its own capacity to make an independent contribution to economic growth."

Those are laudable aims. They are the aims of laudable people who often sacrifice the benefits that others receive through the welfare state to pursue their own ideas and careers and the development of the products and services that they can offer to the community. They are estimable people, and it is appropriate that the House should spend some time in addressing them.

After such a good debate, it is only right for me to say that the matter has been common to all political parties, whatever their ideological stance on the question of self-employment. The aim of encouraging small businesses is surely common to us all, and I hope that that will result in yet more policies that will lead to further regeneration and growth in this important sector.

It being Seven o'clock, the proceedings lapsed, pursuant to Standing Order No. 13(8) (Arrangement of public business).

Agriculture

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

7.1 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John MacGregor): In a general debate on agriculture such as this I would normally talk about a wide range of issues germane to agriculture and which I spoke about or which were raised during the discussion period at the annual general meeting last week of the National Farmers Union. Those issues are about the future of dairy quotas and the reviews in the coming months of the sheepmeat and sugar regimes. I would have talked also about progress on environmentally sensitive areas, and that would have helped me to underline the substantial achievement that has been made in just a few months during which there has been a most encouraging response from farmers and environmentalists. I would have talked about our pioneering approaches to giving help, much of it also helpful environmentally, to assist in the process of taking land out of agricultural production. Perhaps I would have said rather less than usual about that because we debated it recently on the Second Reading of the Farm Land and Rural Development Bill, particularly in relation to the farm woodland scheme.

I would have dwelt on topical issues such as rhizomania, the progress of ADAS in its first year of charging, the position about the pigmeat industry, private storage aids, MCAs for the pigmeat industry and the free food scheme. All those matters are of current interest to farmers and, with the exception of one of them, the free food scheme, they were all discussed with me last week. I mention those issues to show that there are issues other than the ones upon which I wish to concentrate. If my hon. Friends would like to raise any of those other matters, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will respond to them in his winding-up speech.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Does the Minister agree that there is a need to discuss the problems facing agriculture? Will he perhaps emphasise to the Leader of the House that we need a general debate on agriculture very soon?

Mr. MacGregor: That is not a matter for me, but I shall ensure that the hon. Lady's comments are passed on. I would not say that they are all problems, because some of them are challenges and exciting opportunities. Many sectors of agriculture are doing very well.

I have listed the topics upon which I shall not go further in the debate, and I apologise for that. In the debate the House will expect me to concentrate on the agricultural aspects of the outcome of the summit. It is timely that, following the statement today by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, I am able to report on that and that we are able to have a debate so soon after the event. As I have said, to cover all the other issues as well would necessitate an inordinately long speech, but if hon. Members wish to deal with those topics we shall have an opportunity to reply to them in the winding-up speech.

I shall now turn to the outcome of the summit and make one or two preliminary comments. First, as the Prime Minister reminded us, the Government and my right hon. Friend have achieved 95 per cent. of all our negotiating objectives — including all the fundamental ones. I noticed in the exchanges following the Prime Minister's statement that the Opposition were picking up one or two of the details about agriculture. For example, they talked about the maximum guarantee quantity for cereals, to which I shall return. However, they were details, and it was noticeable that the Opposition concentrated on them. It is important to look at the fundamental issues in the negotiation and at the outcome in relation to those.

In any negotiation, one rarely achieves 100 per cent. of one's initial objectives. The fact that we have succeeded on all the fundamental issues is crucial. I would certainly compare this with the renegotiation in 1975 of the United Kingdom's entry terms into the Economic Community. That was intended crucially to alter the entry terms, but did absolutely no such thing. It is crucial to realise the importance of the fundamental issues and the fact that we have achieved 95 per cent. of our objectives. Secondly, primary among those fundamental objectives is the continuation of our Fontainebleau abatement. That is unchanged in its effect, despite the fact that the French and German Governments, amongst others, were strongly opposed to it for much of the negotiations. That is an important issue that will not be discussed in this debate. However, it must be in our minds as we approach the overall outcome.

Let no one underestimate what has been achieved for agriculture. One has only to look at the French and German press to see what has been achieved. Nor should we underestimate the effect of these measures in the event of over-production. Certainly the French and German Governments are under no illusions about that. My third general comment is that in looking at the results the House must compare what is in place now as a result of the summit with what was in place before it. We must not compare it with the package that was in front of the Heads of State at Copenhagen. At that meeting the French and German Heads of State refused to sign up. If we compare the outcome of the summit with what was in place before, we see that it is undoubtedly clear that the previous system will be substantially changed as a result of the summit.

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): Perhaps my right hon. Friend will go on to illustrate what might have happened if there had been a total breakdown. That is too horrifying to contemplate, because we would have seen financial breakdown throughout the Community and our farmers would have been left with total indecision, not for three or six months, but throughout the presidency of the Greeks, and then next year the presidency of the Spaniards.

Mr. MacGregor: That was certainly one of the possibilities, and in looking at the outcome one must consider the overall future of the Community and the importance of achieving the single European market. My hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) makes a fair point about agriculture, on which I hope to elaborate. It is that for our farmers one of the critical issues, and one of which they are well aware, is that in this world of surpluses they must face adjustment.

As was constantly said to me when I was going round the country, what farmers want most of all is an end to the uncertainty. They want to know what the new regime will be. That, too, was another factor that had to be taken into account. As I think the Opposition will argue, it would have been possible to hope for a different package in another summit. As I shall show, we have achieved

considerable changes in agriculture. We have achieved most of our objectives, and one of the factors that had to be considered was the importance of ending uncertainty.

Having made those preliminary wide comments, I shall now turn to agriculture and to the key differences brought about by the summit. The first is that we now have a legally binding overall budgetary ceiling for agricultural spending. Let no one under-estimate the importance of that. The last major agreement was reached in 1984, when there were real attempts to achieve budgetary discipline in agriculture. In the following three years spending on agriculture rose by 40 per cent. As a result of this agreement, spending on agriculture over the next five years will rise by 7·8 per cent. This will be a legally binding agreement as soon as the full regulations and legal requirements are put into effect. That 7·8 per cent. over the next five years compares with 40 per cent. in the three years after 1984. It is 8·5 per cent. if one includes the cost of disposing of existing stocks and contributing to set-aside. I shall return to that.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): While I accept what my right hon. Friend says, that the actual budgetary discipline was binding on the Council, but not legally binding, may I ask whether he agrees that under the Dublin agreement the 1·4 per cent. VAT maximum was legally binding? Despite that, last year the Commission, by using budgetary devices, increased that to 1·6 per cent. Can my right hon. Friend say where in this new agreement there is anything that can prevent the Commission from doing exactly the same in future by having, as it had in 1987, a metric year of 10 months to make sure that it kept within the so-called legally binding 1·4 per cent.?

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister this afternoon commented on some of those aspects in relation to what we know as creative accounting, but which can be known as negative reserves and other things of that sort. In the context of agriculture, I shall deal later with some of the other key differences that make this a much more effective and legally binding settlement.

I shall deal further with the matter of the overall budgetary ceiling, because I should like to put one or two aspects of it to the House. I have already said that the figure for the next five years is likely to be 7·8 per cent. or 8·5 per cent. if one includes the cost of disposing of existing stocks and the contribution to set-aside. Inevitably that must be an estimate, because it is related to the projected growth in GDP across the Community as a whole in the next five years, but it seems a reasonable estimate.

In considering the 40 per cent. increase since 1984 one must take account also of the fact that there was no provision for the disposal of existing stocks. I am now including in the 8·5 per cent. increase over five years the cost of disposing of them. That was a big hidden cost—an overhang on top of the 40 per cent. increase. I have put the cost of disposing of those existing stocks — the penalty which we now face for the result of previous budgetary indiscipline—into the figures, but there is an even more significant point. Under these arrangements, any new surplus stocks will be included within the agricultural guidelines. These stocks will depreciate year by year, which means that the depreciation element will have to be included in the year in question within the overall agricultural ceiling. That is a further budgetary discipline and an important change.

I come to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) must have had in mind. We had a political undertaking at Fontainebleau to agree a guideline, but it was in the minutes, not in a legally binding text. The guideline could be overridden at the will of the Council in what were known as "exceptional circumstances", and it was. I remind the House that, in the 1985 price fixing, the German Government invoked the Luxembourg compromise for the first time in the Community's history over a 1·8 per cent. price cut for cereals. Now, exceptional circumstances will apply in only one case. A change in spending can occur only if the value of the ecu against the dollar changes by more than 5 per cent. If the dollar appreciates, that will mean an automatic reduction in the amount spent on agriculture. Previously, the guideline was not reinforced by the necessary changes in the regulations for each commodity; now it will be. There is a clear definition of exceptional circumstances and there are changes for each commodity.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. MacGregor: No.

Mr. Taylor: This will be the last time, honestly — never again.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall take up that promise by giving way.

Mr. Taylor: I promise my right hon. Friend sincerely that I shall not intervene again in this debate. My right hon. Friend, who has a reputation for being honest, sincere and straight in all the years in which he has been a Minister, should surely tell us about annex V. He has said that there is only one reason to allow a break through the limits—a fall in the value of the dollar. What about annex V, which says that if the majority of member states think that any other country has not done a proper job in restraining agricultural production they can increase spending by any amount that they like? Would it not be fairer to tell the House that we should consider not only this definition of "exceptional circumstances", but annex V on page 41 of the presidency notes, which drives a coach and horses through every word that my right hon. Friend says?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that annex V does not say that, although I do not have the text in front of me. I have had a quick word with my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, who will give a full reply on the point about annex V.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I should like to continue, because there is much that I want to say.

In a very different change from 1984, the stabilisers are now a guaranteed automatic mechanism for each commodity where there is over-production beyond a certain point, or over-expenditure. This is a major achievement. When I first became Minister and we started to talk last summer about stabilisers, it seemed to me that it would be a massive task to get the Community to sign up on stabilisers in all major commodities. That has now been achieved. That is why — *[Interruption.]* I shall elaborate on that later. That is why the Government's overriding concern in the many months of negotiations has been to secure effective control over CAP expenditure through the installation of stabilisers. We have stressed

[Mr. MacGregor]

throughout that there need to be effective stabilisers for all major commodities—a mechanism that will automatically bring about a reduction in levels of support when production exceeds a given threshold. That automatic nature is very important in this outcome.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my right hon. Friend stress to the farmers that that may well secure stability in production, but that he will be going hell-for-leather, as he pointed at the National Farmers Union annual general meeting, to ensure that it also secures fairness for our farmers by ironing out the problems of the green rate?

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend knows, that is a separate issue from what was agreed at the summit. I have made clear my position on the green rate. There is one important aspect. The way has now been cleared for working towards the single European market, but if we are to achieve a single European market in agriculture it is crucial that we secure the objective of phasing out all monetary compensatory amounts by 1992.

As for stabilisers in all products except cereals, oil seed, peas and beans, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made the position clear this afternoon, and this point was raised by the French Government at a late stage in the summit negotiations. My right hon. Friend said:

"The Dutch Prime Minister and I made it clear that our agreement to all the measures before the European Council last week was conditional on the adoption of these eight stabilisers as they are."

That is an important point. I had to fight hard in the Agriculture Council in the negotiations after Christmas for the inclusion of stabilisers in all the other products within the package to be considered by the summit. A number of Governments wished to weaken the stabiliser regime by, in one way or another, getting changes in their products. That would have reopened the whole package in front of us at Copenhagen and made it difficult to achieve agreement at the summit.

It is important that the decision is carried through in the Foreign Affairs Council. These other commodities are wine, tobacco, fruit and vegetables, sugar, milk, sheepmeat, olive oil and cotton. There was no further discussion on the substance of these stabilisers at the summit or in the Agriculture Council, except in the attempt to take them outside the overall package in the Agriculture Council leading up to the summit.

There are, of course, elements in those other products that we do not like. I fought strongly on one or two, and that was true of all member states. If that package were reopened, all of us would have fought for the changes that we wanted. That would have made it even more difficult to achieve a successful outcome at the end of last week. It is important to bear in mind that those other products must be part of the final arrangement.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): I am following my right hon. Friend's comments as carefully as I can. As sheepmeat is not yet in surplus, nor is likely to be for a while, how does this affect the sheepmeat regime and the discussions on the regime's development if we were in the very first stages of negotiation, as my right hon. Friend said last week?

Mr. MacGregor: It does not really affect the discussions on the future of the sheepmeat regime, to which we shall come in due course. There had to be a stabiliser on sheepmeat because, although we are not in surplus in sheepmeat, the supporting cost to the CAP of the regime was escalating fast and was projected to be more than 1 billion ecu in the coming year. One must have regard to the extent to which the support for any one commodity is rising very fast, and this was true in the oil seed sector as well. That is why if we argued that there had to be a stabiliser in all the major commodities—excluding only a few—a stabiliser for sheepmeat had to exist.

There were two elements which I disliked and on which I fought hard in respect of the sheepmeat stabiliser. The most crucial element — I think that all our farmers accept this — was the proposal to have a ceiling on headage payments of 1,000 in the less-favoured areas and 500 elsewhere. Despite the fact that we had little support in the rest of the Council from other member states, we were able to negotiate that out in this package. It is important that it stays out, which is a reason why I want the other products package to remain as it is.

There was another discriminatory element in relation to the variable premium which I could not negotiate out. One cannot negotiate everything out, and the headage payment was the most important.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: This is a debate on agriculture and the right hon. Gentleman is the Minister. In the light of the recent malicious and squalid attacks of the Minister of State on the clergy, will he now sack the Minister of State? He is an embarrassment to the Government and he is offending people throughout the country — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. This is a short debate and that has nothing to do with the subject.

Mr. MacGregor: I was about to say that, in view of the shortness of the debate and the fact that so many hon. Members wish to speak, I would not give way again. In view of the complete irrelevance of the hon. Gentleman's intervention, I wish that I had said that before he rose.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South) *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: No, I shall not give way again. I am afraid that the last intervention was completely irrelevant and wasted a great deal of time. I must get on with my speech.

Mr. Spearing *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I am sorry, but I cannot give way again. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will make his own speech.

Mr. Spearing: This is an important point.

Mr. MacGregor: In that case I will give way.

Mr. Spearing: I am extremely grateful to the Minister and he will find my point relevant. From the statement and document we know that there is an arrangement for a 3 per cent. cumulative reduction in the intervention price if the cereal limit of 160 million tonnes is exceeded. On what evidence does the Minister conclude that that will be sufficient to keep the agricultural budget within the 75 per cent. of any increase in GNP year on year?

Mr. MacGregor: I was about to come to the cereal stabiliser and I shall deal with that point, but overriding the decisions in the annual price reviews is the need to keep the agricultural ceiling within the limits that are set down in the regulation that will come before us.

The cereals and oil seed stabilisers featured in the summit. The need for such stabilisers is particularly acute for cereals and for oil seeds as costs have been escalating in those sectors and without such a mechanism could soon be out of control. For cereals, for example, the price more than doubled in two years to about £3·5 billion in 1987.

For cereals the new stabilising mechanism is linked to a production threshold of 160 million tonnes. Earlier this afternoon there was some criticism about the fact that we have agreed to a maximum guarantee quantity threshold of 160 million tonnes, but what has not been understood is what we have achieved in return. Two critical points mean that in effect it will be as effective a stabiliser in our judgment.

First, what was on the table prior to the summit—in other words, what left the Agriculture Council — for cereals was a maximum guarantee quantity threshold of 155 million tonnes with a 1 per cent. price reduction for every 1 per cent. increase beyond that. That meant that in order to achieve a 3 per cent. price reduction the maximum guarantee quantity threshold would have had to increase to 159·6 million tonnes, which is little short of the 160 million tonnes. But the new change that has been introduced is that above 160 million tonnes it will be not a one for one, but an immediate automatic 3 per cent. price cut. Given that the projected harvest for next year is likely to be about 168 million tonnes, it is in effect as effective a stabiliser.

Secondly——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: We all follow these matters.

Mr. MacGregor: After the hon. Gentleman's comment, I would not expect him to understand.

Secondly, the new regime will apply for four years instead of for three years, which was on the table before the summit began. It is a marginal change and the stabiliser will continue to be effective.

We have regretfully had to accept that the stabiliser should operate through the co-responsibility levy as well as through price. That is certainly not a satisfactory method of market regulation. That, as much as anything else, has caused many of the long debates that the Agriculture Council has had since Copenhagen. The German presidency wanted to put much more emphasis of the stabiliser on to the co-responsibility levy and I was strongly opposed to that. There are many reasons why it is not a satisfactory method, but the Commission and every other member state felt that that must play a part in the stabiliser and, indeed, some wanted it to play a bigger part than it does now.

We have insisted that the levy should play a subordinate role to price cuts. Thus, the additional levy will increase by 1 per cent. for each 1 per cent. increase in production up to 3 per cent. in any year while price cuts will cumulate at 3 per cent. a year so long as the guarantee threshold is exceeded. Moreover—this is an important point when one considers what was proposed earlier in the negotiations — the maximum additional levy of 3 per cent. is much lower than the 7·5 per cent. originally proposed by the Commission. When one combines that with the fact that we have managed to ensure that price cuts play a bigger part than the co-responsibility levy, and with another important point——

Mr. Ralph Howell (Norfolk, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. MacGregor: I said that I would not accept any other interventions, but I will accept this last one in view of my hon. Friend's position. I wish to make one other important point on the co-responsibility levy which again demonstrates how much we have succeeded in minimising its impact on the stabiliser.

Mr. Howell: Will my right hon. Friend explain how this extra hardship which is to be imposed on our cereal growers will in any way diminish cereal output? All cereal farmers will have to try to grow more to maintain their income or to reduce their losses, bearing in mind the serious situation in which they find themselves at present.

Mr. MacGregor: I am well aware of the difficulties of adjustments, but one of the benefits of a stabiliser is that it has automatic price and other penalties if production continues to rise. Therefore, in terms of the CAP it helps to keep costs within a reasonable amount and, from the farmer's point of view, it will prevent the CAP from collapsing under its own weight, so it is necessary.

The other important point which I should like to emphasise is this. We have successfully opposed the proposal, which was in the negotiations for some time, for a flat-rate exemption of 20 tonnes on co-responsibility levy — this was introduced by the German presidency — which would have resulted in the levy having a disproportionate impact in the United Kingdom where 20 tonnes represents a much smaller proportion of average cereals output per enterprise than in other member states. Had that been in the package, 70 per cent. of the co-responsibility levy would have been met by Britain and France, and only 10 per cent. by Germany. I am glad to say that we have negotiated that out.

I recognise that there is concern among farmers about the potential impact which these measures may have on their incomes. I appreciate that their incomes have been under pressure and that many were hit by the bad harvest last year. However, we are faced with the imperative need to put the Community's agricultural support system on a credible and viable basis. It is the farmer who would be most adversely affected if the system were left unrestrained to collapse under its own weight. Some discipline had to be introduced to ensure a stable foundation for the industry in the long term.

Moreover, the burden of over-production of cereals is not simply a problem for the Community alone. It is one of the key issues being discussed in the Uruguay round. If the Community had not put its house in order, disagreements on cereals could sour these negotiations and exacerbate the existing difficult trading relations between the Community and the main agricultural exporting nations such as the United States. At a time when the United States has set aside 10 million hectares of wheat-growing land — equivalent to 30 per cent. of the total Community cereals area — and has cereal stocks of about 150 million tonnes, it will not accept that the Community should do nothing to reduce its cereal production; or that it should try to solve its problems by increasing its highly subsidised exports or by restricting imports of competing products, such as cereal substitutes. That is an important international context in which to view the matter.

I stress that we are not relying exclusively on stabilisers for cereals. The European Council also agreed that stabilisers should be complemented by new proposals on

[Mr. MacGregor]

set-aside. I particularly welcome that. As the House will know, we have persistently argued that, to be fully effective, a restrictive price policy needs to be accompanied by a set-aside scheme. That would provide an acceptable alternative to those growers who might have difficulties in coping with a more rigorous pricing regime. The Commission's new proposals are set out in document COM(88)1, to which I draw the attention of the House.

In view of the lateness of the hour, I shall mention just a couple of things about set-aside. There has been a significant change regarding the set-aside that I proposed in the consultative document—I referred to it earlier—that followed the extensification agreement reached in the Council last year. We are now talking about a set-aside scheme for all arable crops. Now that agreement has been reached on the principles, that scheme will overtake the consultative document that I introduced. Nevertheless, the responses that I had from the farming community and others on that consultative document were extremely useful in the very long discussions and negotiations that we had on the set-aside scheme now before us. In view of the time, I shall not go into more detail on the set-aside scheme.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston) *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I am sorry, but I cannot give way. I must get on.

In the documents before us the House will see that there are some items which the Council has now signed which will provide the basic principles for operating the set-aside scheme. Member states will still have considerable choice over the details—exactly what rates to pay and what conditions to attach—and they are clearly a matter for further discussion in the Agriculture Council.

On cereals, I stress that the stabiliser mechanism, in contrast, for example, to quotas, will not prevent the most efficient farmers from competing for a greater share of total Community production. I emphasise, "in contrast with quotas." As the United Kingdom farming industry holds a leading position in the Community for efficiency, that is a challenge to which our producers should be able to respond and they will not be held back by artificial quotas.

The same considerations apply to oil seed and protein crops. The past few years have seen a dramatic increase in Community oil seed production—from 1¼ million tonnes in 1979 to 10 million tonnes last year. In the past three years alone expenditure has trebled from £700 million in 1985 to more than £2,100 million in 1987. The regime is also among the most expensive per hectare. Last year it cost nearly £700 per hectare. Tough measures were needed to restrain escalating costs. There was already a threshold system for oil seeds but subject to a limit of 10 per cent. on the price reductions which could be made under it. That limit will be removed so that if oil seed production continues to increase support prices will be reduced automatically to avoid an increase in budgetary expenditure. The extent to which support prices can be cut will increase after the first year of operation of the new system. The new maximum guarantee quantities have been agreed at 25 to 30 per cent. below production.

I ask those who argue that the final outcome on oil seeds was not enough to consider the rigorous discipline of that sector as it now stands. On the basis of forecast output in 1988, there will be price cuts of up to 8 per cent. on top of the 10 per cent. price cuts already applied to the 1987 crop. The mechanism will result in automatic further price cuts thereafter if production continues to expand. A similar system will apply to peas and beans. I stress, however, that oil seeds and peas and beans are profitable crops, as is evident from the rapid rate of expansion both in the United Kingdom and in the rest of the Community. They should continue to be attractive, but while production may continue to expand it will in future have to be on a broadly cost-neutral basis.

While discussing oil seeds, I remind the House that agreement on the stabiliser package has been achieved without the introduction of an oils and fats tax, for which some member states had been pressing most vigorously up to the last minute and to which we have been, and will remain, adamantly opposed.

To understand just how successful the outcome of the negotiations has been in achieving our objectives, I should like briefly to compare the opening positions of other member states—they were held for a long time during the negotiations—and what those states have had to accept. For example, the German Government were opposed to a stabiliser for cereals that would bite and they wished to rest entirely on set-aside. They had to accept that set-aside is not an alternative to an effective stabiliser, but complementary to it. It was a bitter battle. The German, French and Irish Governments would have liked a maximum guarantee quantity for cereals that was over 160 million tonnes. On oil seeds and proteins, the French wanted a different system in which price cuts were linked to productivity and not to area expansion. That would have considerably eased the position for French producers. The French Government fought vigorously for that system, but failed to achieve it. The French in particular, supported by Ireland and Greece, were the main proponents of the oils and fats tax; it was a key negotiating objective.

On set-aside, Greece wanted higher Community funding. On wine, France and Italy were strongly opposed to the regime that is now coming in. On sugar, Germany and France wanted the new additional levy to be switched to "A" quota—that would have adversely affected our sugar beet growers—rather than to "B" quota. They failed in that objective.

Spain, Greece and Italy were opposed in many respects to the new stabilisers for fruit and vegetables. Greece, Italy and Spain were also opposed to the new limits on the maximum guarantee quantity for tobacco. I could go on, but the plain fact is that to achieve a new, effective agricultural regime every member state had to make sacrifices. That brief list demonstrates that many other member states had to go a long way from their opening negotiating positions.

I have listed the substantial number of changes made to the whole agricultural regime to achieve a better budgetary discipline. Those changes add up to a much more effective system of discipline over agricultural spending. We have achieved our major objectives and the outcome will greatly assist us in the Uruguay GATT round negotiations because it demonstrates that the Community can put its house in order, not just in relation to the latest outcome, but in the context of the milk and beef changes that were agreed under the United Kingdom presidency in December 1986.

I am well aware that the changes will mean some difficult adjustments for our farmers, and, even more, for many farmers in other member states. However, our farmers are aware that in a world of surpluses it was inevitable that there had to be changes in the CAP regime. I believe that the outcome gives our farmers a much more stable basis on which to plan. I hope, first, that we have now avoided the need for constant emergency measures that disrupt farmers' business and, secondly, above all, prevented CAP from collapsing under its own weight. That would have been to the detriment of our farmers as well as farmers elsewhere in the Community.

For all those reasons, I believe that this was an effective deal. It is the right deal for the future of the Community, and the right one for the taxpayer and the farmer. I commend it to the House.

7.38 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): According to the farming press, I understand that at the NFU annual meeting the other day the Minister charmed the delegates.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: So he did.

Dr. Clark: The hon. Lady agrees with that view.

The Minister presented his case in a charming and plausible manner. I believe that if anyone could defend the case that is before us tonight, it is the Minister, and he did it very well.

The Minister started by attacking the Opposition for their response to the Prime Minister, and said that we were paying too much attention to detail without being able to consider the summit as a whole. I assure the Minister that it is because we see the summit as a whole that we are especially annoyed. Tonight I hope to explain why and also to ask why some of the details that we feel are important to the whole have been omitted. We shall be seeking further explanation on a number of points.

As the Minister explained to us at the beginning of the debate, this is the annual debate on agriculture. Now that the debate has been overtaken by the result of the summit, I hope that we shall have the opportunity of another debate on agriculture, as the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) suggested. That was an admirable suggestion, and I think that the whole House would like a further debate.

The debate comes at a most propitious time. We have had the publication of the annual review of agriculture for 1988 in the past few weeks, the annual general meeting of the NFU last week, and over the past 72 or 96 hours there was the historic meeting in Brussels, which will take up so much of our time, and which witnessed the humiliation, I am afraid, of the British Prime Minister.

All those events have occurred against a background of despair in British agriculture or, perhaps more accurately, in the words of Simon Gourlay, the president of the NFU, on yesterday's BBC farming programme, an air of uncertainty. As I travel up and down the country meeting farmers, I constantly hear of the lack of direction and leadership from the Ministry, and a sense of confusion. British agriculture does not know where it is expected to go. Indeed, it is in a state of crisis. [HON. MEMBERS: "Come on."] Local and regional press confirm that description. I have a copy of the *Western Mail* of 4 February, which refers to the "Crisis in Welsh farming." The *South Shropshire Journal* carries a headline saying that for agriculture in south Shropshire "The future looks grim." One could go on. The picture throughout Britain is of crisis. The situation is serious.

If one wants confirmation of that, one need only look at the Government's own annual review of agriculture. Even if one reads it through rose-tinted spectacles, it makes disturbing reading. Bank borrowings have risen further, from £5,909 million in 1986 to £5,962 million in 1987. All that is against a background of falling assets, amounting to only £49 billion in 1986 compared with £56·5 billion only three years before. That is not a good background of economic viability.

It is little wonder that there are predictions that one in 10 farmers is likely to face bankruptcy in the next few years. Agricultural confidence is particularly fragile. It is not the wish of Opposition Members to see farmers go bankrupt. Far from it.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Hear, hear.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): Capitalist.

Dr. Clark: The Minister's PPS may shout "Capitalist" at me——

Mr. Stewart: Not at the hon. Gentleman, but at the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson).

Dr. Clark: I think that farmers do a good job in keeping Britain's countryside attractive, which is what we want. We want to try to encourage them so to do. That is the view that we continue to put forward.

It is against that background, as well as the background of the lack of economic viability, that the Prime Minister went to Brussels last Thursday to protect British interests —of farmers and consumers alike. The Prime Minister's nerve cracked and the other leaders watched her "dramatic climb down". [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Those are not my words; they are the words of the *Financial Times*, whose agriculture and diplomatic correspondents were there, which is more than can be said of any member of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I am more inclined to accept the viewpoint of the people who were there and saw the effect of the Prime Minister's "dramatic climb down", as the *Financial Times* said.

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): In view of the shortness of the debate, it would be helpful if, rather than standing at the Dispatch Box and lambasting what has happened, the hon. Gentlemen told us what he thinks should happen.

Dr. Clark: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman cannot take it. He has obviously been listening too carefully to the Government's propaganda machine, which has been put into overdrive over the past 48 hours, in an effort to turn the truth on its head. *[Interruption.]* We are debating agriculture. We are debating the result of the summit, when the Prime Minister sold this country short. It is right and proper for us to debate that.

In spite of all the efforts of Conservative Members, the truth will come out. For example, *The Times*—not exactly a house magazine of the Labour party—reported:

> "The post-summit consensus as the drama of the summit fades is that, on the whole, Mrs. Thatcher did give way, and not only on the farm question."

That is another observation by someone who was there. I know that the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) does not like the truth, but he will get it, whether he likes it or not. Modern European politics will

[Dr. Clark]

never be the same again. The iron lady cracked. For some unexplained reason, at the 59th minute of the 11th hour, her confidence went and her judgment faded.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Prime Minister should not have given an inch or given way at all? In what areas would he not have given way?

Dr. Clark: I shall address that point in a moment. I am not trying to evade the issue.

We in the Labour party have a right to feel betrayed by the Prime Minister because we gave her our support. We had a debate on 24 November, when we said that if the Prime Minister and the Minister fought for the interests of the British people in Brussels, to make sure that there was a reduction in the amount of money spent on the CAP, she and the Minister would have our support. They have not delivered the goods. As a result they have let down not only the British people but the people of the Third world.

I now come to the point made by the hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith). I should like to spell out in detail the critical position that the Prime Minister and the British people were in when she made that eventful journey to Brussels. There is no doubt that the EC was in difficulties. There was no budget. By about August, the money would have run out. That was the simple scenario. As the House knows, the reason for that budgetary impasse was that the CAP was simply too expensive for the European Community. Almost two thirds of the whole EC budget is eaten up by the CAP. Even worse, almost two thirds of the CAP goes towards the storage and disposal of surpluses, sometimes including destruction. Only one third gets through to the farmers. That is the key point that we should address. It is the key point that the Prime Minister did not address in the discussions in Brussels.

The CAP is sheer nonsense. The complicated bureaucratic system that was devised about 30 years ago to protect — I understand why — European consumers and farmers has grown into a monster, which now threatens to destroy the very purposes that it was set up to achieve. It has become the cuckoo in the European Community nest.

The British farmers know that. They realise that the harvesting of subsidies can be only temporary because, to use another ornithological simile, they see that the goose that once laid the golden eggs is now laying addled eggs. Our farmers know what the situation is, as do the consumers.

The consumers in Britain have paid dearly for the agricultural system of support. Indeed, they have not appreciated how dearly they have been paying. We have been trying to get the point across, admittedly without a great deal of success, so we were most encouraged last week when our case was given a fillip from a most unexpected quarter — Her Majesty's Treasury. The Treasury produced its "Economic Progress Report", which is well worth reading, headed, "The challenge of agriculture." The document sets out some principles that should guide agricultural reform in the European Community, which the Prime Minister evidently forgot last Friday. It was strange that that document should appear from the Treasury on the day that the Prime Minister went to Brussels. It is quite unclear to me why it was produced, but it contains the truth and is therefore worth examining.

One of the key findings of the document is that

"consumers have to pay much higher prices for food than would otherwise be necessary. The additional costs of higher food prices together with higher levels of taxation have been estimated at over £550 per year for a non-farming family of four in Europe."

In other words, it costs in excess of £10·50 a week for every family of four in Europe——

Mr. Ralph Howell: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that that document is based, among other things, on cereals at £50 a tonne? Does he realise that no one anywhere in the world can produce cereals at £50 a tonne? Does the Labour party support that sort of figure?

Dr. Clark: I am familiar with the study. Not only have I read it in detail, but I have read in detail the computer model that went with it, and the variables. It was based on 1979, and updated to 1986 prices. The figures produced by the study are accurate. We stand by them, and the Treasury stood by them last Thursday, but it no longer seems able to do so.

Mr. Ralph Howell *rose*——

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry) *rose*——

Dr. Clark: I have given way a great deal, and other hon. Members want me to continue.

I have read the document; I have it here and I happen to have read the associated comments from Australia and the OECD. I shall return to one of those in a moment.

As the hon. Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell) knows, the document was produced by the Department of Primary Industry in Australia. But Conservative Members need not go as far as Australia; we have many excellent agricultural economic departments in this country. If the hon. Member for Norfolk, North had gone to Newcastle university he would have found similar work. As I pointed out in our last debate, the university calculated that in 1968 an average household of four in Britain — not Europe—was paying £11·50 a week in tax and inflated food bills—in other words, approximately £8·25 on the food bill and £3·25 in tax. If we update that figure, it probably means that the average British family of four will pay £12·50 a week to support the CAP. But that is not the end of it. The Newcastle university figures match the Australian and the OECD figures. Almost all academic agriculturists agree on the figures, give or take the odd statistical point.

The key point is that it is not only the academics who accept these figures; the British Government accepted them last Thursday, although they have cold feet now. The Treasury document and the original report go a bit further. The Treasury document, referring to the costs to the housewife and the consumer, states:

"Even these heavy costs borne by consumers and taxpayers do not tell the whole story. Far from preserving employment and output, the effect of the CAP is to reduce employment in other sectors."

The most recent study, parallel to the one that I have just quoted, which was also done in Australia by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and the Centre for International Economics, published the figures for 1986 —the latest available—and concluded that in the EEC the CAP has cost 1 million jobs in manufacturing and

services. In Britain alone, 480,000 jobs have been lost in manufacturing and service industries. So hundreds of thousands of urban and rural workers in non-agricultural industries have lost their jobs on account of the common agricultural policy—in addition to the tens of thousands of agricultural workers who have suffered the same fate. The CAP is nonsensical——

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): The hon. Gentleman started by presenting himself as the champion of farmers, and proceeded to argue that the regime that should have been imposed on them at the end of last week should have been even harsher than the one that was agreed. That is hypocrisy. Will he now face the facts and tell us what he proposes should have been done last Friday?

Dr. Clark: Apparently the hon. Gentleman was not listening to what I was saying. Incidentally, I am charmed to be called the champion of farmers. I did not expect that, but I am pleased to hear it—however temporarily I may have been given the title.

Under the CAP, two thirds of the cost of agricultural support goes not to farmers; it goes to buying storage and disposing of surplus products. That is nonsense.

Mr. Quentin Davies *rose*——

Dr. Clark: I cannot continue to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Only one third of the money gets through to the farmers.

We are discussing not only money on the direct budget. It costs about £7 billion for the British citizen to protect agriculture, taking into account levies and taxation. To put that figure in perspective, it means that we are spending four times as much on agricultural support as we are on unemployment benefit each year. That cannot be right, and that is what the Prime Minister had a chance to change in Brussels last week — *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members do not understand the fact, but it was an historic occasion. The Community was in crisis. Like British farmers, it was going to run out of money. The British Government had the power of veto, and if the Prime Minister had insisted on the demands that she originally said she was going to stick to before she went, she would have effected a reform in the EEC that would have changed its whole nature. By failing to do that and by not waiting for the summit in Hanover, when the political problems of the French and the Germans would have been eased, she failed to obtain a better deal. For some reason she gave in.

The Minister has proclaimed that the deal struck at Brussels—he was very convincing at a superficial level—would substantially reduce agricultural production. Many hon. Members on both sides are sceptical about that claim. It is difficult to see how it can be true. Certainly, the NFU does not take that view; nor do informed agricultural observers. Over the past two or three weeks—and, in particular, the past two or three days—there has been a messy compromise. It has arisen out of stabilisers. The mechanism by which the Minister believes he can reform the system is that of stabilisers, and various other means. Stabilisers were the core of his argument. Why did he agree to increase the limit at which stabilisers come into play from 155 million tonnes to 160 million tonnes? He has said in the past that stabilisers are ineffective at that level. I understand the relationship of the compensatory levies that are paid at the beginning of the year. This is a complicated subject, but will the Minister confirm that if the maximum guaranteed quantity of 160 million tonnes is exceeded in one season, the 3 per cent. reduction will not become operative until the following season? Am I right in thinking that?

Mr. MacGregor *indicated assent.*

Dr. Clark: The Minister indicates that I am right and that I have read the documents correctly.

Will the cut be made only in the nominal price so that the Agriculture Council will not be free to increase the buying-in price in the following year? If that is so, it could negate the stabiliser effect.

The thrust of the Minister's argument was that there will be a capping of the agricultural budget. We have repeatedly seen the other 11 nations cave in when we have got to that budget. That is a specific point, but I am sure that the Minister will agree that it is important.

Did discussions take place within the Community's agrimonetary system? So far, they have not formed part of the negotiations. How will we ensure that individual nations do not manipulate their green currencies to offset price cuts for their farmers, thus negating the effective use of stabilisers? I think that was the point that the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) was trying to make when she talked about the green pound in Britain.

Mr. Boswell: Has the hon. Gentleman noted the early-day motion regarding the disparity between green currencies as they affect the British farmer? Is he disturbed about that matter, or is he ruling out any change in that arrangement in the future?

Dr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman, who is very knowledgeable about these matters and who always participates in these debates, is making the point for me. Of course Ministers can change their green currencies by negotiation, but will those changes be used to negate the purpose of stabilisers?

Mr. Spearing: The cogent points that my hon. Friend is making highlight the question that the Minister courteously allowed me to put: that there is no statistical proof or evidence to back up the assertion that the Community will get within the 75 per cent. GNP limit. Should we not sympathise with the Minister, who was not present in Brussels when British agricultural policy was made over a 48-hour period by the Prime Minister?

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend talks common sense. I believe that if the Minister had been present good sense would have prevailed and the good sense of British agriculture would have succeeded. It is a pity that he was not present to give first-hand advice to the Prime Minister when she so obviously needed it.

The hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) mentioned sheepmeat. We have heard little detail about the proposals for sheep stabilisers. We have always given the Government our general support on cereals, but not on sheep stabilisers. As I understand it, the Copenhagen agreement discriminated solely against the United Kingdom in that stabilisers were to be exclusive to Britain and that they were related to the variable premium. That

[Dr. Clark]

is discrimination against Britain, which we should not tolerate. There should not be discrimination against an individual nation.

Although, as the Minister explained, the limit on the payment of the annual ewe premium to 500 ewes in lowland areas and 1,000 ewes in less-favoured areas has been withdrawn, the Commission has said that it wil renew this proposal in this year's review and that it could become operative on 1 January 1989. Will the Minister give the House an assurance that there will be no discrimination against sheep farmers in the United Kingdom? Does he realise how vital this matter is for upland farmers, who are on extremely low incomes?

One of the other issues that was way down the list to be discussed in Brussels was direct income support. It is interesting that the Treasury's "Economic Progress Report," which I keep praying in aid, with regard to the best way to help farmers on low incomes, says:

"Low income farmers would be best helped through direct income support rather than price guarantees or output related assistance."

When we have advanced that argument, the Minister has always disagreed with it. As that statement was agreed by the OECD Ministers and endorsed by the Venice economic summit in June, why does the Minister still refuse to rule out that course of action? As it has been accepted in Brussels, does that mean that it is on the table and that there is a chance of income support for our upland farmers? Any comments that the Minister could make about that matter would be helpful and would end the uncertainty, which the Minister acknowledged, in British agriculture.

We have been asked to consider a document relating to set-aside, but I do not think that it will receive the attention that it deserves. I am sure that the Minister will agree that this is an important matter, and I hope that we can have a debate on it. Does the Minister appreciate that if the system is introduced in a clumsy manner and farmers are paid for doing nothing, we will be bitterly opposed to it, as will the overwhelming majority of British people?

We are prepared to support proposals aimed at utilising land for more sustainable agricultural and environmental needs. It is sensible to encourage the planting of broadleaved woodland, as the Minister said when he presented a Bill to the House a couple of weeks ago. Are the Government committed to set-aside as a positive method of improving our environment? Are they prepared to build on the experiences of the environmentally-sensitive areas, to which the Minister referred at the beginning of his speech and which have been a tremendous success? We believe that we should build on those experiences to encourage farmers to farm in a less damaging and more ecological manner. I hope that the Minister will take that point on board.

There is specific reference in the reports from Brussels to the concept of fallow grazing. That is a sensible possible use for land taken out of cereal production. However, if the system is to be effective, how will the Government contain the progeny aspect of it?

With regard to set-aside, will the Minister consider the proposal for which we have argued—the development of low-input farming, which has the advantage not only of protecting the land and the landscape but of retaining labour and machinery on the land?

The House has a right to expect the Minister to explain what proposal has been made to stamp out the fraud that so bedevils the CAP. As the Minister knows, this is a serious problem. Some experts estimate that over £2 billion—10 per cent. of the CAP budget—has been lost in fraud every year.

Mr. Robin Cook: Before my hon. Friend leaves the set-aside issue, I should like to put forward a point that I tried to put to the Minister. The effect of set-aside will be to encourage the most marginal land to come out of production first. That could have a serious regional impact, particularly in Scotland, which has not a surplus of cereal but a deficit. It could have serious knock-on effects on other consumers of cereals, such as the poultry industry, which is well represented in Scotland and which will be a less economic location as a result of set-aside.

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend is right. Cereals for feed, especially in an area such as Scotland, might be the commodities most taken out of production. As we understand the Commission's proposals, the amount of support from FEOGA for more marginal land — the land to which presumably the Government will be giving lower grants — will be at a higher level than the more productive land, for which the Government will be giving higher grants.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): My hon. Friend mentioned fraud. It seems to me that people can go on television and confess to the most astonishing frauds without any action being taken. That may be common in Britain, but it is even more frequent abroad. What does my hon. Friend have to say about member state Governments who do not implement arrangements that they are obliged to implement under the EEC regulations? For example, the Italian Government have not introduced milk quotas.

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend has raised a point with which both sides of the House sympathise, and which worries many of us. We are concerned that the British Government and British farmers adhere to these agreements. Certainly, there is a suspicion—I choose my words fairly carefully—that that is not always the case in other countries.

The domestic scene is very depressing. In real terms, farming is at the second lowest level since the end of the war. Twenty thousand jobs have been lost in the past couple of years, and investment in plant, machinery and vehicles is at a post-war low. That is not a very happy state of affairs, and we believe that the time is now right for the Minister to give a lead.

We are especially critical of the Government's handling of research and development. We know that they have already made considerable cuts, and we also know that the Ministry is now carrying out a thorough review of its research and development, with a view to indentifying areas of research that can be funded by the industry rather than with public money. The technical term, I believe, is "near market research". That research has been hurried through behind closed doors, with no formal consultations, and to those concerned there seems to be no clear definition of the objective. However, the Opposition are quite clear. A time when the farming industry is in a state of crisis is entirely the wrong time to start cutting down on research and development and on advice services. I hope that the Minister will think again.

The debate has largely centred—and, I am sure, will continue to do so—on the recent Brussels summit. The agreement reached there, as one eminent agricultural journalist has written,

"is remarkable for the number of concessions made by the British to the Franco-German position on the agricultural section of the package."

The Minister attacked us earlier for being too specific, but I hope that I have raised a number of specific points. He also criticised us for not seeing the issue as a whole. What has annoyed Opposition Members so much is that the Prime Minister had the chance of a decade to obtain a fundamental and far-reaching reform of the CAP. That would have been of long-term benefit to the British people —farmers and consumers—to the people of the Third world, who will now have food dumped on them in a glut, and, of course, to the European Community. The Prime Minister went to Brussels proclaiming her intention of imposing absolute financial limits on agriculture, but, as we know, her nerve broke. Now, tragically, the CAP will trundle on and on.

8.12 pm

Mr. Ralph Howell (Norfolk, North): I recognise that both Front-Bench spokesmen have concentrated on the summit statement. That was inevitable. However, I prepared my speech for the debate on agriculture which was originally intended, and I mean to say only a word or two about the summit. I have not had time to study the document, and I do not know precisely what has been done, but, judging by what I have heard so far, I would sum it up as another typical EEC fudge which may damage British farmers. The only good thing that I can say is that it will probably damage them a little less than might have been the case.

Agriculture is in a very serious position, not just because the weather has made it a very bad year, and the awful autumn and winter will probably make next year very bad as well, but because of the uncertainty and loss of confidence in the industry. Somehow, that must be put right.

My first point concerns the necessity to solve the green currency problem. As far as I can see, it is a great swindle. British farmers have been swindled under both Governments, and the time has come for that to end. I also believe it to be a self-inflicted injury. We have had artificially low food prices in this country, and this is a way of keeping them low. I can substantiate what I say. Last week, in reply to a question, I was told that food prices had increased by an average of 5·8 per cent. since 1979, while all other prices had increased by 7·8 per cent. That has seriously damaged the farming industry.

As a result of that holding back, and because of the green currency fudging and swindling, the assets of British farmers have gone down to a dangerously low level—66 per cent. of the total assets of 1979. This means that British agriculture has lost £21 billion of assets, which is a huge figure.

We are now suffering the second lowest level of profits since the war—that is, for those who are making profits. A number of people are making losses. Profitability for cereal producers is down to 10 per cent. of the 1979 level. I am calling for an overall rethink, not just in this country but throughout the EEC. I cannot understand how the way ahead can possibly be achieved by restricting output and lowering prices.

Before he came to the House, my right hon. Friend the Minister was a banker. If one of his customers had gone to see him and told him that his business was in difficulties and that he proposed to reduce production and sell at cheaper prices, he would have been drummed out of the office pretty quickly, because that is the road to disaster. In farming, or any other industry, if output and prices are reduced at the same time, the result cannot add up.

We should recognise that the present troubles of our pig farmers are entirely due to the green currency system. The artificial price levels in this country mean that they are doubly damaged by the effects of the MCAs, which are already causing so many problems.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): Does my hon. Friend agree that when we talk to farmers we find that the problem falls into two separate halves? One half is the problem of sorting out surpluses, with all the complications that are involved. The other half—this comes over loud and clear—is the fact that it is all about fairness.

My hon. Friend has made the point made earlier by other hon. Members about the green pound and the MCA, which is hurting our pig farmers so much. That is all down to fairness. If we could get it right we would still have problems to tackle, but our farmers would have much more sympathy with all that we are trying to do.

Mr. Howell: I entirely agree. There is no doubt that British farmers could compete with any other farmers in the world on a fair basis, but we cannot compete as we are.

I wonder why the cereal farmer is under such attack at present. I must declare an interest—I am a cereal farmer —but I should like to tell the House how well our cereal industry has done. In fact, it is one of the most successful industries in the country and is of great help to our balance of trade. In that respect it is the fourth most important industry in the country. Only invisibles, oil and chemicals are more successful. The chemical industry has improved our balance of payments position by £837 million since 1979. The cereals industry has improved it by £812 million—almost as much as the chemical industry. Steel, coal, motor vehicles and other visibles all reflect adversely on the balance of payments.

Why is it generally accepted that the United States should have such a great share of the export trade in cereals? Why should the United States, which exports 74 million tonnes, export more than the EEC, Canada and Australia put together? The 20 million tonnes that we export help the European balance of payments in general.

I now want to consider the myth of how much agriculture costs us. Will my right hon. Friend the Minister of State set out clearly just what we are paying for agriculture? My right hon. Friend the Minister of State has said that we are paying less now in support of agriculture than we paid in 1961. In 1961 we spent £263 million in support of agriculture. At 1961 prices we are spending £246 million this year. To bring the figures up to date, we are told that agriculture is costing us £1,443 million, yet we receive a refund of £1,480 million. We need to know how much agriculture is really costing the taxpayer. I believe that we will be amazed at the real figure.

The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) referred to the Treasury document that was released last week. The Treasury should disown that document. There is no substance behind it. Why does the British Treasury

[Mr. Howell]

need to get hold of an obscure Australian publication to prove its point? Many people are employed in the Treasury —probably too many. We should be able to work out the figures for ourselves. I shall table a question tonight to ask my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer either to substantiate the figures or to withdraw the document.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): I wonder whether my hon. Friend would return to the point that he was making to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark). Did I understand the hon. Member for South Shields to say that he was happy for British farmers to receive £50 a tonne for wheat? If so, would my hon. Friend care to explain the input cost of wheat and state whether £50 a tonne would in any way meet the farmers' requirements?

Mr. Howell: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for his intervention, because I might have forgotten who to attack. I did not hear an answer from the hon. Member for South Shields.

The Australian document—and here I am shooting at the Opposition and the Treasury at the same time—was based on wheat at £50 a tonne. I do not believe that any farmer in the world can grow wheat at £50 a tonne. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will understand that the farmers in his constituency cannot compete with that price either.

Mr. Marland: To be more precise, can we say that the input costs of growing an acre of cereals in this country are probably between £90 and £100 an acre? Therefore, it is ludicrous to try to produce wheat at £50 a tonne.

Mr. Howell: I am grateful for that information.

One or two people hanker for the past, but anyone who believes that the Labour party has anything to offer agriculture with wheat at £50 a tonne is seriously mistaken.

Dr. David Clark: My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) commented on the Minister of State——

Mr. Gummer: Completely irrelevant.

Dr. Clark: The right hon. Gentleman says that this is completely irrelevant. A few minutes ago the Minister of State said that I had said that British farmers could grow wheat at £50 a tonne. That is not true. I have never said that. The Minister of State's statement needs rebutting now. The credence of the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington have some standing if the Minister of State intervenes and makes allegations that are basically untrue.

Mr. Howell: I should explain that the hon. Member for South Shields referred to the document and said that it proved his case. That was based on £50 a tonne——

Dr. Clark: It was not.

Mr. Howell: Let us argue the point further. According to the document, the figure is 80 ecu for wheat. That is almost £50.

Dr. Clark: Perhaps I can clarify this. The hon. Gentleman is obviously very knowledgeable on these matters. I am afraid that I was not quoting from the secondary source from which I believe the hon. Gentleman is quoting. I was not quoting from the "Economic Progress Report". I was quoting from the original document based on the 1979 figures, which have been updated to 1986. I referred to the figures in the primary document, not to those in the secondary document which the Treasury put out. I cannot be responsible for what the Treasury says all the time.

Mr. Howell: We have established the point that the figure is based on 80 ecu, which is roughly £50 a tonne.

I want to refer to world food production in general. We have reached a point where we are consuming more wheat than we are producing. It is quite possible that by the time some of the penalties are in place we will penalise ourselves and will have reached a serious position of food shortages.

I also want to refer to the damage that this general low food price is having on the Third world. It is all very well for the Geldofs of this world to try to do something about it, but so long as the advanced nations insist on holding agricultural prices down to the present absurdly low levels we will damage indigenous agricultures throughout the world, including the Third world.

I want to explode the myth that food prices are high. They are actually low. In 1979, in Britain, 21·2 per cent. of consumer expenditure was spent on food. We now spend 15·6 per cent. Some 25 per cent. less is spent on food so that we can buy more videos and other goods. I have already said that food prices generally are lagging 2 per cent. behind other prices. That has cost our agriculture industry £17·6 billion since 1979. That money should have been ploughed back into the industry.

If the Government are still not convinced that food is relatively cheap, I remind the Minister of the bottle of water that I gave him some weeks ago. I bought it in this House. It contained a fifth of a litre of English Ashbourne mineral water. I paid 55p for it. If the Minister had bought that bottle full of milk, he would have paid less than 9p for it. If he had been a farmer and had filled it with milk, he would have received 3p. That is a startling revelation of how we are prepared to pay for non-essentials, but not prepared to pay for food. It is impossible to buy a litre of mineral water for less money than one pays for a litre of milk.

The way ahead is obvious. For those commodities that are over-produced we must find a way of effectively restricting production. The sooner that we go over to some form of compulsory set-aside, the better. It is no good fiddling about with these petty little schemes that we have on the stocks at present. We must be serious about this and stop over-producing those commodities that are costing us so much in storage. We must recognise that if we restrict production we must allow prices to rise. If we were to allow prices to rise we could escape from the system of subsidising food. Why not pay for it over the shop counter and stop fiddling about with this awful mess of subsidising? It merely helps an army of bureaucrats and achieves very little.

One thing comes out of the summit. We now recognise that we are in Europe, that we must stay in Europe and that we must make Europe work sensibly. I hope we realise that the uncommon market in which we have been for the past 15 years cannot last. We must make a proper common market, and Britain should be playing her full part in taking serious steps to get us in to a proper common

market. The first and most sensible thing that we can do is to join the European monetary system and prove that we are really determined to make Europe work.

Finally, I am convinced that British agriculture has a tremendous part to play in the well-being of the economy of this country and in maintaining a good and sound environment. It will do that only if agriculture is prosperous and thriving. It simply cannot pay for the enhancement of the environment if we are pushed to the borders of bankruptcy. I trust that the Minister will do his utmost to have a total rethink of our agricultural policy.

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell). I agree wih many of the points that he made—and, just for information, may I say that we are not related. If we were in charge of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, there would be many wealthy farmers on the east coast and the hills of Wales.

I am proud to be a dedicated European, like many other hon. Members on both sides of the House. I am also proud to be a farmer and, at times, a politician. From my experience, confidence in agriculture is at its lowest ebb since the war. I am sure that the Minister and his two colleagues will agree. I know from experience that they are genuine and sincere in their deliberations to help agriculture. They realise that, at present, agriculture is being clobbered, but, unfortunately, they have to toe the line, so far as the Prime Minister is concerned, and have to pursue policies that are not acceptable to them.

Throughout the recent discussions on the EEC budget and the common agricultural policy, what has been most striking is the Government's attitude to the farming community in the United Kingdom. Anyone hearing the Prime Minister speak this weekend would not realise that British agriculture was the most efficient industry in this country, if not the world. No one would believe that, after being encouraged by the Government to increase production to enable us to be self-sufficient, the farmers of this country responded and achieved the desired results. Indeed, instead of being praised, agriculture has been reviled, dubbed the villain of the piece and accused of wantonly producing more and more food and creating mountains and lakes as far as the eye can see. Farmers are being criticised by those who used to be their friends. The Tory Government have truly turned their back on British farmers.

It is a great pity that, during their discussions in the European Community over the weekend, greater emphasis was not given to the marketing of our surpluses within the Community and to the intervention system. As we have been members of the Community for many years and the common agricultural policy has been in existence for a long time, it is time to set up an independent inquiry into the CAP. Many farmers do not realise what is happening in Italy, France and West Germany in comparison with what is happening in Britain. Something must be done in the near future to give extra clarification to British farmers on how agriculture is faring in other countries within the Community.

For some years agriculture has been coming under great economic pressure and the strain is beginning to tell. It has been estimated that, in 1987, total investment in agriculture was cut by 15 per cent. and the average net income of farmers fell by 1·5 per cent., following years of similar falls. In some sectors, such as specialised dairy farms in Wales, there was an estimated fall in income of 8·2 per cent. in 1987. That excludes interest paid on loans. It must also be pointed out that, over the past decade, food prices have risen by only 73 per cent. of the increases in the retail prices index. Farm gate prices have increased by just over one half of the rise in food prices.

Why, then, is the industry being so fiercely attacked? This is why we are not as ready to consider the problems of our farmers as sympathetically as our European partners do. We cannot expect the farmers to produce less, to do away with the surpluses and to accept a reduction in income at the same time. It is not compatible and it will never work in this country. Many small and medium farmers will be in dire financial trouble and the social consequences of many of these new regulations will be far-reaching.

For example, in Wales, where the livestock industry accounts for 85 per cent. of agriculture, there is great alarm at the probable effects of the measures being taken to curb production. They are seen as measures against the family farm and, thus, against a way of life and the rural economy.

The use of stabilisers, set-aside schemes and diversification are fine in theory and may well have limited uses in some sectors, but there are drawbacks. For example, it has been argued that land set-aside would be the least productive in any holding. The remainder of the holding could be intensively farmed to bring up production to previous levels, thus defeating the object of the exercise. When he replies to the debate, I know that the Minister of State will clarify the comment of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that 20 per cent. of the land will be taken out of wheat and cereal production over a period. What effect will that have on the less productive land? We need more clarification on the question of set-aside. I have always held the view that farmers should be paid if their land is set aside. Will those farmers who take 20 per cent. of their land out of production be able to grow something else, such as a crop of rape to feed lambs, for short-term benefit? They should be able to do so if they choose to go for that instead of taking the money under the set-aside scheme.

Mr. Gummer: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, even if farmers do not do that, the land would still need to be looked after? Therefore, the idea that they would be paid for doing nothing is a calumny on the farmers of Britain and it does no good, in an attempt to change our agriculture system, to throw this calummy about, as seems to be the policy of the Labour party.

Mr. Howells: I agree with the Minister on this occasion —we do agree now and again.

The British Poultry Federation has pointed out that this scheme could alter the structure of its industry, and it is dependent upon the cereals sector. Marginal land will be taken out of production and in some regions the poultry sector will suffer the consequences.

There are millions of sheep in Wales, particularly in the hills of Plynlimmon and mid-Wales, where I farm myself. On behalf of the sheep producers, I ask the Minister not to dismantle the sheepmeat regime if it is at all possible. I disagree with the Prime Minister, who said earlier today that we cannot revert to the deficiency payments scheme. The present scheme is operating under another name, but

[Mr. Howells]

it is still a deficiency payments scheme. It has worked well for the sheep producers over the past 40 years, and may it remain doing so.

I believe that the Minister said some months ago that the year of the introduction of stabilisers would be based on the stock numbers in 1987. Is that still the case, or is the year now 1988? Will other countries within the Community accept a similar scheme for sheep?

There is an obvious example of restraint from producers causing prices for the consumer to rise. Cattle prices are already rising because of the shortage of supplies and the Sunday roast of a succulent beef joint is becoming prohibitively expensive. The Government extensification plans for cattle look as if they are already heading for trouble, and any surplus will soon be replaced by shortages, which can only harm the family budget in the long term.

What plans have the Minister and the Government to help dairy farmers in particular? I know that the majority of them are doing reasonably well because there is a good export trade to the continent in cows and calves. This is due to market forces, and if things go wrong and we revert to a poor trade in those two commodities the dairy sector would be in trouble once again.

Another grave concern is the ever-decreasing budget for agriculture research. In my constituency we have the world-renowned Welsh Plant Breeding Station, which deserves great support. I should like the Minister to reassure us that the recent report from the Institute of Professional Civil Servants that it is planned to take a further £75 million from research, with a loss of 7,300 jobs in agricultural research, is without foundation.

I will leave many of the points that I wished to raise, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I want to give other hon. Members an opportunity to raise matters concerning their constituencies.

I have had a word with one of my parliamentary colleagues in Scotland, who has pointed out how the new 50 per cent. rule for the suckler cow premium scheme will discriminate against farmers and crofters, particularly those in the islands. Their way of life must be protected, and I urge the Minister to look into the working of this scheme with particular reference to this sector.

We are committed to stabilisers, extensification and diversification. These may help in the short term to control farm spending, but my worry is that unless the Government show willing to support the genuine farmers the whole industry will degenerate. It is only reasonable that, if we are interested in the future of farming, we should look at fiscal measures to aid the family farmer through this difficult period. Many EEC farmers are able to take advantage of bank loans at a lower rate than many farmers in Britain. I wonder whether those schemes in Europe could become optional for farmers here instead of the capital grant scheme.

It would be helpful to set up a Royal Commission to review the effect of capital transfer tax and capital gains tax on the industry and the rural economy so that the future of small family farms can be safeguarded from one generation to another. I hope that the Minister will respond to this suggestion.

I am anxious to see an inquiry set up into the comparative effects of the CAP in various countries and the way in which the regulations are operated within each state. My interest is to see that British farming is given a fair deal and is enabled to compete on equal terms with other countries in Europe. It is difficult to believe that this is so and the Government are partly responsible for not ensuring that there is fair play.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I appeal for short speeches. There is a great deal of interest in this important debate and if speeches go on as long as they have so far, many hon. Members will be disappointed.

8.47 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I shall do my best to oblige, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) — I am more familiar with the second part of his constituency. The hon. Gentleman knows what he is talking about, and I specially welcomed his sympathy for the small farmer. I have a number in my constituency, and the small farmer has a vital part to play in maintaining the prosperity of the rural community. We will not solve this problem as easily as Ministers thought they might at one time. The existing structure of the common agricultural policy is not as helpful as it ought to be.

I appreciated the constructive tone of the speech of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I liked the way in which he approached the matter. He said that there was a challenge but that there were exciting opportunities ahead. He did not minimise the severe problems, but he was right to point out that 95 per cent. of the Government's objectives were achieved. It has been forgotten in the debate that has been raging today that in these negotiations my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister clearly demonstrated her commitment to Europe.

I have a great personal regard for the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), but he was less than fair to suggest that my right hon. Friend should have gone to the summit like some latter-day Boadicea, shaken her fist, so that all the other nations would fall down before her, and smashed any idea of agreement, thus causing considerable confusion and uncertainty among the British farming community, which she desires to protect. How arrogant to assume that someone should have the power to do that, when two powerful nations which are facing elections, and many other nations which are not quite so powerful nor facing elections, did not happen to agree with the hon. Member for South Shields, and certainly would have disagreed profoundly with such an approach by my right hon. Friend. That is an arrogant assumption, and we should not behave arrogantly.

Had the Prime Minister behaved in that way, I know what sort of speech the hon. Member for South Shields would have made. He would have talked about the "Iron Lady" and the Prime Minister thinking that she knows better than anyone else. What rubbish. We do not like that sort of speech. The hon. Member for South Shields sought to redeem himself later on in his speech.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Is it not a fact that there is no politician in the world who could have negotiated a better deal for this country than the Prime Minister has done?

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: My hon. Friend is right. The Prime Minister needs no lessons from any Patsies on the Opposition Benches on how to stand up for Britain. I admire her for her capacity to achieve considerable savings when the majority were against her. In fact, all the other nations were against making the sort of substantial savings that we have been able to achieve. The hon. Member for South Shields knows that that is true. I have now got that off my chest.

Although we have achieved some of our objectives, we have not achieved everything that we would like, nor will we. With the common agricultural policy as it currently exists, we will not be able to sort things out at a session such as that held in Brussels over the past few days. However, the National Farmers Union has said in its press release:

"It is good for Europe that the ECs internal financing problems have now been resolved. This should now allow the Community to concentrate on achieving the objectives which it has set itself and, in particular, the completion of the Single European Market."

Of course, there are uncertainties, because this is an uncertain time. However, most of us who want to be fair-minded about this matter would agree that the Community has now set up a system that gives a better chance of providing the additional prosperity and stability that farmers seek. It will not benefit just the farming community. Taxpayers can feel that the Government have not neglected their interests. The British budget rebate was saved, and we received £3 billion for the last three years. The saving will continue at that rate over the next five years. To those who believe that the Government have not established the importance of reducing the proportion of the Community's budget by reducing the common agricultural policy's budget, I should say that we know that it will go down from 75 per cent. of the budget as a whole to 50 per cent. in 1992. That is a reduction of 25 per cent., and it is not bad.

We know that farmers face serious problems of adjustment. I do not know of any industry that has been called upon to face a 12 per cent. price cut such as that faced by the farming industry in respect of cereals. I am glad to note that the Minister was able to see that the exemption limits were negotiated out of the agreement.

We know that farm incomes have dropped. I shall not go into the details of that, because it has already been mentioned by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I shall not develop my indignation at the impact of the green pound, except to join my hon. Friends in saying that I believe that that is of profound concern to the farming community. I wonder to what extent the Government's reluctance to seek devaluation of the green pound arises from the fact that it will result in higher farmgate prices, which would affect the set-aside proposals. Or is it the Treasury that complains that it would be a subsidy to farmers?

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I have been talking to the farmers in my constituency. I have been talking to the pig farmers who, without a shadow of doubt, are going bankrupt. I have been talking to the farmer who has a farm in Yorkshire and one in Germany. Therefore, he is able to compare what is happening in Yorkshire with what is happening in Germany. Also in my constituency there is the manufacturer of industrial machinery who has had to dismiss 49 people because of the roll-on effect. A 10 per cent. devalutation of the green pound would offset that.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I fully accept what the hon. Gentleman has said. He has anticipated my comments about the MCAs. The patience of farmers has been stretched to breaking point.

I understand the Government's intentions on set-aside schemes. My right hon. Friend the Minister is right to pursue them with all the vigour that he can command, but he must ensure that they are effective. From what I hear, I do not know whether the amount that is to be paid to farmers to set aside land will be sufficient. It is a mammoth problem. I hope that it will not be too expensive before it becomes effective. That is one reason why some of my hon. Friends believe that it should be compulsory. That is a matter for the future.

I am indebted to the magazine of the Country Landowners Association. It has provided me with some information which sets out the massive scale of trying to make an impact on production by a set-aside programme. It pointed out that in France the land surface area is 55 million hectares. A total of 55 per cent. is used for agricultural purposes, 29 per cent. is made up of woods and forest and 9 million hectares are used for other purposes. France faces the prospect of 6 million hectares being taken out of food production. That is quite a lot.

The editorial says:

"Even if 300 new golf courses are built and 10,000 tennis courts and 1,000 camping and caravan sites, they will account for no more than 30,000 hectares, leaving 5,970 hectares facing a fate, which the Franch call desertification."

A few golf courses were established in my constituency years ago. It was announced recently that one of the few large farms in my constituency is to go out of farming and that at least one international standard or championship course will be built, with perhaps another for less ambitious players. That is the trend. It may be helpful in diversification and in bringing in new employment.

There is another aspect of trying to cope with such massive production. Diversification has been the policy embraced by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of the Environment. The figures show that the Ministry of Agriculture gives £1·5 billion in price support in this country. It gives £150 million to special areas and hill livestock and £100 million in capital grants. Most of that money goes to the bigger farmers.

What has happened to grant-aid for diversification since 1986? I read a report saying that virtually nothing had been handed out. There is a Development Commission for Rural England, which receives £30 million. I am not prepared to say that all the money should be taken away, from the hill farmers and those living on marginal land, especially when I see the Celtic fringe facing me on the Opposition Benches. However, the size of the budget, where it goes and the emphasis that is placed on other things shows how inadequate it is to support a diversification programme.

A start has been made in encouraging woodland management. However, to us in the south-east, that seems to be unduly biased towards the planting of hardwood, for which there is less anticipated demand than for softwood. Prices for pulpwood are discouraging.

In this general debate on agriculture I should like to digress for a moment to talk about woodlands and to

[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith]

underline to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State the despair that is felt by those woodland owners who face horrendous and crippling financial burdens to clear up the mess that was left behind in the wake of last October's hurricane. The Government now have the facts, the Forestry Commission has looked at the matter, and there is every reason to believe that the costings have been made. What encouragement is there for woodland owners, and what untold long-term damage has been done to our forests and woodlands in the south-east? There will be long-term damage if nothing is done to help clear the fallen trees.

Mr. Lord: Does my hon. Friend agree that the most important thing is to recognise that in the woodlands that have been so badly damaged, and where trees have been blown down, there is not only the problem of replanting and replacing those trees, but the enormous cost that will be involved in getting rid of the huge roots, which is totally out of all proportion to normal forestry work? This is not the kind of thing that farmers, or even woodland owners, normally have to cope with, and it will add massively to the bill. Does he agree that that must be taken into consideration if we are to be fair to those people and get on with the reinstatement?

Sir Geoffrey Johnson-Smith: My hon. Friend is totally correct. I am delighted that the Select Committee on Agriculture visited three woodland sites in my constituency and saw just that sort of damage. It is ludicrous to suggest that anything can be done in the way of replanting, least of all getting an agreement on replanting, by the deadline of 30 March this year unless this vexatious problem is dealt with as a matter of urgency by the Government.

9 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Although I do not want to go over some of the points that have been made in the debate, other issues have been raised that need emphasising in terms of my own constituency and in general.

The effects that monetary compensatory amounts have been having on pigmeat and on the pig industry in terms of the green pound have been mentioned. I know that the discussions that took place were centred mainly on grain and on oil seed crops. Nevertheless, the pig industry always seems to be pushed to the bottom of the pile when it comes to negotiations. What impresses me about the pigmeat industry is that it is asking not for subsidies but only for a chance to compete fairly. That is unlike the grain farmers who are subsidised up to the hilt in many ways. All the pigmeat industry wants is fairness in terms of imports entering this country and undercutting our producers.

I should like to deal briefly with the set-aside policy. Hon. Members of all parties have agreed—perhaps for different reasons—that the set-aside policy will not work in terms of reducing the overproduction of cereal crops. There are many reasons for that. One is that the amount of money that will be paid in set-aside grants will not compensate the very large cereal farmers, even it they go over their target figures and suffer the 3 per cent. price reduction. I do not believe that that 3 per cent. price reduction will in any way deter them or induce them to go over to the set-aside scheme.

Therefore, we need alternative ways to reduce the overproduction of grain. One way—the Government are considering this and I support them—is the alternative use of land for the planting of trees. It has been said that 29 per cent. of France is covered by forests, which is a far higher proportion than that in this country. I think that I am right in saying that we have the lowest proportion of land covered by forests of any European country. Therefore, there is a need, a demand, and a market, especially in the hardwood sector. I hope that the Minister will consider that point seriously.

I know that this matter does not come under his control but I hope that when the Government consider investment in forestry they will do something about the tax dodges, whereby people, such as Lady Porter, can receive about £500,000 in tax relief. That is more than many people in my constituency could hope to earn in a whole lifetime of work. Although we must encourage forestry, we should do so in a way that does not put large sums of taxpayers' money into the pockets of private individuals.

I do not want to waste time by going over all the points that have been raised. I agree that food overproduction in the common agricultural policy is a serious problem. The problem with the CAP is that many farmers have been caught in a trap that is not of their own making. Over recent years they have been induced to produce more and more food. They are caught in what has been termed "a treadmill effect"—not a term that I would coin myself. However, because the farmers must produce more and more to get the money, they invest more and more in fertilisers, equipment and other things. That was bound to have the effect that has made the CAP so damaging to our farming community and to our environment because of the way in which many farmers have moved over to agriculture. They have done most of the damage by ripping up hedgerows and chopping down trees simply to increase their production so that they can get more and more in terms of grants. In many cases, it is the small farmer who is suffering as a result of those policies.

There is scope for improvement. I accept that it is a difficult concept. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) that the Prime Minister went to Europe spouting more rhetoric, instead of trying to achieve something. No matter what has been said, because her veto would have held up the whole negotiation, and frankly because the bankruptcy of the Common Market was hingeing on that, the Prime Minister had a tremendously powerful lever and could have achieved real changes. I do not believe that the change that she did achieve will seriously dent the overproduction of grain in Britain.

9.5 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I shall participate in the debate only briefly, but I should like to second the plea made by other hon. Members that we have a much longer debate at some stage in future. It has been quite impossible for many hon. Members to speak and to make their points. The subject is important.

I speak tonight in the full knowledge that farming incomes are down to approximately half in real terms compared with five years ago, and that the present return on capital in the industry is negative and employment is

falling. It is very difficult to be optimistic about the future of agriculture in Britain, unless that efficient hard-working industry is enabled to return to profit and reinvest for the future.

The details of the internal financing agreement of the EC are too new to be fully digested, and some are completely indigestible, but I fear that they will not benefit agriculture in Britain, although I realise that it is difficult to be 100 per cent. positive until the next price-fixing round has been completed. The set-aside proposal is a mixed blessing. In theory, set-aside would appear to be the answer to reducing production by taking marginal land out of production. In practice, it is difficult to see how it will be of benefit until the monetary level is fixed at a reasonable rate; and the minimum would need to cover fixed costs. No one is likely to be attracted to the scheme by less than that. The proposal that half set-aside land should be green fallow is ludicrous and would seriously exacerbate the problems in other commodities such as beef and sheep.

The present proposals for the sheepmeat regime are quite unacceptable, as they discriminate against British agriculture, although the worst proposal of all has been shelved, at least for the moment. Sheep represent the one area of hope in which we have been supremely successful, especially in the export markets, having escaped the MCA system. To have to control ewe numbers if we retain the variable premium is quite deplorable; and it would enable France, for example, to build up its flock whilst ours was being tightly restricted. The Minister will appreciate how devastating that stabiliser mechanism will prove, not least to the hill farmers in less-favoured areas.

The other commodity being devastated at present is the pigmeat regime, which has been mentioned by many hon. Members. I urge the Minister to fight hard for the abolition of the MCAs on this product as soon as possible. Because they are receiving lower prices now than they were five years ago, many producers in my constituency are losing money hand over fist. That cannot be sustained for any length of time. Urgent action must be taken to ensure that our pig farmers can compete in a fair market. The Dutch farmers are receiving a payment of £70 for every tonne of bacon that they export to the United Kingdom at present, and they are, of course, paying £16 per tonne less for their feed.

Finally, it is absolute nonsense for the EC to try to depress cereal production while allowing cereal substitutes to be imported. Surely it is quite obvious that one cancels out the other.

Uncertainty may well have been ended by the summit agreement, but that emotion has been replaced by dismay at the prospects for British farmers compared with others in the industry elsewhere in the Community.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for a commendably brief speech, and say to the remainder of hon. Members waiting to speak that if they follow suit many of them will be called.

9.9 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I shall try to be brief. I should like to make three points. First, it is agreed in the House that the common agricultural policy is nonsense. It is agreed by the Opposition that the Prime Minister failed in her objectives in Brussels because she failed to achieve what she told us she would achieve.

My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) teased the Minister of State about his attacks on the Church of England. It was only when I read the *London Standard* that I realised that the Prime Minister had had a secret meeting with the seven bishops. Perhaps she and the Minister of State have been trying to get the churches to stop praying for a good harvest. The last thing that we want is a good harvest. Perhaps the Minister of State has been trying to ban harvest festivals.

The common agricultural policy is nonsense, and so is the cereal deal concluded this year in Brussels. Are we really saying that what we need is an epidemic of slugs on our cereal land? Perhaps somebody in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is working on some sort of disease that will attack the crops. That is the sort of nonsense that we find in the common agricultural policy.

The wood pigeon is a much maligned bird. I have been doing some research on it and perhaps after I have outlined my findings the Minister will make it a protected species. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food says that each wood pigeon eats 20 kg, which I understand is over 40 lb, of grain per year. There are between 5 million and 10 million wood pigeons in the United Kingdom. Therefore, in five to 10 years it could eat Britain's grain mountain. We should breed more wood pigeons but, unfortunately, we might end up with a wood pigeon mountain, such is the nonsense of the common agricultural policy.

Some hon. Members have said that we are so efficient that only 2·5 per cent. of our work force works on the land. We criticise the French for having 10 per cent. and the Germans for having 5 per cent. However, it is we who are stupid because the French and the Germans are preserving their rural communities. They are not decimating the villages and closing the village schools because people are leaving the land. The sooner we get back to putting people on the land, such as was done by the Land Settlement Association brought in by a Tory Government in the 1930s——

Mr. Lord: I am carefully following the hon. Gentleman's argument. I am sure he appreciates the effect on labour costs and on the price of food if we put all those people back on the land. Is he recommending a large increase in the price of food?

Mr. Martlew: I am saying that the French and the Germans are doing very well and that we are doing badly. If the hon. Gentleman asks the housewife whether we have cheap food, she will laugh. We do not have cheap food because of the common agricultural policy. If we had a free market and allowed such things as sugar to come in from Jamaica, we would have cheap food. We have the worst of both worlds.

I should like to mention a local point about milk quotas. I accept the need for the quotas. We got a bad deal in 1983 when the Government agreed that it was a bad year. A creamery in my constituency has just closed because of the quotas. We have heard much talk about looking after the farmers but not much talk about the people who work in the food industry. People in Europe tried to get rid of the Milk Marketing Board. I support the Milk Marketing Board because I worked in the milk industry for more than 20 years and I know that it does an excellent distribution job and looks after its markets.

Dairy Crest does a terrible job. One would expect the chairman of Dairy Crest to drive around in a Volkswagen

[Mr. Martlew]

Polo because that company was getting into milk production when all the smart money was getting out. It is the sort of company that married the kitten when she turned into a cat. In my constituency Dairy Crest spent £7 million building a factory at the time when a reduction in milk quotas was on the cards. That factory has been closed.

Many of my hon. Friends have signed an early-day motion about New Zealand butter, but I am afraid that I cannot sign it because the butter workers in my constituency are out of business. I have had letters about the matter. If we are talking about set-aside, can the Minister set aside a little money to compensate those dairy workers for the loss of livelihood? We are always talking about compensating farmers, but the Milk Marketing Board is offering dairy workers the most miserable redundancy money one could imagine. It is diabolical. The trouble with the Milk Marketing Board is that, as it is a farmers' co-operative, it has always treated its workers like farm labourers. It is time that the Government gave some thought to helping those people who will be made redundant by the common agricultural policy and this decision.

There is a factory which was once efficient but is now a blot on the landscape in my constituency. Is there an opportunity to get money from the CAP to convert that factory into a food-processing factory? If that is not done, it will be an insult to the people of Carlisle. I should like in a year's time as many people to work in that factory producing a food product as there were working there before the redundancies.

9.15 pm

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): In recent years, whenever there has been a summit on the skyline, the farmers have trembled at what may come out of it. The speech of the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) will make them tremble even more. His idea of trying to supply an improved diet for wood pigeons, with no recompense to the farmers, would put all of them out of business in one season.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): It is a grain of sense.

Mr. Marland: That must be recognised.

When I say "farmers", I mean the farmers about whom we are all concerned — not the agri-businesses that operate on grade 1 silt in East Anglia. The traditional farmers on the poorer soil are facing the most difficulty. They are being told repeatedly that they must produce less and produce more cheaply. They wonder, rightly, where it will all end and whether there will be any safeguards for them and their families and for those who work in the ancillary industries. Euro-economics is in an unbelievable muddle with far too much money going into the wrong hands.

What is the result of this policy of levies, price reductions and green pound imbalances? It is impoverishment and sacrifice for certain for those on poorer land and for all but the most well-financed. Pressure on price to reduce output is obviously the most efficient method to cut reduction, but it is socially unacceptable.

I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister say this afternoon that she wanted reasonably prosperous farming. Short-term expedients have allowed politicians to tamper at the edges with the CAP and completely wreck it. Thank goodness, last week-end we had some direction and sanity as to the future. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her efforts, for at last farmers can begin to plan for the future. They know that our partners in Europe will be bound by the same rules as we are. All too often the farmers in this country have thought, rightly, that member states on the other side of the Channel have been bending rules to their advantage.

Let us return to basics. As others have said, the European Community was intended to be a single tariff-free trading area — a single European market. The problem is that we do not have a single European market. Fortunately, we are working towards that in 1992. It is disgraceful that so many British farmers should have to trade in the face of such unfair competition because of green currency variations. The pig industry well reflects that point. All those who are involved in the pig business know that the industry is cyclical, but there is no doubt that the depression this time is deeper and more serious than for many years. It is true that the Dutch and the Danes are operating and exporting their production to this country with a £60 a tonne advantage—an advantage to them of £60 a tonne and a disadvantage to our farmers when they seek to export.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is difficult for pig farmers to appreciate the difficulties that they find themselves in when, on the one hand, they are batting on an unfair wicket against foreign competition, yet, on the other hand, they see grain surpluses building up in this country which an additional 4 million pigs would help to absorb?

Mr. Marland: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I was about to plead with my right hon. Friend to make available grain in intervention so that farmers and others can take it out in small lots. At present the minimum lot that anyone can remove from an intervention store is 100 tonnes. Pig producers in my constituency tell me that it would be a great help if they could have access to grain in smaller lots. As the price of intervention grain is to be depreciated, it would be a great help if pig fatteners and others could have access to the grain in smaller lots.

Quotas in the dairy industry have successfully cut the output of dairy products. It is good news that butter in store in the past 12 months has decreased by 39 per cent. When we introduced dairy quotas, why did we say that those with a quota of less than 200,000 litres would be exempt from any further reductions? I understand that in 1988, when the 2·5 per cent. quota reduction is introduced, it will also apply to small dairy farmers. Why has there been that change of mind? I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend would touch on that in his reply.

Dairy quotas have undoubtedly reduced the output of milk and dairy products, and cereals and oil seed are undoubtedly the bugbear of the CAP today. The last time I spoke on this subject I advocated national quotas in order to share out the pain equally, for there is no doubt that quotas restrict output. We see that with milk, sugarbeet and potatoes. I accept that I have lost the battle to introduce quotas on cereals. Since then we have had price cuts and co-responsibility levies, which are again to

be extended, but they have never reduced output. Co-responsibility levies are simply a soft option for European bureaucrats to raise more money. They are simply a political fiddle.

Now the new arrival on the scene is stabilisers. Price cuts are to follow the year after a surplus and I dare say that they may work. It is an ingenious but complicated way out of the problem with all this interlinking of price reductions, levies and goodness knows what else. Nevertheless, it will not reduce the surpluses. Against that the farmers are ever set on growing more if prices are reduced. They are assisted in that by plant breeders who reckon that they can improve output by 2 per cent. per annum, as a result of studies in plant pathology, by increasing the output from each acre. Stabilisers will have only a small effect on reducing output and will not achieve our aim.

In the past farmers have been urged to diversify into other enterprises to reduce their dependence on cereals. They have gone into bed and breakfast, growing borage and evening primrose, and some have even planted vineyards. This week's *Farmers Weekly* tells of a farmer's son who has gone into chopping pasta in Guildford. All that is enterprising, but can only be described as exotic at its best.

What was CAP originally designed for? Among its basic aims was to put money into rural communities, so farmers and those living there should have been the beneficiaries. But that most certainly is not what is happening today. The beneficiaries of today's CAP are store keepers and Russian housewives. Between 50 and 60 per cent. of the CAP is spent on storing and disposing of surpluses. Russian housewives are enjoying a subsidy from European housewives of £60 a tonne for every tonne of grain exported from the Community to Russia. As Opposition Members have said, why should our families pay £10 a week to subsidise Russian housewives? The money is not going to rural communities. I believe that we should rearrange things to ensure that it goes to such communities in Europe, not in Russia.

I welcome set-aside and am pleased that we have moved in that direction, but we must make it work. In 1988 I believe that we have a golden opportunity to introduce set-aside at minimal cost to the overall budget because less money will have to be spent on storing and disposal. Our stores are now emptier than they have been for many years. The prospects for the 1988 harvest are not that great. Those of use who are involved in farming know that we have had an incredibly difficult autumn — the amount of autumn planting has been extremely low in comparison with previous years—and I do not believe that we shall have a monster harvest in 1988. Therefore, we have a golden opportunity to divert money into set-aside rather than to the store keepers and the Russian housewives.

If we have a successful set-aside it will remove the need for stabilisers because we will not reach the targets. Unlike others, I believe that the set-aside should be voluntary rather than compulsory. I also believe that set-aside should be generous so that farmers queue up to take it. I believe that it should be £150 an acre at least. Farmers would then come forward and take the land out of production. If such a rate was set, I believe that we would have a queue of farmers from here to Exeter waiting to take advantage of it.

As regards all the land in marginal areas being taken out of production, I believe that those who organise the farmers who will be eligible for set-aside can plan where production should take place. Therefore, it will not only be the farmers in the north or in the marginal areas who will take advantage of the set-aside. I accept that set-aside is a form of quota, but I believe that it gives great flexibility to our planners. The costs would be fixed once the amount to be set aside had been established. I urge my right hon. Friend to consider seriously the possibility of making set-aside a great deal more interesting for our farmers.

9.27 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I followed with great interest the arguments of the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) about the need to protect our rural communities. It will not surprise him to discover that I wish to devote a substantial amount of my speech to the Scottish rural community, especially as I am the only hon. Member representing a Scottish constituency who has sat through this debate.

I wish to draw attention to some particular Scottish statistics that are measured separately from those for England and Wales. They will place the Scottish position within the context of this subject. In the past decade Scottish net farm incomes have fallen by one third, and that is set against the background of rising interest charges. The overall pressures on the Scottish agriculture industry have been particularly harsh. Investment has fallen substantially — by 17 per cent. in building and ancillary additions to farms, and by 6 per cent. in plant and machinery. That reduction has an overall knock-on effect for the rural community. It deprives youngsters of the opportunity of taking apprenticeships in, for example, agricultural engineering, and it drives more and more people away from the rural communities into the towns, and it is not as though there are presently many jobs in those towns.

Moray is placed within the Grampian region for local authority purposes, and about 30 per cent. of the region's output is totally dependent upon agriculture. If there were a 20 per cent. reduction in farm employment in the region, 3,500 people would be seeking alternative employment. That demonstrates the importance of agriculture to that region.

The various issues that have been touched upon in the debate have similar effects in Scotland as in England and Wales. Every farmer I speak to emphasises the need for the devaluation of the green pound. The Scottish NFU has pointed out that a 10 per cent. devaluation of the green pound would result in less than a 0·5 per cent. increase in the cost of living. I believe that that is a small price to pay to ensure that our farming communities can compete effectively, efficiently and fairly with their opposite numbers.

Much has been said about the set-aside scheme for the cereals sector, but other aspects of the farming industry that are dependent on the cereals sector are crying out for help. The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) referred to the poultrymeat and egg industry, and I agree with what he said. I should like to refer also to the pig industry. Some 50 per cent. of Scottish pig production is based in the Grampian region, and the producers are facing bankruptcy. The industry is based historically in Grampian because of Lawson's of Dyce, which was a major employer until it moved south. The

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

farmers there wish the industry to continue. They are angry that Holland will be importing 22 million tonnes of cereal replacer over the next five years, while we are being asked to set aside. That seems strange to them. They are left at a disadvantage, particularly in competition with the Dutch producers, which is unfair. The Minister has mentioned that in previous debates. I hope he will say that he will take steps to eradicate that unfair competition, and particularly that he will bring about the early abolition of MCAs, to ensure that the pig industry has a future.

9.31 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (Norfolk, South-West): People in my constituency of Norfolk, South-West, not all of whom farm on grade 1 soil, are realistic about the necessity to reform the CAP and to tackle the problem of surpluses. Our farmers are business men who, like any business men, want a framework in which to plan their future, in which to plan for perhaps reduced outputs in some crops and diversification to others, but above all the opportunity to compete on the fairest terms possible within the European market place and beyond.

The settlement that was announced this weekend moves towards the provision of a framework in which our farmers can work. The legally enforced regulations, provided that they work effectively, will be popular with our farmers, who for some time have been under the firm impression that only British farmers have been keeping the rules, especially with co-responsibility levies.

I know that I must be extremely brief. I should like to have talked about non-agricultural use of land and bio-technology, but I shall confine myself to some remarks about the pig industry. If farming is in crisis, it is most in crisis in the production of pigs.

As other hon. Members have said, it is a cyclical problem, but since the previous crisis in 1983 the industry has done an enormous amount to put its house in order. It does not benefit from direct support, such as intervention price, but producers have studied the market, produced pigs that the market wants, have not over produced, in contrast to their Dutch competitors, for example, and above all have developed their marketing.

I think that nobody has mentioned marketing in the debate. Perhaps no one else present in the Chamber visits supermarkets and butchers as I do, but over the past couple of years I have been struck by the evidence in the retail sector of the industry's determination to market pork attractively — not just joints, but fillets, kebabs, stir-fry, spare ribs, casserole pork and lean pork steaks. That is a good example to producers in the other meat sectors. The pork producers have also cashed in on the healthy eating fashion by demonstrating the many uses of lean pork.

The industry has been assiduous in developing its export markets. A supplier in my constituency has negotiated excellent outlets in Japan and the United States. However, all those efforts have been defeated. Why? Because our producers are being forced to compete against the Dutch, Danes and French, who are able to export their pork to us with a subsidy provided by favourable MCA rates, while our producers have to battle against an export tax from unfavourable MCAs. In effect, our taxpayers are spending £5 million a year to help the Danes, Dutch and French put our pig producers out of business. That cannot be right, and it is not good enough.

I know that my right hon. Friend is fully aware of the problem. I know that he is determined to move to an early abolition of MCAs, if possible. I know, too, that the short-term private storage aids will give temporary relief, but pigmeat MCAs should be abolished as soon as possible, otherwise our producers will be forced out of business, only to have their place in the market filled by more imports.

Our farmers are efficient, well organised and ready for change. Like my right hon. Friend, they know that their best interests are to be served by an orderly and sustainable change in agricultural policy. Moves towards the abolition of MCAs and a devaluation of the green pound will enable British farmers to compete fairly with our neighbours, and we must strive to give them that chance.

9.36 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): The common agricultural policy brings the European Community into disrepute. If one could hear the call of people in the street, I am sure that an overwhelming majority of them — more than 90 per cent. of the electorate — would be hostile to the CAP. It is nonsense. Food prices and the guaranteed prices of intervention for most products are up to 40 per cent. above world prices. The regulations involved in the common agricultural policy are complex and difficult even for experts to understand. As an hon. Member representing a rural constituency with an interest in agriculture, I can assure hon. Members that the regulations are difficult for ordinary people to understand.

The cost of the CAP, as we have heard, is £19 billion or £20 billion. That amounts to about 40 per cent. of the value of the products. The extent of the subsidy is horrific. The public are well aware of that. What makes it particularly ugly is the fact that most of that benefit goes to farmers who are already rich, while small farmers are still being driven to the wall. The pricing mechanism is wholly based on production: large farms with large outputs receive a large subsidy, whereas small farms with smaller outputs are under great pressure.

The CAP is drastically in need of reform, and we had hoped that the Prime Minister would have achieved something worthwhile for the people of this country last weekend. Instead, she caved in to the French, the Germans and the other members. I shall give only one figure to show that — for expenditure on the EEC next year. The proposal was for an increase from 1·4 per cent. of the VAT base to 1·4 per cent. of GDP. In the circumstances, the Prime Minister settled for 1·2 per cent. of GDP. In today's statement she acknowledged that that was a 25 per cent. increase in our contribution to the Community next year. We challenge that figure. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said earlier today that the real figure was an increase of at least one third. My own calculations put it nearer 40 per cent. Even if we accept the Prime Minister's figure, there will be a 25 per cent. increase in our contribution to the European Community next year.

What other sector is receiving a 25 per cent. increase? Will our Health Service or our education service receive

that much? Our pensioners will receive only an inflation-linked pension with no real increase, yet the Prime Minister bends the knee to the European Community and allows this phenomenal increase.

Let us compare the amounts allocated to the Health Service and the EEC. The cost of the CAP—we have heard it several times this evening—is about £10 a week for every family in Britain. The cost of the National Health Service, as we have heard the Prime Minister say dozens of times over the past few months, is about £20 per family per week. I am sure that if there were a referendum on scrapping the CAP and giving the money to the NHS it would carry a 90 per cent. — or higher — majority. *[Interruption.]* That is what the majority of the British electorate feel. With the CAP, we are pouring money into a virtually bottomless pit. The Health Service is desperate for resources.

There is agreement throughout Europe that we must dramatically reform the CAP. I give a cautious welcome to stabilisers, even though the Prime Minister again made a major concession by raising the amount from 155 million tonnes to 160 million tonnes. I represent an area with a strong dairy farming interest. When milk quotas were introduced there was a 7 per cent. cut right across the board. The agreement that has been reached is much softer on cereal farmers than the agreement on milk producers a few years ago.

As to set-aside, I cannot but feel that there is something fundamentally immoral about not using land. The problem is that the CAP tries to treat the symptoms, but that results only in problems and absurdities such as growing tomatoes and then subsidising farmers to plough them back into the land. Set-aside is an illogical, immoral absurdity. In effect, it means that we are paying rich farmers for doing nothing. I do not believe that we should pay anybody anything for doing such things.

Farming, through the subsidies, has experienced that sort of feather-bedding for many years. As the Government acknowledge, difficult times lie ahead for farmers. When the recession hits agriculture, the broadest backs that have been doing so well should carry the burden. Small farmers should be protected. We must protect our rural communities and the social structures within them.

We must reform pricing mechanisms and productivity restraints which discriminate against small farmers. When milk quotas were introduced in Germany there was a threshold below which there were no quotas. That helped to protect small farmers. The same should apply to all other pricing mechanisms and quotas. We must protect small farmers to protect our rural communities.

I represent a Welsh-speaking area where the Welsh language is under severe threat. The Government's policies, with milk quotas being applied across the board, are driving small farmers out of business. That poses a strong threat to the Welsh language, to rural schools and to community life. The small farmers who look after the countryside best are being driven out of business. It is large farmers who are bulldozing hedgerows, spraying pesticides and pouring masses of fertiliser on their fields. Small farmers enjoy a much more harmonious relationship with the environment.

It is ironic that the CAP was introduced to protect small farmers. However, it has been perverted. It is guaranteeing fortunes for the very rich and is driving small farmers to the wall—the trend is relentless.

We need a redistribution of income right across the board in Thatcher's Britain in the 1980s. Rich farmers have had it too good for many years. We should take income from them and, through pricing mechanisms and production restraints, use that money to support small farmers and rural communities. That is what I would describe as a Socialist agriculture policy.

9.45 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): I carefully checked the constituency of the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) because it seemed almost unbelievable that he should represent a farming constituency when we heard his mixture of comments about the common agricultural policy. If we followed his proposals, very few of his farming constituents would be able to pay the bills at the end of the week.

I was sad that the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), who opened the debate for the Opposition, used the sort of quotations that can be seen outside London theatres — a few odd words from the middle of a newspaper statement, intended to encourage people to go to see the play. What the hon. Gentleman might have done was to look at the foreign press. If he had done that, he would have seen what our competitors thought about the results of the summit. I quote but one, *Le Figaro*, which is after all a French newspaper. *[Interruption.]* It is evidently a very pro-British newspaper. Let us hear what it says about the decision:

> "To assert that the victor of the Falklands has given way is a sign both of a slight unfamiliarity with Community affairs and of a failure to appreciate the mettle of the Head of Government of Her Britannic Majesty."

That is what that "anti-British" newspaper said.

I feel that it is rather an overestimate of the hon. Gentleman's speech to refer to a "slight unfamiliarity" with Community affairs. The problem is that the Opposition are determined to say two entirely opposite things. On the one hand, they demand that we obtain a price structure that is close to world prices; on the other hand, they complain about the lack of direction, the worries and the low incomes of farmers. They cannot have both at the same time.

The truth is that Opposition Members cannot get by by quoting out-of-date Australian figures about world prices and believing that the farmers will then take their views seriously. The hon. Member for South Shields made it clear that he wanted our agriculture policy to be based on an attitude to world prices involving about £50 a tonne for grain.

Dr. David Clark: That is not true.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman may have misstated his case. He must read what he said. I was very careful. He has not given me enough time to say any more.

Dr. Clark *rose*——

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman has interrupted on this point on several occasions. If he listens to what I say, I think that he will realise that I am not doing him a disservice. He drew our attention to the £50 a tonne world price for grain, and suggested that the Government would have done a great deal more good if they had come nearer to that price. But that would not do our farmers any good whatever.

[Mr. Gummer]

My hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell), in his fine defence of the farmer, made it perfectly clear——

Dr. Clark *rose*——

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that he has already answered my point. I am now answering his point. He also knows perfectly well that I have 13 minutes before the end of the debate, and I intend to answer the comments that have been made.

Dr. Clark: The right hon. Gentleman is not telling the truth.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman does not like what I am saying; that is why he says what he does.

The hon. Gentleman went on to say that in the proposals for set-aside farmers would be paid for doing nothing. He knows that that is not true. Farmers will be paid for looking after the land, and there are various forms of set-aside that we are seeking to implement. My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) suggested——

Dr. Clark: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I shall not give way. I have made that perfectly clear.

Dr. Clark *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the Minister will not give way, I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman cannot intervene.

Dr. Clark: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not a point of order. I think that the hon. Gentleman is distressed about something——

Dr. Clark: The Minister is not telling the truth.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Every right hon. and hon. Member makes his speech in his own way, and I have heard nothing unparliamentary so far.

Dr. Clark *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must give the Minister a chance to answer the debate.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton referred to green fallow. As she rightly said, this is a very new proposal and all the details are before us. She may have misunderstood the proposal. The proposal is not that 50 per cent. should be green fallow, rather if a country agrees to have a green fallow system it can pay only 50 per cent. of the rate for bare fallow. That is where the 50 per cent. comes in and my hon. Friend will agree that it is a less worrying proposal than the proposal that she was rightly concerned about.

I must tell Opposition Members, including the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells), that it will not help the farmers to suggest that there is no cost in caring for the land. The truth is that costs will be involved in any system. The purpose of set-aside is to ensure that the costs to the taxpayer are not inflated by the production of food that we do not want. The common agricultural policy alone has not resulted in surpluses. There are surpluses throughout the world. Even India and China can export food, something that we would not have thought possible 10 years ago.

We are concerned for the developing countries. I know that the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) will want to consider this carefully. I have heard her speak with gratifying support for the developing countries. However, it is difficult to say that we should exclude from this country agricultural products from all other countries, especially as we are part of a group of nations based on a trading community. This Government could not possibly support such a policy. It would be wholly against any reasonable international trading policy to tell the Thais that they cannot export manioc, one of their major products, to Europe. It would also be against the morality of international policy. It would also be wholly against our national interests because we would not be able to sell to those countries if we were not prepared to buy at least some of their products.

I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) that there is nothing in annex V that adds to any powers that the Commission or the Council possesses at present. Many countries in the European Community want to underline the fact that if the European Community cuts back on its production they will expect other surplus producers which subsidise their farmers to do likewise. We would not wish our farmers to bear the brunt of surplus production and leave other countries to produce surpluses to fill the markets.

Mr. Teddy Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not give way. I have already said that I will not give way in the time left to me.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) rightly referred to the fact that 95 per cent. of the Government's objectives have been achieved. Perhaps we should consider the horrific situation that might have occurred. If we consider the position of other countries in their negotiations, we realise that this is an enormous achievement. Those who wanted to quote selectively from the newspapers did not continue with the quotation from the *Financial Times* which said that any attempt to leave this to the next discussion would have been worse for Britain and for British farmers. The hon. Member for South Shields should have paid the House the honour of continuing the quotation.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) referred to pigmeat. I agree that pigmeat is seldom the centre of debate largely because it does not have the same kind of regime as other products. He was right to say that pigmeat producers believe that because they receive so little support—only indirect support in the form of private storage aids—they are often not at the centre of the discussion. However, the hon. Gentleman would agree that the discussions were not concerned about the green pound or MCAs. Therefore, we must consider the decisions that will be made in the price fixing where Britain has always insisted that the decisions should be finalised. The Community is committed to the eradication of these by 1992 and the Government are wholeheartedly in support. We need that if we are to have the Common Market and the kind of competition that we all want so that Britain can succeed.

I agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe about forests. We are trying hard, through our recent proposals, to get matters under way. I hope that he will support us in the difficult task of

encouraging farmers to see that forestry can be one of the jobs and that woodlands can be a crop. It is not an easy change to make and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will help us.

I wish to make one point to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton. We made it clear that we intend to fight for the interests of British sheep farmers, and those battles will continue to ensure that the sheepmeat regime will meet their needs.

We should forget the argument about the wood pigeon put forward by the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) because it will not go down well with his farming constituents.

Mr. Martlew: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I shall not give way. There are many farmers in the hon. Gentleman's constituency who shop in Carlisle, but they will not have much with which to shop if he pursues his wood pigeon policy.

The hon. Gentleman also suggested that, if we allowed sugar to come in from Jamaica, we would have cheap food. It is one of the great triumphs of the CAP that we pay to those who produce sugar in Jamaica a similar sum to that which we pay to those producing sugar in this country. That is one of the ways in which we support the poor economies of many West Indian countries. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that we should cut the price that we pay for sugar to some of the poorest people in the world, that is not the way in which I want to reduce the cost of food in this country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) rightly said that co-responsibility levies are not the answer to the problem. They are, in the inimitable language used by successive Ministers of Agriculture, a load of old rubbish. We should much prefer not to have them as part of the stabiliser mechanism, but we have ensured that they are a much less important part than the price reduction section of that mechanism and that they are a considerably less important part than other European countries, particularly West Germany, wanted them to be.

We have also ensured that co-responsibility levies do not contain the particular trick sought by some other countries, which would have meant that the major part of the cost of the co-responsibility would fall on the backs of British and French farmers and very little upon the backs of German farmers. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucesterhire, West that, as in any negotiations, although we have not done all that we should have liked, we have done a great deal more in respect of co-responsibility than anyone would have thought possible before those negotiations.

I have taken the points made by the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) about the problems of smaller farmers and those on difficult terrain. I hope that she will help us to convince Labour Members that the proposition in respect of set-aside will help smaller farmers as well as larger farmers. I hope that she will also help us with our propositions for diversification. She has already raised with me the problems of crofters. I am not ignoring those and, as she knows, I have put those matters to my colleagues at the Scottish Office. Our ideas for diversification are designed to make it possible, not just for those with larger amounts of land, but for those with smaller incomes, to find alternatives. We need to find those answers together. The answers do not lie in further production. Over-production is the result of technical advance, not of any particular system of farming support. Every country must consider and deal with that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard) rightly emphasised that fairness is a crucial part of acceptability. That was why we fought so hard against the unfair policies proposed in the sheepmeat stabiliser regime. That is why we are pleased to have got out of it that headage limit which would have distorted it. I hope that she will agree that we must be fair in that regime, as in others. It would have been odd if we had asked for stabilisers for all the other regimes but not insisted on one in the sheepmeat regime. My hon. Friend is right to press the fact that the pig industry, of all industries, depends greatly on the rate of the green pound. That is why we are committed to the phasing out by 1992 of the differences that make for that unfairness.

Altogether, the proposals from Brussels mean that, for the first time, we have a clear budgetary ceiling on spending on the CAP.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Taxis and Drivers' Safety

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

10 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): When I was first elected, an article described me as a member of the new breed of Conservative taxi driver Members of Parliament. I know that this description was meant as a compliment, and that is what I took it to be. Whether they cut me up in traffic, or ignore me when I hail them, taxis and taxi drivers are an essential part of the British way of life. I am sure that most people at some point have welcomed the assistance of a taxi.

My hon. Friend the Minister felt at first hand the warmth of taxi drivers in Essex when he addressed the annual conference of their association in Basildon last year. He had the task of explaining the details of Government proposals for taxi sharing and so on. My lasting memory of that conference will always be the point at which one person accused my hon. Friend of purchasing his suit from Savile Row, to which he replied that it had been purchased at Marks and Spencer. After that my hon. Friend could do no wrong, and I trust he felt that his visit was more than worth while.

My first point is about taxis and the accommodation that they are able to offer handicapped people. At the moment about 10 per cent. of councils—32 out of 360—grant special licences to taxi owners for vehicles to carry handicapped passengers. Although a licence is not strictly necessary to convert a taxi, there is little or no incentive to make it worth while. The purpose of the specially adapted vehicles is to provide a much needed service for handicapped peope who find it too difficult to use transport facilities.

Following deregulation of the bus services, some rural areas are becoming increasingly isolated, as the routes to and from them are uneconomical to run. This particularly hits handicapped people. I hope that my proposals will fill that gap. In Basildon we have one licensed taxi which is used to transport handicapped people. It has been so successful that two more are to be granted licences in the coming year. Over 500 wheelchair passengers were carried last year, and the response that has been reported by the driver is so great, and the service is so appreciated by disabled people, that he has every confidence that it would be successful if it were enjoyed throughout the country. The scheme works and I should like to see it extended to as many councils as possible.

Will my hon. Friend examine the possibility of setting up a pilot scheme in just one or two councils, under which new hackney licences are not issued except to taxis contracted specifically to handle disabled passengers without their having to leave their wheelchairs? Business would not suffer, as the taxis would be able to take able-bodied passengers as well.

Taxi drivers operating the scheme for the disabled complain that at present they have to book ahead for disabled people. It would be much simpler if more taxis were capable of providing the services on an ad hoc basis. I should add — I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will appreciate this — that the scheme I am suggesting would not cost the Government a penny.

It is a case for much sadness and concern about the state of society today when we have to consider the increasing incidence of violence towards property, animals and, most serious of all, people. It seems that life nowadays has somehow become cheap. The incidence of violence is reaching such proportions that although such events are reported daily in our newspapers they gain little or no attention. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary recently delivered an excellent Peel Memorial Lecture speech in which he made some telling points about the increase in violence and to which he posed some possible solutions. Any measures would be taken in the hope of finding a long-term solution to the problems of violence. Of course, my hon. Friend the Minister has to deal with the circumstances with which we have to cope now.

In July last year I asked my hon. Friend the Minister about his policy for protecting taxi and private hire drivers from attacks by passengers. I asked him what measures were planned to increase their safety. My hon. Friend said that he had no reason to believe that it was a serious problem, but that if I had any evidence to the contrary I should give him that information. I have to tell him that I am able to produce evidence that will show clearly that there is a serious problem, and I hope that my hon. Friend will wish to tackle it.

Last year there were 116 attacks on taxi drivers and three taxi drivers were murdered. I wish to tell my hon. Friend the Minister about some of those attacks. In July 1986 there was a report in the *Evening Standard* with the headline,

"Minicab driver's gunman ordeal."

The article went on:

"Police were questioning a man today after a minicab driver was forced to drive through London at gun-point. The incident happened just after midnight when the taxi went to an address in Clapham to pick up a passenger who then pulled out a gun. The shabbily-dressed attacker with a scar on his face held the gun at the driver's stomach and forced him to drive to Whitehall."

In June 1986 there was a report in the *Daily Telegraph* about a taxi driver whose throat was cut. It said:

"A taxi driver had his throat cut from ear to ear by a six foot bearded and bespectacled customer yesterday. Mr. James Sinnot, 40, of Roland Avenue, Runcorn, Cheshire, drove half a mile to hospital with blood gushing from a wound six inches long and three-quarters of an inch deep".

The attacker robbed him of just a few pounds and 50 police were involved in the chase after that assailant.

Last year there was a report in the *Daily Express* of a taxi driver being attacked by a mob. It said that taxi drivers were boycotting one of Britain's worst council estates after a cabbie was attacked by a mob of 25 young people.

"The gang on the Stonebridge estate, Harlesden, North London—armed with wooden staves, a crowbar . . . tried to overturn Paul Samuel's cab after failing to lever open the locked doors".

It went on to say that the police were extremely worried about that area, where there were constant outbreaks of violence by up to 200 young people.

We read about a "murder charge" in *The Times* in August last year, which stated :

"A youth aged 16 was charged last night with the murder of a minicab driver. Mr. Dudley Young, aged 47, a father of four, was stabbed seven times in the chest and stomach, allegedly during an argument over a fare in south London . . . The body of Mr. Young . . . was found after his car had hit a wall."

We then learnt the circumstances of the teenager who was charged.

Finally, only this year we have read about a

"Black cab in foiled bank raid".

The article stated:

"An armed man hired a taxi to act as an unwitting accomplice in a foiled bank raid yesterday.

The well-spoken man hired a black taxi in Harley Street, central London, and asked to be driven to the Coutts bank branch at Cavendish Square, Marylebone.

There he told the unnamed driver to wait while he 'popped into the bank to pick something up', police said.

The man walked into the bank, pulled on a black balaclava and produced a gun . . . He then asked the driver to take him to Baker Street . . . 'The cab driver didn't have a clue that anything was afoot', police said."

The attacks that I have outlined tonight were extremely serious, and there is reason to believe that such incidents are increasing. Forty-three of the attacks were physical assaults by one or more assailants, 39 attacks involved knives, 12 attacks involved the use of guns, and all the other attacks involved various weapons, for instance, belts, bottles and metal weapons.

Some taxi drivers have resorted to carrying weapons for self-defence. Many admit to carrying weapons. I know that there has been widespread reporting in the press about the use of stun guns. Of course, the taxi drivers understand that the use of such retaliatory weapons is illegal.

My hon. Friend should recognise that, although I have outlined several incidents tonight, we believe that apparently only one in ten incidents of assault are reported because many people cannot be bothered to go through the process of reporting them to the police.

The alarm system that I should like my hon. Friend to consider is the most favoured. It is a floor stud-operated alarm which emits a high-pitched noise and operates the hazard warning lights on any taxi. I understand that strobe or flashing lights would not be permitted, and that a noise alarm would not necessarily be permitted. At the moment, the construction and use regulations of the Transport Act 1985—regulation 37(4)—mean that such alarms can be carried only on vehicles such as buses. I am asking the Government to include taxis as an exempted vehicle under the regulations. What I am suggesting is a modest measure, and I advise my hon. Friend once again that it would not cost the Government any money.

The other day a taxi driver said to me that the violence on the streets was coming into the cabs. That is a shocking indictment of society today. The system that I am suggesting is universal and would be usable by both black taxis and minicabs.

Some drivers feel that even to mention the fitting of alarms is dangerous, as some people will see that taxi drivers are capable of being attacked. They believe that the fact that people would recognise that taxi drivers are carrying money might make them more liable to commit an assault.

I know that when my hon. Friend the Minister addressed the Essex Taxi Association's annual general meeting last year he listened sympathetically to the points that were made by those who attended the meeting. Following the question that I put to him last year, I hope he will agree tonight that I have produced the evidence that, sadly, the incidents of assault are increasing. Taxi drivers, who are recognised by the British people as carrying out a very useful function, deserve our support and our protection. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will support me tonight and give them that protection.

10.15 pm

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): In his typically ebullient way, my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) has raised an important matter which affects the taxi trade. I am very much aware of his keen interest in that trade from his attendance at the meeting in his constituency to which he referred.

My hon. Friend has raised two questions. The first relates to the use of taxis to carry people who are dependent on a wheelchair. As he said, a good deal of progress has been made in London since the assistant commissioner who is responsible for the public carriage office decided in 1985 that any new type of taxi approved for use in London would have to be capable of carrying a wheelchair. I can tell my hon. Friend that the decision was taken partly at least at the suggestion of my Department. The new Metrocab does, as he says, comply with that requirement, and I am happy to say that there are already more than 250 of them operating on the streets of London. I understand that new Metrocabs are coming into service at the rate of about 20 a week. The other manufacturers of London taxis — London Taxis International—are already producing the FX4W which is capable of carrying a wheelchair and I know that this is widely welcomed by people who need to use wheelchairs.

My hon. Friend urges me to go further and take some initiative elsewhere in the country. Here I am afraid I must be rather more cautious. The conditions to be prescribed for taxis outside London are a matter for the district councils which license them, unlike the system which operates in London, and I have, of course, noted the examples which he has quoted of authorities which have made the purchase of a wheelchair-carrying vehicle the condition of issue of new hackney licences. I am by no means sure, however, that that is the right way to proceed in all cases. My hon. Friend has pointed out that such a move would involve no cost to the Government. No doubt he sees that as an attraction. That may be true, but it would certainly involve a cost for the purchaser of a new taxi—perhaps someone who has only just been able to get together the money to set up in business for the first time on his own.

The House should consider whether it is right that in all areas of the country—in small towns and villages, as well as in major cities — any person coming into the trade for the first time should be compelled to buy a relatively expensive London-style taxi equipped to take a wheelchair. They are the only kind of vehicles that are likely to be able to meet that requirement. I would remind my hon. Friend that it is only in a minority of areas that the standard London cab is a prescribed requirement for taxi operation. I believe that we would have to think very carefully before making it a requirement for the country as a whole, especially if the new rule were to be imposed — as it must be — in such a way as to discriminate against new entrants to the trade.

However, in response to the specific suggestions from my hon. Friend that, as an experiment, councils should reserve a couple of licences for taxis with wheelchair facilities, I have to say that I find it an interesting and thoughtful suggestion, but it must be one which local authorities are persuaded to introduce, for they have the power of licensing. It may well be that, either through his connections with the taxi trade or through disabled groups, it will be possible to draw his suggestions to the

[Mr. David Mitchell]

attention of local authorities who license taxis and hire cars in their areas to the point at which they are prepared to undertake the experiment that my hon. Friend has suggested. Perhaps this is an interesting way forward, and I urge my hon. Friend to pursue it through those two channels.

My hon. Friend has referred to the consequences of deregulation of buses in rural areas. I would by no means accept that deregulation has diminished the supply of bus services to rural areas. In many areas the opposite may be true. My hon. Friend may be surprised to know that in the shire counties 17 per cent. more mileage is being operated by buses since deregulation than before. In any case, if the local authority considers that further buses are required, it has the power to provide those services that it regards as socially necessary. As local authorities have saved just on £40 million of taxpayers' and ratepayers' money, there must be very few places in which they cannot afford to provide further bus services if they are needed.

As this is a debate about taxis, I would like to stress that the 1985 Act did a great deal to open up new ways in which the taxi trade could improve its business by offering new services to the public. I hope that the trade will be more active in future in taking up opportunities, such as taxi sharing, and its new ability to run regular scheduled services, just like a bus, over set routes. I use the opportunity of the debate to express the hope that local authorities will do more to encourage such activities by arranging their tenders for subsidised services by bus or taxi-bus in such a way that they are attractive to the taxi trade. I hope that they will take the opportunity to promote taxi sharing.

One of the things that has most disappointed me since deregulation is the extent to which the taxi trade has not taken up the opportunities offered by the taxi-bus, especially in the area of tendered services and of some of the commercial services. Early-morning and late-night services that do not warrant the running of a full-size bus are ideal for a taxi-bus operation. I blame not only the taxi trade for lacking initiative in taking up opportunities, because very often local authorities have not made it clear, easy and attractive for taxi operators to bid for those contracts.

The other matter raised by my hon. Friend was crime. All hon. Members are concerned about that. The latest figures show that, even though there has been a welcome drop in the level of crime in general, crimes of violence against the person continue to increase. We all know that among the most frequent victims of such crimes are servants of the public who are attacked by vicious, often drunken, hooligans while actually providing the service on which the public relies.

It is fair to say that the Department of Transport has been at the forefront of moves to develop a co-ordinated response to these problems across the whole field. It was one of our initiatives which led to the establishment of a joint committee chaired by the Health and Safety Executive and bringing together representatives of the CBI, the TUC and the Home Office. Its purpose, and that of other Government Departments concerned, is to pool the ideas and experiences of all those who have been involved with problems of violence in different types of work place.

My own Department established a working group on violence to road passenger transport staff which published a report in 1986. The working party has now been converted into the Standing Committee to which my hon. Friend has referred. Its objective is to keep up the pressure on this issue and to ensure that everything possible is done to fight the kind of threat with which bus crews are all too often faced. In the light of what my hon. Friend has said, I should like to take the opportunity offered by the debate to issue an invitation to the taxi trade to be represented on that committee. In view of my hon. Friend's speech and my concern in the light of what he said, I shall tomorrow morning instruct officials to get in touch with the trade to make arrangements for such representation.

My hon. Friend has raised the issue of the green light taxi system which has been developed with the assistance of the East Anglia Federation of Taxi Associations. The problem is that the system incorporates a flashing green light and an audible distress call which, I understand, is designed, when switched on, to be so strong as to make any occupant want to leave the cab immediately.

Mr. Amess *indicated assent.*

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend agrees. I understand that it is so effective that there must be real grounds for concern about what the effect might be if, for example, the system were switched on by accident when there was an elderly passenger in the cab. We must think about that.

There are also, I gather, additional sound systems and revolving lights which the driver can fit if he wants. As against all this, the Road Vehicle Lighting Regulations 1984 require lamps on vehicles to show a steady light at all times. There are exemptions in the case of the blue, amber and green beacons which certain emergency vehicles—such as fire engines, ambulances, police cars, doctors' cars and road maintenance vehicles — are authorised to use in an emergency. But the view has always been taken that it is essential to exercise very tight control over the circumstances in which such exemptions can be authorised, otherwise the value of the exemption will be undermined, and vital emergency services will not get the priority that we all recognise that they need.

The question we must ask ourselves is whether the arguments put forward by my hon. Friend are strong enough to justify a further exemption for taxis. Let us remember that we are talking about a completely new system, untried and untested, which has, so far at least, been developed in a small way. The developer has not, as yet, contacted my Department for discussion or submitted his system for testing. I suggest that he does just that. We can then take it from there. I must warn my hon. Friend that we shall take some convincing that the degree of protection which this particular system provides for the taxi driver is really appropriate to justify a further exemption from the regulations.

More constructive is the fact that there are other kinds of systems with which a taxi could be equipped without contravening any regulations. For example, there would be nothing to prevent a taxi from being equipped with a steady light, which could be switched on in an emergency, together with a sign showing a suitable message such as "Help" or "Emergency". Perhaps my hon. Friend would like to explore this kind of solution with his constituents.

We will look sympathetically at any proposals for an alarm system which are put before us. We would very

much welcome representation of the taxi trade on the Standing Committee, to which I have already issued an invitation this evening and which is already advising us on the kind of action that can be taken to counter violence against bus staff. It would be helpful to extend its activities to cover criminal violence against taxi drivers and others in the taxi trade.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 16 February 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Leavers (Illiteracy)

1. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the illiteracy rate among school leavers.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): Evidence collected by my Department's assessment of performance unit suggests that very few 15-year-olds are unable to read or write a single word, but that some have difficulty with fairly simple reading and writing tasks. The national curriculum will help to raise standards of literacy at all levels, through the introduction of attainment targets in English. The national assessment arrangements will in due course provide information on the language capabilities of 16-year-olds.

Mr. Butler: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply and for the improvement that we expect through the use of assessment and the national curriculum. However, what is my hon. Friend's response to the many personnel managers who are dissatisfied with the current level of literacy among school leavers?

Mrs. Rumbold: We accept that there are still some inadequacies in literacy attainment, which is one of the very good reasons why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has introduced a national curriculum to tackle immediately the problem confronting some employers.

Mr. Boyes: Should we not have more teachers with special responsibilities for dealing with such children? That would need cash. It is clear from the written answer given by the Secretary of State on 8 February—it appears in columns *51-52* of *Hansard*—that he plans cuts in cash for special and secondary schools to the end of the decade and that there will be only about 1 per cent. growth in the sums available for primary schools. Given that the Secretary of State will not put the necessary money into the service, it is no wonder that some of our children leave school illiterate.

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Gentleman is clearly not aware that the grant given to the adult and literacy skills unit has been increased from £0·5 million in 1980-81 to more than £2 million in the current financial year. That is a substantial increase, which will contribute to solving literacy problems.

Mr. Pawsey: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a direct relationship between indiscipline in schools and illiteracy? What action might she be able to take to improve discipline in our schools, particularly in the light of the recent Professional Association of Teachers survey showing that violence and indiscipline have been growing substantially?

Mrs. Rumbold: Clearly, if we are to tackle the literacy problem in our schools in the long term, we must work towards breaking the cycle affecting a proportion of the weaker pupils with literacy difficulties. It is, indeed, an inadequate foundation, which catches some of the children least able to withstand indiscipline in school. Therefore, the PAT report was of great importance. We must establish discipline in the classroom so that weaker children can learn and therefore benefit from the introduction of the national curriculum.

Education Reform

2. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to publish his proposed amendments to the Education Reform Bill regarding charges for school activities.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I shall be announcing the outcome of our consultations later this week, and would hope to table new clauses next week.

Mr. Fearn: Is the Secretary of State aware that extra charges would fall particularly heavily on one-parent families, especially charges for field courses and arts and music courses? In his reply, will he dwell on the city technology colleges, which will find it extremely difficult to give their pupils what they need?

Mr. Baker: The Government will not be imposing charges but will allow schools to charge for extras if they wish. *[Interruption.]* This problem was brought to our attention by the local education authorities, which asked us to find a way through and particularly to protect them in their present practices. Before Opposition Members laugh too much, I remind them that many authorities controlled by the Labour party and the alliance charge for extras at the moment.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that schools have always charged for certain activities, such as home economics, field trips and materials for woodwork and handicraft, as well as for skiing trips and so on? Is it not now necessary to make that practice legal, and is that not what Labour, Liberal and Conservative authorities want?

Mr. Baker: That is exactly the position, and I believe that my proposals, which will be published later this week —we have already discussed them with local authority associations—will be widely welcomed. I can confirm that, as my hon. Friend said, since the 1944 Act it has been the practice for authorities to charge for certain extra activities.

Mr. Fatchett: When the Minister of State said in the Standing Committee on the Education Reform Bill on 28 January that opt-out schools would be able to use parental contributions to employ additional teachers, was that a clear statement of Government policy? If so, does the Secretary of State realise that those contributions will

become less and less voluntary and that opt-out schools will become fee-paying schools, which will be even more divisive than the Government's current proposals?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman is talking rubbish. We have made it clear in Committee, as the hon. Gentleman knows, that grant-maintained schools will not be allowed to charge fees. They can certainly attract voluntary contributions, as can, and do, schools in the state-maintained sector. I should emphasise that our objectives in clarifying this policy are to preserve the principle of free education, to clarify the law and to safeguard current valuable provision.

Mr. Chapman: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the need for an early statement — which I would welcome — arose because it was hoped that the Government would make it clear that parents on income support and family credit will be exempt from such voluntary charges, particularly for field trips and so on?

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend will see, when I announce the changes later this week, that we shall be covering that matter specifically. Should schools wish to continue to make charges for field trips, there must be remission arrangements for children whose parents are on family support.

Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals

3. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the Committee of Vice Chancellors and of Principals; and what subjects he discussed.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Robert Jackson): My right hon. Friend addressed the Committee on 30 October on matters concerned with the Government's higher education policy.

Mr. Darling: Did the Minister discuss the 20 per cent. reduction in funding for Scottish universities over the past four years, compared with a reduction of only 13 per cent. for England? Did he discuss the implications of that on the ability of universities to contract to provide courses under the new system of funding? More important, did he discuss the future viability of the four-year honours degree in Scotland, which is the envy of the academic world? What will he do about this attack on Scottish education?

Mr. Jackson: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the University Grants Committee is a national organisation and it pursues a policy at arm's length from the Government. The distribution of funds between the different institutions in the United Kingdom is a matter to be determined by the University Grants Committee. Last year we increased expenditure on universities at the central level by 10 per cent., and this year it will increase by 8·2 per cent.

Mr. Rhodes James: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the proposed amendments by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State relating to higher education. Does this not show the value of consultation? Is it not nice to know that occasionally sanity can prevail?

Mr. Jackson: Sanity has always prevailed. The Government listen to what is said during debates in the Standing Committee and outside, and they respond to that. We have responded with amendments to other parts of the Bill, and we are so responding in respect of the clauses that will be debated this afternoon.

Mr. Ashdown: The amendments — details of which have not yet been announced—may deal with academic freedom. The Government claim that they are not increasing their powers, but, under the present proposals, are they not abolishing a 70-year-old convention not to intervene and replacing it with specific powers to intervene on a day-by-day basis? How can the Minister square that with the claim that the Education Reform Bill is about freedom? Is it not about the iron fist of central control? Is it not about the imposition of control on universities, which is a constitutional violation?

Mr. Jackson: This is an important matter. The hon. Gentleman is offering us a travesty of the true position, which is that, with regard to the balance of power between central Government and the institutions, the proposals contained in the Education Reform Bill make no difference in substance between what is already established in the case of the UGC and what is proposed for the Universities Funding Council. There is no impact, either positive or negative, on that balance; it merely sustains the old arrangements on a new footing.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Has my hon. Friend had an opportunity to discuss in Committee the subject of the money raised by the universities? Will he make it abundantly clear that universities such as the University of Lancaster, which has raised up to £3 million of its own funding, will not find my hon. Friend or any of his successors being able to dictate what they do with such money? Will that be clearly expressed in the Bill?

Mr. Jackson: The University of Lancaster and all universities are to be congratulated on their successful efforts to diversify funding. It has never been the Government's intention that the universities should be held to account for the money that they have raised under their own steam. My right hon. Friend will make a statement this afternoon in which he will say that the Government intend to make that clear beyond doubt in the legislation.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Does the Minister accept that there is considerable concern in all Scottish universities that have four-year degrees, in places such as Keele in England and in other colleges of higher education that have four-year degrees, that they will lose as a result of the new method of bidding for funding? Will he give a categorical assurance that the Government do not intend any of those four-year degree courses to lose out?

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the Government have no views or policy on the academic policy of institutions. The four-year degree in Scotland is to be decided by the Scottish universities and the UGC. Expenditure on students in Scotland is one third higher than the level in England and Wales. That is the extent to which we recognise the importance and value of the four-year degree in Scotland.

Mr. Hill: Does my hon. Friend agree that the University of Southampton has done well in co-operating with industry on research and development? At the moment all seems calm, but people who have written to me from the university—several times—have expressed three fears. They are concerned, first, about the Secretary

of State's ability to appoint the Universities Funding Council, secondly, about the interest charges on spending, and thirdly—we must kill this fear—that they will lose some of their independence.

Mr. Jackson: We do not believe that the proposals in the Bill compromise the independence of universities or polytechnics; rather, they enhance the independence of the polytechnics. For universities, the position is neutral as between the existing arrangements and the proposed ones. Appointments to the Universities Funding Council will be made by the Secretary of State in exactly the same way as he appoints members of the UGC now.

As regards possible interest charges and repayments, the basic principle underlying the Government's thinking is that money is provided by the Universities Funding Council to the institutions to do certain things. If it becomes apparent that the resources have been misallocated, the issue of what should be done about that will arise, and the Government are thinking seriously about it.

Primary Schools (Pupil Costs)

6. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent per pupil in primary schools *(a)* in England as a whole and *(b)* in Staffordshire in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what were the comparable figures in 1978-79, at constant prices.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Bob Dunn): Local education authorities in England spent an average of £690 per primary pupil in 1978-79 and £815 per primary pupil in 1985-86. The comparable figures for Staffordshire are £695 and £815.

Mr. Knox: Does my hon. Friend agree that those figures show an impressive increase in expenditure per pupil in primary schools in Staffordshire and the whole of England since the Government came to office? How can the Labour party justify claims of cuts in education under this Government, either in Staffordshire or in the rest of the country?

Mr. Dunn: My hon. Friend is right. Between 1978-79 and 1985-86 expenditure per pupil rose nationally by 19 per cent. and is currently at its best ever level. Opposition Members never acknowledge that improvement.

Mr. Fisher: Will the Under-Secretary acknowledge that it is a Labour authority that has provided those good educational standards despite restraints on spending by central Government?

Mr. Dunn: I acknowledge that it is a Labour authority — I wish it were not. I remind the House that Government plans for local authorities current expenditure in 1988-89 represent an increase in cash of nearly 8 per cent. over the plans for the current year. I am extremely proud of that.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Is my hon. Friend aware that that Labour-controlled authority is reorganising primary education in Burntwood in my constituency? Before my hon. Friend approves any of those proposals, will he ensure that he is satisfied that the complaints of the parents that the accommodation proposed by Staffordshire county council is inadequate will be taken into account?

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has a legal duty to examine the proposals for closure and the arguments for and against. I am grateful for the fact that in the past my hon. Friend has brought deputations to see me. Their views, as well as those of the authority, will be carefully taken into account before my right hon. Friend makes a decision.

Mrs. Clwyd: Why do the Minister and his colleagues continue to deceive us? Is it not a fact that since 1979 central Government spending has been cut by 20 per cent. in real terms, and that in that time it is the much maligned local authorities that have increased their spending by 8 per cent.? It is those authorities, not the Secretary of State and the Government, that have protected our schools.

Mr. Dunn: That question was much laboured, if I might use that word. The Government's strong record is supported, not only in cash terms, but by other objective standards. For example, the overall pupil-teacher ratio on January 1987 was 17·3:1 compared to 18·9:1 in January 1979. Average class sizes have been improving in primary and secondary schools and there are now far fewer classes with more than 30 pupils.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend tell the House how the figures for Staffordshire and England as a whole compare with those for ILEA? Would my hon. Friend care to comment on the effectiveness of the last figure?

Mr. Dunn: I do not have all day to do that, but my hon. Friend is right to point out the massive difference between expenditure levels in ILEA and even the more extreme Labour authorities out in the country. The reasons for abolition are quite clear.

First Division Association

7. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to meet representatives of the First Division Association branch of his Department.

Mrs. Rumbold: No, Sir.

Ms. Armstrong: I am pleased that that answer suggests that the Government have got over their slight problem with First Division Association on the stand at the Ideal Home exhibition. Is the Minister aware that parents in my constituency will not benefit from any of that wonderful information — I understand that it will cost at least £30,000—because they will not be able to afford to go to the Ideal Home exhibition? They would much rather see that sort of expense put into the schools to ensure that their children have books. If the Minister is interested, I could give her many more effective and cheaper ways to communicate with parents.

Mrs. Rumbold: We hope that parents who have access to the Ideal Home exhibition will benefit from the information that will be disseminated there. I should make it perfectly clear that that information about the rights of parent governors is to do with the Education (No. 2) Act 1986. Parents in the hon. Lady's constituency will also receive information and leaflets, which will be distributed to all parents at all the schools.

Mr. Spearing: Is the Minister aware that concern has been expressed among the members of the FDA about the so-called efficiency payments that are now paid in the

Department to high education officials? Can she tell the House who decides to whom those payments will be made, and how does she distinguish them from straight political patronage?

Mrs. Rumbold: There is no question of political patronage. These matters are properly decided within the association and its general negotiating circumstances. It does not come anywhere near Ministers.

Secondary Education (Cumbria)

8. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has received proposals for the reorganisation of secondary education in the county of Cumbria.

Mr. Dunn: No, Sir.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the Minister aware that the future of secondary education, particularly Catholic secondary education, in my constituency is now being prejudiced directly as a result of the cuts that the Government are imposing on Cumbria county council's education budget? Does the Minister understand that people are getting angry? Is it not true that the Government are pressing the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to make attacks on the clergy as part of a campaign to undermine the truly independent position of the Church in Britain?

Mr. Dunn: I thought that the question was about secondary education in Cumbria. I remind the hon. Gentleman that Cumbria received a prescribed capital allocation for schools of £4·651 million in 1988-89. That was a generous allocation and represented 83·3 per cent. of the county councils plans, compared with the national average of 47·2 per cent. That is rough treatment indeed.

Postgraduate Training and Research

9. **Mr. Maxton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what study he has made of the trends in the number of British students of high ability wishing to do postgraduate training and research; and in what subjects he sees cause for concern because of poor career prospects.

Mr. Jackson: Institutions are responsible for the provision of and recruitment to postgraduate courses. Overall, however, the recruitment of British students in 1986 compared with 1980 was 6·6 per cent. higher on full-time courses and almost 28 per cent. higher on part-time courses.

Mr. Maxton: Is the Minister aware that despite his answer, there are many young, outstanding scientists in Britain who are deterred from undertaking postgraduate research or who go abroad to do that research because of the poor career prospects in Britain? Does he agree with Sir David Philips, chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils, that we are in great danger of falling behind our foreign competitors in terms of industrial development because of the Government's failure properly to invest in civil research? Will the Government ever understand the close connection between Government-backed investment and industrial development?

Mr. Jackson: I have to point out to the hon. Gentleman that the numbers of postgraduates in science have increased by one third since 1979. As for his observations about Government expenditure on civil research and development, an examination of the proportion of the national product invested in civil research and development by Governments makes it clear that we spend more than the United States and Japan.

Mr. Roger King: Will my hon. Friend confirm that as our economy picks up and our manufacturing industry expands throughout Britain the opportunities for students to move into engineering and manufacturing disciplines have never been better?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The recruitment of graduates and postgraduates into a wide range of occupations is flourishing. That is confirmed by all the statistics relating to graduate and postgraduate recruitment.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the Minister confirm that the proportion of well-qualified students with first-class honours and good second-class honours who are failing to get research funds has steadily increased during the past few years?

Mr. Jackson: I shall have to look into the figures that the hon. Gentleman quoted, and I shall certainly come back to him on that point. The resources made available by central Government for science have risen by 15 per cent. in real terms since 1979 and by 1·5 per cent. in the past year.

Education Reform

10. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on the cost implications of the Education Reform Bill.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Many of the responses we have received have commented on the resource aspects. All representations, except those from individuals, are deposited in the Library.

Mr. Greenway: I recognise that spending per pupil has increased considerably under the Government and that we have substantial resources for the implementation of the GCSE, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the success of the Government education initiatives will depend on adequate resources being made available for the national curriculum and for the delegation of school budgets? Will he assure the House and parents that those popular policies will be properly financed?

Mr. Baker: Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. The Government are providing £150 million over the next three years specifically to help to implement the national curriculum proposed in the Education Reform Bill, which is now being considered in Committee, and to introduce CTCs. Substantial resources are also available for education support grants. It is important that such reforms should be financed properly. I am sure my hon. Friend will appreciate that the national curriculum will be phased in over a number of years.

Mr. Madden: What particular aspects of the Education Reform Bill does the Secretary of State think will benefit schools in places such as inner-city Bradford?

Mr. Baker: Specifically, the national curriculum. There is no doubt about that. The emphasis on basic skills in the

national curriculum, the delegation of budgets to school heads, and the greater responsibility for head teachers and governors are all policies that are not only popular, but are to be supported by all the hon. Gentleman's Front-Bench colleagues upstairs.

Mr. Baldry: Is not the key part of the Education Reform Bill its proposals for local financial management, and have not these proposals been welcomed by every major teachers union? Will they not ensure that money is spent more cost-effectively and responsibly, according to the wishes of head teachers, parents and governors?

Mr. Baker: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. In those schools which already have delegated budgets the general pattern has been that money has been spent more effectively. Money has been saved and spent on the sharp end of teaching on extra facilities of one sort or another. These proposals are fundamental and important and will be introduced in the course of the next three or four years. They will certainly lead to greater efficiency and more cost-effectiveness.

Mr. Ron Brown: Is it not a disgrace that Edinburgh university—as revealed by the former admissions officer, Mrs. Ann McGuckin — discriminates against Scottish working-class youngsters in favour of deadbeats from English public schools with inferior qualifications? Is that not something that the Minister should consider? We speak about Victorian values, but is that not unacceptable to the majority of Scottish people?

Mr. Baker: I know of no discrimination against Scottish applicants going to Scottish universities. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome applications from English children. I am sure that many English children will benefit enormously from a Scottish education.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a national curriculum will lead to curriculum-led staffing and the removal of the previous system whereby teachers were produced for non-existent subjects, and that that will itself lead to the saving of cash and the better deployment of teachers?

Mr. Baker: Certainly there will be a need to retrain some teachers. A concentration of subjects is implicit within the national curriculum and there will be some need to redeploy and retrain teachers in the foundation subjects. I agree that that will lead to the better redeployment of many teachers in our schools.

Mr. Fatchett: Is it not the case that over the next three years, according to DES figures, only £67 million will be spent as a direct result of the Education Reform Bill, and that money will be spent on developing assessment procedures and the work of the Schools Council in terms of the national curriculum? How much money will be spent in the classroom and on each individual child? Or will the Government's reforms simply be paid for by local authorities so that, yet again, the Government will not foot the bill for our children's education?

Mr. Baker: No. Schemes of assessment and testing, and their moderation, will be paid for from Government funds. We are providing £9 million to help polytechnics to become independent, and another substantial sum for the CTCs, which are part of the Education Reform Bill.

Mr. Salmond: Do we take it from the Secretary of State's apparent denial that there is bias against Scottish-qualified applicants to Edinburgh university that he has read the allegations referred to by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown)?

Mr. Baker: I have seen the allegations, but there is little in them. The Government do not influence the admission procedures of various universities. They are a matter for the universities. It does little good to besmirch the reputation of such a great university as Edinburgh.

Children (Assessment Tests)

11. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether it is the Government's intention to publish the results of assessment tests for children aged seven years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baker: The task group on assessment and testing has recommended that schools should not be required to publish aggregated national assessment results for seven-year-old pupils, but should be allowed to do so if they wish. I shall be considering this in the consultations that will be taking place on the task group's report.

Mrs. Mahon: I am glad that the Minister is considering further the testing of seven-year-olds, but could he also consider further the testing of 11 and 14-year-olds? Does he not realise how divisive this is, and that for seven-year-olds particularly it will lead to cramming and competition in schools, quite unnecessarily?

Mr. Baker: I shall send the hon. Lady a copy of the report, because it simply does not bear out what she says about assessment and testing at the ages between 11 and 14 being divisive. It recommends a system of assessment and testing at ages seven, 11, 14 and 16 and that at 11, 14 and 16 the results should be published so that parents and the whole of the local community may know how the schools are doing. I do not believe that that is divisive. I think that it will improve standards.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the protests against assessment and testing are rather bogus, as teachers have been doing this at every age ever since teaching started, and that it is vitally necessary if we are to have a correct diagnosis of children's problems?

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend, who I believe was a teacher, is absolutely right. There is a great deal of testing and assessment going on in schools, because one has to assess and test the ability of children at certain ages to know what should be their next course of studies. This has been well established and practised. We intend in the future to regularise it and make it a much more open process.

Mr. Flannery: Does the Minister not realise that the mentality of "Friday morning is test morning" has long since disappeared, because it was useless, and that in our primary schools, especially with young children, a continuous assessment programme goes on all the time? The children are thoroughly assessed, and this is a crude intrusion coming from the most backward of the Right wing of the Tory Government.

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman could not have been in a school recently. If he had, he would know that already about 75 per cent. of primary schoolchildren are tested in

English. There are five or six well-established tests. In mathematics, there are about nine established tests. The hon. Gentleman really ought to find out what is happening in the schools.

Dr. Hampson: Does my right hon. Friend understand that there is considerable anxiety in the schools as to how rigid this process is going to be? Can he say that there will be a distinction between the assessment that will be required in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and what I hope will be the broader approach to the rest of the national curriculum?

Mr. Baker: I cannot quite give that undertaking to my hon. Friend, because the whole purpose of the national curriculum is to establish attainment targets for the whole range of academic subjects, beyond English, mathematics and science—foreign languages, history, geography and technology. Technology is particularly important. One of the important changes that we are making is that in future every boy and girl will have to take science and technology up to the age of 16. That must be right.

Mr. Ashdown: The right hon. Gentleman has said that the public have a right to know how the schools are doing. I agree with him. In order to achieve that, his junior Minister promised in Committee that the Government would consider the proposal that when tests were published social and economic factors would be taken into account. Will he now give an undertaking that the Government, in putting forward their proposals for publishing tests, will require social and economic factors to be taken into account?

Mr. Baker: The task group recommended that the assessments and tests should be published as they appear, undoctored, but that at the same time there should be for each school a statement about its socio-economic background so that those who studied the results could take into account the social mix of the children. It did not recommend that the assessments and results should be doctored in some way. Various universities try to do that, but it does not work at all well.

Mr. Wells: Is my right hon. Friend aware that if the tests at age seven are diagnostic they will be widely welcomed by parents, particularly if he undertakes to provide the additional resources to make certain that the results of the diagnosis are applied to the children in their subsequent education, so that those with disabilities get more attention and those with great gifts get the right attention?

Mr. Baker: I would say yes to my hon. Friend. One of the purposes of assessments and tests is to diagnose how a child is doing, to determine whether a child of seven can decipher a page of writing. If a child of seven cannot decipher a page of writing, he will be in some trouble. By determining that, one can determine the next course of study. As I have already said, we are making substantial resources available in the education system to ensure that this can take place. The increase in expenditure this year is 8·2 per cent.

Mrs. Clwyd: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the view of Professor Black and other authorities is that publishing results of seven-year-olds' assessments is highly undesirable? Why does he refuse to support that view? Does he agree with the punitive approach recommended by his right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) that failures, even at the age of seven, should spend their summer holidays at school?

Mr. Baker: It is no purpose of the system of assessment and testing to stigmatise failure at an early age—none whatsoever. I can assure the hon. Lady of what I have said. We shall consider the recommendation very carefully. Professor Black said, "Do not publish, but schools can be allowed to publish." That might be a suitable way of dealing with it.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: Does my right hon. Friend recall that during the Second Reading of the Education Reform Bill, in response to an intervention by our hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson), he made it clear that schools would not be forced to publish the results of assessments of seven-year-olds? In the light of that, does my right hon. Friend think that the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) should read *Hansard* before putting questions on the Order Paper?

Mr. Baker: I hope that all hon. Members avidly read *Hansard* all the time. I think that it is an excellent thing to do. It is very clear that we find some favour in Professor Black's proposal. Perhaps I should emphasise that we have been talking about the publication of results, which does not involve the individual results of children. In no way will it be possible to find out how a particular child is doing. That information will be restricted to the teacher, the parents and the child.

Children (Special Education Needs)

12. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to increase the number of people training to teach children with special education needs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Our policy is to maintain the supply of specialist teachers of children with special education needs.

Mr. Fisher: Why does special education merit only one clause of three lines in the Education Reform Bill? Is that an indication of how seriously the Government take children with special education needs? If the Minister cares about special education, what additional resources and staff will he provide to address the important special education needs of children?

Mr. Dunn: If the hon. Member bothered to read the proceedings of the Committee, he would notice that the Committee has spent a great deal of time dealing with the problems of children with special education needs. The Government have accepted a number of changes that will improve the position of such children under the Education Reform Bill.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Will the Minister consult his colleagues in the Northern Ireland Office to ensure that there is adequate provision for children with special education needs, because our teachers are trained in England?

Mr. Dunn: I thank the hon. Member for that helpful point.

Education Reform

13. **Mr. Haselhurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from rural areas about open enrolment; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: A number of the responses to the Department's consultation document, "Admission of Pupils to Maintained Schools", and some of the letters received from groups and individuals, have raised issues relating to education in rural areas.

Mr. Haselhurst: Can my hon. Friend offer an assurance to parents living in a village which has a popular school that their child will be able to go to that school, even though it may attract pupils from other parts of the district?

Mrs. Rumbold: The criteria for admission to schools will remain very much as they are at present. That is to say, they will relate to where the children live, whether there are brothers and sisters in that school, and the distances to be travelled, so I think I can offer my hon. Friend the assurance he requires.

State Schools (Rural Areas)

14. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a further statement of his policy towards state schools in rural areas.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is the responsibility of local education authorities to provide a proper service to rural as well as to other areas. My right hon. Friend is currently supporting a number of projects, including some in Norfolk, designed to identify ways of enriching the curriculum of rural primary schools. Any proposal for the closure of a rural school which comes before my right hon. Friend is considered very carefully in the light of the criteria set out in the Department's circular 3/87, which makes it clear that size alone is not a criterion for closure.

Mr. Bellingham: I am grateful for that reply. Will my hon. Friend reiterate her support for small rural schools and, above all, for the crucial role that they play in conserving the fabric of many rural communities? Is she also aware that some rural schools would like to opt out under the Secretary of State's proposals and that it would be unfortunate if they were precluded from doing so by too high a limit being set?

Mrs. Rumbold: I thank my hon. Friend for those words. Of course, the Government are anxious to preserve those schools which are excellent, particularly those in small rural areas. We are well aware of the role that they play. However, we have to consider other criteria besides the fondness of parents for small schools, and these include education criteria.

Education Reform

17. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what effect the Education Reform Bill will have on units concerned with special education attached to county and voluntary schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: There is no specific provision in the Bill relating to such units.

Mr. Martlew: Does the Minister agree that, due to the opting-out possibility included in the Education Reform Bill, special units will suffer because education authorities will not take the risk of those schools opting out and will not put resources into those particular units?

Mr. Dunn: When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State comes to consider any applications for schools to become grant-maintained schools and to have grant-maintained status he will consider all the arguments for and against such opting out.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty The Queen.

Mr. Gill: In the light of the Brussels agreement, will my right hon. Friend undertake to seek the elimination of MCAs on pigs and poultry? In doing so, will she consider the enormous potential in that sector for converting surplus cereals into pigmeat and poultrymeat, of which the United Kingdom is a net importer?

The Prime Minister: I believe that British farmers will welcome the agreement that we reached in Brussels. With regard to the two matters raised by my hon. Friend, I am aware that pig farmers are in acute difficulty at present, although I understand that poultry farmers are not in quite such difficulty. I confirm that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be seeking at Brussels the elimination, or at any rate the reduction, of MCAs in order to help our pig farmers.

Mr. Hattersley: As there have been very substantial changes in the education policy on which the Government fought the general election, may we be told whether the basic principles still stand? Does the Prime Minister still insist, as she did at the last Tory party conference, that in education the wishes of parents must be paramount?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman is aware, in our last manifesto and in the legislation before the House, we are giving parents a greatly increased say in education and greatly increased opportunity for children. Those are the principles on which we fought the election. That is what is happening.

Mr. Hattersley: May I first of all welcome that emphasis on the importance of parental choice — *[Interruption.]* Does that mean that, if the ballot of inner London parents demonstrates that a majority of them want to continue with ILEA, the policy will be changed and ILEA will be kept in operation?

The Prime Minister: No. Our policy on ILEA has been generally welcomed— *[Interruption.]* At the election we made it clear that each local authority could opt out if it wished. Therefore, the future of the ILEA was always in doubt. We went further than that in our wish to help parents and said that if parents chose to opt a school out of ILEA or of a local authority they could do so. They

could, therefore, have stopped ILEA on their own. We were faced with views which suggested that there should be an orderly rundown of ILEA and I believe that that is the right policy.

Mr. Hattersley: Does the Prime Minister realise that if her last answer means anything it means that parent power is to be respected so long as it agrees with Conservative prejudice?

The Prime Minister: Nonsense. The trouble is that the right hon. Gentleman disagrees with our policy. That is why he lost.

Mr. Higgins: Will my right hon. Friend consider carefully the evidence that Lord Cockfield gave yesterday to the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service? As the EEC Commission is evidently prepared to consider only formal representations, will she today write to the Commission, making it clear that the commitments that she has given on zero rating for VAT are absolute and that the Commission should not waste its time putting forward proposals that involve the abolition of the principle of zero rating for VAT?

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend is aware, the Commission and one of the commissioners representing this country are very well aware of our position on VAT. We shall insist on our right to determine zero rating. Any changes in taxation have to be by unanimous vote and we would not agree to that. If my right hon. Friend thinks that the commissioners do not know, I shall make arrangements to see that they do.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Will the Prime Minister clarify the reports to the effect that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is conveying to the Government of the Republic of Ireland the intention of another Department of Government before that Department comes to the House and has the consent of the House? Or is this just another attempt to make the House as useless as Members representing Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman's question was a little Irish; in fact such that I did not get the full meaning of its content. There is no change in our policy towards Northern Ireland.

Q2. **Mr. Stokes:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Stokes: Is my right hon. Friend aware that her recent meeting with the bishops of the Church of England has caused widespread satisfaction? Is she aware that at a time of rising prosperity, this can best be accompanied by high moral standards? Is it not the duty of the Church, as well as of parents and teachers, to proclaim those standards?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. Rising prosperity brings great benefits, but on its own it is not enough. It is how one uses that rising prosperity that counts. I certainly had a private meeting of the kind that my hon. Friend indicated. I think that he and I, and most people, believe that all societies need to have rules and standards by which to live, and that the Church has a great part to play in setting those rules and standards.

Q3. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Skinner: When will the Prime Minister end the confidence trick that is being played on pensioners and other recipients of state benefit in relation to the back pay which they were supposed to receive recently? Is she aware that in my constituency a 79-year-old blind pensioner, who has a son claiming constant attendance allowance, was due to receive £16 on both books, and in that very week her branch of the DHSS sent one pension book and reduced the entitlement to £8? Is it not time the Government got rid of the sinister streak that enables them to rob blind pensioners of £8 when the Prime Minister is doling out money to the Common Market and not investigating the fraud in the City of London?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the extra sum of approximately £8 is being paid. The Government were not legally compelled to pay it— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister has been asked a question.

The Prime Minister: The Government were not legally compelled to pay it, but took the decision to pay it as a moral duty. In the overwhelming majority of cases it is being paid perfectly normally. If the hon. Gentleman has a particular case he should let my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State know—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister must be given a chance to answer.

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman has a particular case to raise he should let my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State know, or have the courtesy, if he is raising a case of one out of 10 million pensioners— *[Interruption.]* to let me know. If the hon. Gentleman is really the compassionate man that he is, I am sure he will see that that person does not lose.

Mr. Ian Bruce: In welcoming the positive news from Moscow, may I ask my right hon. Friend to organise a fresh mission for her right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary? As he has been able to persuade the Soviet Union of the logic and sense of our maintaining our independent nuclear deterrent, perhaps he could be sent on a mission to persuade the Front Benches of the Labour and Liberal parties——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not the Prime Minister's responsibility.

The Prime Minister: I very much welcome — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is perfectly in order for the Prime Minister to answer the first part of that question.

The Prime Minister: I very much welcome Mr. Shevardnadze's confirmation of Soviet policy, that our independent nuclear deterrent is not contained within these arms control negotiations and is entirely outside them. That is why we are modernising it with Trident, and that is why we on the Government side believe that it is fundamental to our defence, and we shall see that our defences are fully safeguarded in the future.

Q4. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cohen: Will the Prime Minister reflect on a letter in Saturday's *Guardian* from Dr. MacSweeney of Leytonstone House hospital which is within my constituency, saying that many mental health problems in this country are treatable, but with the cuts that the Government are imposing beds are often not available for psychiatric or mentally handicapped patients? As the Prime Minister is fond of reading out NHS statistics, will she read to the House the NHS statistics for bed losses and cutbacks in the mental health service? Or, in this matter is it mindless negligence that figures?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, this Government have done a very great deal to see that patients who would otherwise be in mental hospitals are outside and looked after in community care. We have made great strides towards that. I stress once again that what the hon. Gentleman runs away from the entire time is the fact that expenditure on the Health Service is up from £8 billion in 1978 to £22·5 billion this year.

Q5. **Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Peacock: Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity to see the leaflet that was recently circulated by the Labour party from Walworth road, which says that anyone who does not register—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question must be related to the Prime Minister's responsibilities.

Mrs. Peacock: Will my right hon. Friend confirm to the House today that someone who does not register for the community charge will not be prohibited from voting in future elections?

The Prime Minister: Yes. There are two quite different registers. The register that entitles one to vote is registration on the electoral register. The community charge register is directly related to the community charge, and failure to register on the community charge register does not in any way affect one's right to vote. Anything said to the contrary is totally false.

Sir Russell Johnston: Has the Prime Minister had a chance to read John Stalker's book? Is she aware that, for the ordinary Member of Parliament or, indeed, for the ordinary citizen who is not always involved in Northern Ireland, and does not agree with terrorism — in fact, hates terrorism — but is supportive of security, it is a pretty shocking book?

Will the Prime Minister tell me why a police officer who was singled out because of his probity and exceptional qualities should be treated in such a way? Surely the right hon. Lady cannot simply ignore what he said. Will she tell me what she is going to do about his allegations?

The Prime Minister: I have not read the book. The findings of that person were directed to the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland in his prosecuting capacity, and not to anyone else. Neither I nor anyone else in Government, other than my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General, would be entitled to read that report, because it is not a matter that affects the Government, but it does affect the prosecuting authorities.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has given the reply about criminal prosecutions and proceedings, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has told the House that the next step is for the findings of the Stalker-Sampson inquiry to be considered in the context of possible disciplinary proceedings. He has also promised a statement as soon as possible on matters within his responsibility concerning procedures and control within the Royal Ulster Constabulary. That is the proper way to deal with the matter.

Training (White Paper)

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Norman Fowler): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the White Paper "Training for Employment", which I am publishing today.

In November last year I informed the House of my decision to bring together all the existing programmes for unemployed people over 18 into a new unified training programme. I informed the House that I had asked the Manpower Services Commission for its comments on the new programme and for its proposals for implementing it from September 1988.

I received the commission's detailed proposals last month. I am glad to say that the commission warmly welcomed the new programme and was unanimous on each of its detailed recommendations. The White Paper announces that I have accepted its proposals in full. I should like to pay tribute to the commission for the very thorough job that it has done in designing this new programme.

The White Paper describes the new programme in detail and sets it in the context of trends in the labour market. As it points out, there has been a dramatic transformation in the employment position over the past 18 months. In that time, unemployment has fallen by nearly 600,000, and there have been record falls in long-term unemployment and school-leaver unemployment. Over the past 12 months, the rate of unemployment has fallen faster in this country than in any other major industrial country.

At the same time, there has been a sharp growth in the number of jobs. The labour force survey—which I am also publishing today—shows that between March 1983 and September 1987 the number of people in jobs increased by 1·5 million. The survey also reveals that self-employment increased by 234,000 between 1986 and 1987. Since March 1983, there has been the longest sustained growth in employment for more than 30 years; there can be no clearer indication of the continuing strength of the British economy.

There is new evidence in the White Paper about the volume and nature of the job vacancies that are now available. A survey carried out specifically for the White Paper shows that there are currently over 700,000 unfilled vacancies in the economy as a whole. Vacancies in jobcentres account for only a third of this total. The survey also shows that last year employers throughout Great Britain recruited about 7·5 million employees. That was not confined to the south: two thirds of the recruitment took place outside London and the south-east.

As the White Paper makes clear, the challenge now is to ensure that unemployed people — particularly the longer-term unemployed—can take full advantage of the growth in the economy and in the number of jobs. At the centre of our strategy for meeting that challenge is the new training for employment programme.

The programme will have an annual budget of some £1·4 billion and will be able to provide training for about 600,000 people a year. Training will last for up to 12 months. It will begin with an initial assessment of each trainee's needs and aptitudes, carried out by training agents who will be appointed by the Manpower Services Commission. That will lead to a personal training plan for each trainee, which will set the pattern for his training.

A wide range of training will be provided — from basic skills to training at craft and technician level. Wherever possible, trainees will be given the opportunity to obtain a recognised vocational qualification or a credit towards one.

The new programme will be designed to ensure that the valuable contribution that voluntary organisations and other bodies have made to the community programme can continue. With that in mind, I have asked the commission to ensure that there are at least 170,000 project places in the new programme.

At the same time, it is essential that trainees who begin their training on projects should be able to move on to training with employers, so that they can learn and practise their new skills in a normal working environment. My intention is to involve employers increasingly in training long-term unemployed people.

The Manpower Services Commission has drawn up detailed proposals for ensuring that the new programme provides high-quality training. Training agents and training managers will need to demonstrate to the commission that they can meet the required standards, and the commission will regularly review their performance.

I have accepted in full the MSC's proposals for the payment of trainees in the new programme. Each trainee will be paid a training allowance, which will be between £10 and £12 a week higher than his previous benefit entitlement. In addition, there will be assistance towards travelling costs and other expenses. One defect of the present community programme wage is that it discriminates against the family man with children. Everyone in the new programme will be better off than if they had remained unemployed and claiming benefit.

The White Paper also details the efforts the employment service is making to help long-term unemployed people back into work. New efforts will be made to explain the in-work benefits available to them. In a survey carried out for the White Paper, half the benefit claimants interviewed did not know what benefits they could claim if they took a job.

Unemployment in this country has come down rapidly in the past 18 months and all the evidence is that there are more and more jobs available. We now have the opportunity to train long-term unemployed people in the skills they need in today's labour market. This will help to ensure that, as a country, we have the skilled work force we need to compete in markets at home and overseas. For these reasons I believe that the new training programme announced in this White Paper should command the support of the House.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): It is because the Opposition have repeatedly stressed that Britain now has the worst trained work force in Europe that we positively welcome any proposals to improve training. However, this scheme is a tragically missed opportunity. The Secretary of State speaks of a commitment to training. In that case, why are no extra funds being made available? Does he seriously expect the House to believe his claim that he can increase the number of people on the schemes by 50 per cent. and substantially enhance the quality of training that they receive—all for the same budget as now?

The Secretary of State implies that £10 per week over benefit is an incentive to join the scheme. However, is he aware that it will actually be only £5 per week because the first £5 of work expenses will have to be paid for by the

participant? Will the Secretary of State therefore confirm that what the scheme really means is that people will be forced to work on £5 a week?

The best incentive is high-quality training. People will queue up for that. However, under this scheme, 60 per cent. of the time will be spent working, and almost all the managers in the field recognise that there will not be nearly enough funding or time for serious training. Is it not a fundamental flaw in the scheme that, because the Government refuse to provide an adequate budget, allowances have had to be cut to a derisory level so that nowhere near enough people will join the scheme voluntarily, and compulsion will then be used?

The Secretary of State says that participation will be voluntary. In that case, why has he taken powers in the current Employment Bill so that he can withdraw benefit from those who decline to join the scheme even if it is unsuitable to their skill needs? Will he give a commitment to the House that he will not trigger those powers in the lifetime of this Parliament? If he refuses, hon. Members will draw their own conclusions. Will he anyway recognise that restart and the tighter availability for work rules already involve creeping compulsion?

Why do the Government insist on regarding training as a cost to get people off the register rather than an investment and an opportunity? The Secretary of State recently visited Sweden. Did he note that, by spending two and a half times more per trainee place and by setting much higher training standards, Sweden has achieved an unemployment rate only one fifth as high as ours? Why does not the Secretary of State look to Sweden's record on training rather than to America on workfare?

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will take points of order afterwards.

Mr. Bruce: It is relevant.

Mr. Speaker: It may well be relevant, but I shall still take it afterwards.

Mr. Fowler: I do not accept anything that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has said. Frankly, I find his points about Sweden incomprehensible, given that Sweden has the kind of compulsion against which I thought the hon. Gentleman sought to argue. That is the essence of the Swedish system; that is what it is all about. I suggest that he goes to Sweden and has a look at the system.

We are spending a total of £3 billion on training—in real terms, three times what the Labour Government spent on training. The new programme will cost £1·4 billion for 600,000 people, whereas the previous programmes cost £1·3 billion for 500,000 people in the current year. We aim not only for a contribution from employers but to use money better in one programme rather than in the 30 schemes.

On the benefit-plus proposal, in November the hon. Gentleman attacked me on the basis that the plus element on social security would be £4 or £5. We have now increased that figure to £10 or £12. I must underline the fact that we have accepted in full the proposals of the Manpower Services Commission, on which three trade union commissioners serve. I repeat that we have accepted in full what the Manpower Services Commission said.

The hon. Gentleman made allegations about compulsion. Let me say again that this is a voluntary scheme and I have no plans to designate it as an approved training scheme. I have made that absolutely clear. We have debated clause 26 of the Employment Bill and, as the hon. Gentleman well knows, one of the aims of that clause is to get rid of anomalies in the present position as between trainees and employees in work.

There is a need for a unified scheme. The new programme will train 600,000 people each year. It is backed by the unanimous report of the Manpower Services Commission, whose proposals the Government have accepted in full.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Will my right hon. Friend accept that, far from being given the grudging greeting that we heard from the Opposition, this imaginative scheme will be widely welcomed out in the field? I am sure that he will understand if I raise the question of those who have been on the community projects who have special needs because they are physically or mentally disabled. Will he confirm that the MSC's recommendation of a supplement of an extra £20, raising it to £40, will be accepted? Does he accept that there will be a need for a staff-trainee ratio of 5:1 instead of 10:1, as there is in the excellent share community project in my constituency? Will he consider incorporating a measure to deal with earnings, incomes and bonus incentives for people working on the scheme, so that they can be prepared for the world of work outside?

Mr. Fowler: As I said, I have accepted in full all the proposals made by the Manpower Services Commission. It is one of our aims to seek to help disabled people with training. If there is anything further that I can do to underline that, I shall willingly consider it.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Will the Secretary of State recognise that the weakness of his announcement is that it is a campaign without cash—there is no new money? He will know that the new job training scheme, which paid benefit and travel, did not command consensus and was a dismal flop. There is widespread scepticism about Government schemes. For this programme to succeed, he needs the support, co-operation and good will of all the bodies involved, including trade unions and local authorities. Why is he jeopardising that success by imposing an unrealistic premium of £10? It will cost almost £10 to get to work, so there is no incentive. Why is he spoiling the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar? Why does he not double that puny premium?

Mr. Fowler: Again, I must point out to the hon. Gentleman, who is Chairman of the Select Committee on Employment, that, as he well knows, and I hope appreciates, the Government have shown their good will and good faith by accepting in full the proposals and recommendations made by the Manpower Services Commission. Among the commissioners of the Manpower Services Commission, as I pointed out to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), there were three trade union representatives. I find it difficult to see how the Government could have done more to show what we want to do, which is to provide good training in this country. The new proposal for benefit-plus will mean that married men with children, who in the past have been excluded from some of the community programmes, will now be able to benefit from training.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the provision of training

[Mr. James Paice]

and the opportunity to be part of the economic revival of this country, will be of benefit to the new skills that are needed for the expanding industries in my constituency and many more? On top of the plus aspect of the benefit, people participating will be better off not only while they are in training but in the future when they are back in employment doing a job that this country needs done.

Mr. Fowler: Yes, that is right. The purpose of the scheme and the programme is to train people for employment. More jobs are becoming available than for many years past. We want to provide the long-term unemployed with skills so that they can take the opportunity offered by those jobs.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Is the Secretary of State aware that his claims that unemployment is falling and that jobs are being created are accepted? Nevertheless, there is considerable concern about the quality of jobs being created, compared with those being destroyed. They are part-time, low-paid and often not adequately protected. In those circumstances, will he accept that his proposals to move to a benefit plus £10 to £12 scheme will be greeted with considerable concern by many organisations which are currently recruiting people, because it is supposed to be a gateway to a proper job?

The right hon. Gentleman said that it is essential that trainees who begin their training on projects should be able to move on to training with employers. If the community programme is so valuable, who will continue this work if local authorities and other agencies are denied the necessary rights, responsibilities and funds to do it?

Does not the right hon. Gentleman accept that, in these circumstances, the community programme operators will feel that they have been sold short and will not be able to train people at the rate for the job, or to offer them a permanent job at the end of the training, unless the Government's wider policies are also changed?

Mr. Fowler: I am grateful for what the hon. Gentleman said about the growth in employment and the reduction in unemployment. However, I do not agree with what he said in the latter part of his question. We look forward to the contribution of voluntary organisations in the new project training and we are making available 170,000 project places. The reform will mean that this will be training, rather than makework, and full-time rather than part-time. We hope to improve on the 30 per cent. who go into jobs from the community programme; we certainly hope that the new training programme will improve on that.

I do not think the hon. Gentleman was right about the record on low-paid jobs. More than a third of employment growth in recent years has been in areas such as banking, finance and business services, which are not noted for low pay levels. Another third has been in jobs in public administration, education and health. I do not think that what the hon. Gentleman said bears analysis.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the tremendous emphasis being laid on improvement in training is welcome? Does he recognise that considerable skill shortages are beginning to emerge in certain critical industries? Can he assure us that the new plan will go a long way towards meeting them?

Mr. Fowler: Yes, there is no question at all but that skills are required for many of the new jobs that are being made available. Therefore, the key to bringing long-term unemployed people back into employment is to provide skills for them. That is the essence of what we are trying to do.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): The Secretary of State asked what more the Government could do. I suggest that they could have had full discussions with the Trades Union Congress and with the individual unions concerned—for example, in the construction industry—precisely to deal with the point made by the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) about the need for skilled workers. Also, the Government could have entered discussions with the employers in those industries, so that some of the money could have gone to the creation of real apprenticeships in those industries to deal with the skill shortages.

Is it not clear that the Government are not really dealing with training for young people, and with skill shortages in this country? Once again, this is unfortunately another way of trying to decrease the numbers of people in the dole queues rather than dealing with the real issues at stake.

Mr. Fowler: No, I do not accept that. Not only is unemployment falling, but the survey that we have done for the White Paper shows that there are increasing numbers of vacancies. At present, we estimate that there are more than 700,000 vacancies in the economy. In that context, the sensible thing to do is to try to give training and skills to the long-term unemployed to bring them back into work. That is what we are trying to do.

As for consultation, we have consulted the Manpower Services Commission and accepted its recommendations in full. As the hon. Gentleman knows, three commissioners on the MSC are from the trade union movement.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): When taking up the kind invitation extended by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) to examine Government funding for training in Sweden, will my right hon. Friend also take the opportunity to examine the position in Japan, where the Government put virtually no money into training, and where training is considered the responsibility of private industry and is done extremely well?

Hon. Members: And they do it.

Mr. Fowler: I am in danger of going on a world tour. I hope to take even the Opposition Front Bench with me when I say that training must be a combination of Government funding and, as my hon. Friend rightly said, funding by employers. We shall want to underline the latter aspect again during the coming weeks.

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): I think that the Secretary of State is aware that we are concerned not only about the quality of training because of under-funding, but also about the element of compulsion to which my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has referred. However, another issue on which we must touch is the status of the participants in the programme. The Secretary of State is well aware that, in Committee on the Employment Bill, it was made clear that the rights of the participants in the programme could be drastically affected depending on whether they were designated as employees or trainees. Can he guarantee, and reassure the

House, that all participants will be covered by all the employment laws and that they will not be affected by the withdrawal of such measures as health and safety, race relations and other equal opportunity requirements that should apply?

Mr. Fowler: The participants will not be afforded all the protection that goes with being an employee, but we made it clear in Committee that they are regarded as trainees. Therefore, we expect and require that such health and safety and discrimination measures should be carried out.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): From what my right hon. Friend said in answer to earlier questions, it is clear that he accepts the importance of ensuring that local training provision meets local demand for skills in existing job vacancies. Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge the work that has been done by the local employer networks towards meeting such needs? Those networks are involved with tripartite schemes combining local education authorities, the MSC and local chambers of commerce representing industry to ensure, to as great a degree as possible, that local training provision meets local training and skill needs.

Mr. Fowler: Yes, Sir, I am glad to do that. I believe that those schemes have made an extremely good start. My hon. Friend is absolutely correct to say that what we want is training that is relevant not just to the needs of an employer, but also to the needs of local employers. That is what LENS is all about.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): In the absence of a statement by the Secretary of State for Wales on this subject, is the right hon. Gentleman speaking about Wales today? May I remind him that, in the Welsh coalfields and the steel areas, unemployment is still extremely high. In some areas, particularly in the valleys, male unemployment is as high as one in four. Does the right hon. Gentleman's statement guarantee good, permanent well-paid jobs? We need such a guarantee in Wales. I urge him not to adopt a complacent attitude when he speaks to Wales on this important matter.

Mr. Fowler: There is no question of complacency. Unemployment has come down in all the regions. Some of the areas where the rate of unemployment has come down fastest are those where the problems have been greatest —for example, areas such as Wales, the west midlands, the north and the north-west. I certainly emphasise to the hon. Gentleman that I am not complacent about the matter.

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): May I assure my right hon. Friend that his statement will be warmly welcomed in Wales. Even though Wales has a surplus of labour, we have a serious shortage in particular skills. Will my right hon. Friend tell the House how the scheme will work, especially in conjunction with local authorities, to respond to local needs? My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) has already made it clear that the response to such local needs is crucial. In my area, there are local needs within the clothing industry. There is a need for much improved co-operation with the MSC.

Mr. Fowler: It will be the responsibility of the MSC, soon to become the Training Commission, to devise and oversee the type of schemes that will be put forward. Clearly, one of our purposes will be to involve employers much more than before. I repeat that the crucial thing is to involve local employers and to see that training is relevant to the local demands for labour.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): The Secretary of State has told the House that, presently, there are 700,000 job vacancies. Will he give us a regional breakdown of that number? Does he agree that the problem of rural deprivation needs to be addressed by the Government? That is a hidden problem. There are still people losing their jobs in the traditional industries such as food processing, and all those allied to agriculture. The problem is that those people are having to leave the rural areas to find work because there is no proper scheme to enable them to acquire skills where they and their families live, which would ensure that they could bring up their children in those rural areas. Have the Government addressed that issue?

Mr. Fowler: Certainly I agree with the hon. Gentleman that some of the biggest differences are not between regions but inside regions. That is one of the problems that the programme will try to address. The survey of vacancies showed that currently there are more than 700,000 vacancies per month. We estimated that there were about 7·5 million vacancies during 1987, two thirds of which were filled outside London and the south-east, 38 per cent. were in the survey area of East Anglia, the west midlands, Wales and the south-west and 29 per cent. were in the north, the north-west and Scotland. Obviously, those are big regions, but they prove the point that the division between north and south is a total over-simplification of the position.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Will my right hon. Friend accept that his statement will be widely welcomed in my constituency, where, in each of the 18 wards, unemployment has fallen during the past 12 months? Will he note that, although local needs should be met locally, and we have skill shortages in hard-pressed north-east England, it is important that the national job vacancy situation is known to everyone? Will he seriously consider expanding the Oracle scheme that currently operates only in three regions covered by television boundaries to a national scheme which would enable people throughout the country, and particularly in the south of England, to see the vacancies which are available in the north of England where we are seeking to attract people with the skills we need?

Mr. Fowler: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments, and I shall certainly look at the details of what he is proposing. Certainly, there are areas outside London and the south-east where there are attractive jobs and an attractive environment in which to work.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Secretary of State pay tribute to the work of centres for the unemployed in various parts of the country — including my constituency, where, despite the national fall, unemployment is twice what it was in 1979? Will he give me an assurance that nothing in that document will prejudice the future of the people who work in those centres?

Mr. Fowler: Inasmuch as such centres provide good services for unemployed people, which clearly is desirable, certainly nothing in the document will change their

[Mr. Fowler]

position. I would need to look a little more closely at individual schemes before giving the hon. Gentleman the total guarantee he seeks.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): Exactly how many of those 700,000 vacancies are in the south-east, where more than 600,000 foreign nationals seem to be able to find work and where there are so many skill shortages? Why does my right hon. Friend not toughen up his programme and cut out unemployment benefit for those soft southerners and instead give the money to those from the north to help them with their housing if they are prepared to travel to the south and take the jobs?

Mr. Fowler: The system of unemployment and supplementary benefit is vitally a national scheme. However, my hon. Friend has a point, in that jobs unquestionably are available in the south, where even now there is a great number of long-term unemployed people. We must seek to bring those people into the available jobs.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): The Secretary of State has made much of the fact that he has accepted the MSC recommendations. However, when he appeared before the Select Committee on Employment, it was concerned about two issues. First, that particular arrangement does nothing to help the over-fifties. What can the Minister say about them? Secondly, as important as the acceptance of the TUC commissioners, the Secretary of State will know that his scheme largely depends on voluntary organisations. How many of those voluntary organisations have agreed with the scheme as it now stands?

Mr. Fowler: Broadly, I hope that all voluntary organisations will accept and work with the scheme. That is very much in the interests of the people they represent and the work that they are doing. That would be my hope regarding voluntary organisations. I understand and share the concern that over-fifties should not be excluded in any way from training. Anyone who has been unemployed for more than six months is eligible for the programme that I have set out. Clearly there are a number of priorities —the 18-to-25 group and the 25-to-50 group—but we do not intend to exclude the over-fifties from the training programme.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in my constituency, a major problem is the surplus of job vacancies compared with unemployed people with suitable skills to fill them? The majority of employers cite the shortage of skilled labour as the major constraint to further expansion. Therefore, there will be a warm welcome for his proposals, which will help my 3,000 constituents who are registered as unemployed to acquire the skills needed to fill the vacant jobs and will help companies throughout the Thames valley by supplying them with the skilled labour that they desperately need.

Mr. Fowler: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. If we can train and provide long-term unemployed people with skills in many parts of the country, there is no reason why those people should not very speedily find jobs.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): I am glad that the Minister is now coming round to the idea that there is a shortage of skills and a shortage of jobs. The Opposition have been telling the Government about that for many years.

We now have a complacent statement congratulating the MSC on its co-operation. Does the Minister realise that, although the MSC top brass, who are nothing but puppets of the Government, may be happy, those who implement the schemes are so distressed that some of them today are taking industrial action?

Mr. Fowler: The hon. Gentleman should take up those last remarks with the commissioners, who have endorsed the scheme. Frankly, when he finds out who they are, he will not regard them as puppets of the Government. As for the case for change, there is a need for a unified scheme. The long-term unemployed must now be the priority. More jobs are available: that is beyond doubt. The labour force survey, published today, shows that about half the long-term unemployed have no qualifications, and that many of them are young, half under 35. That is an opportunity and a challenge.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): My right hon. Friend clearly wants to encourage employers to be more involved in the training process. Will he give me more details about how he intends to do that and whether there will be appropriate funding? Will he give me more details about the special provisions that might be made for the long-term young unemployed, the 18 to 25-year-olds?

Mr. Fowler: We shall seek to involve employers in the new adult training programme in a way that they have previously not been involved. Clearly, that will depend very much upon getting the co-operation and help of employers. Secondly, as well as training the unemployed, we need training for those who are already in jobs. Again, employers have the first duty in that. The 18-to-25 group is a priority group, and our major efforts will be directed to bringing those people back into employment.

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): Under the new workfare-plus system, who will be responsible for paying the benefit? Will it be the employers and the agencies, so that there is a pretence or an impression of a low wage, or will that responsibility remain with the Department of Employment and the DHSS, so that the employers and agencies will pay that miserable £10? It is clear that this is nothing more than slave labour-plus.

Mr. Fowler: No, it will come from the Government, but it is a benefit plus premium. We have always said that that was the case. In other words, the principle will be that people will have their social security entitlement, and, in addition, a premium. I think that the hon. Gentleman knows that his description of this as workfare is ludicrous and I shall not bother to try to reply to that.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will my right hon. Friend note that one of the most important aspects of his announcement is benefit-plus? We all know of unemployed constituents who are not looking at schemes at present for fear of damaging the benefit arrangements of their families, so will my right hon. Friend give an undertaking that this benefit-plus commitment will be trumpeted from the rooftops?

Mr. Fowler: We shall certainly seek to do that. The whole purpose is to underline the fact that people will be better off on the training programme than unemployed. The incentive will be particularly great for married people with children, who have previously been left out of training in Britain.

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): Is the Minister aware that, in constituencies such as mine, any reductions in unemployment are due more to how he calculates his figures than to any rise in employment? On Derwentside, since 1980, there has been a rise in employment of less than half of 1 per cent. Even if we forget the arguments about the figures, constituencies such as mine still have high unemployment; fewer and fewer employers who are prepared to take on young people or trainees because they feel that they are struggling at the edges; a large number of people who are currently engaged in the community programme, but largely through voluntary organisations and the public sector; and a low wage economy.

Together, those factors mean that the right hon. Gentleman's proposals are unfortunate for my constituents and for many others in similar constituencies. How can he guarantee that the money for trainees will not be less than it is at the moment and that the quality of training will be better than it has been, so that we really can re-equip people for the future?

Mr. Fowler: The essence of what the hon. Lady is saying is in her last point, on the quality of training. We are changing from the present system because, although schemes such as the community programme have many good features, they are not providing the full-time training that we want to see. We are building upon the foundation laid by the community programme.

I accept that there are variations in unemployment between constituencies and between cities, but the labour force survey, which is published today, shows that there has been faster growth in the employed labour force than we had thought. There has been an increase of 450,000 over the past 12 months, rather than 400,000, self-employment has gone up sharply, and, as I have said, over 1·5 million additional jobs have been created since March 1983.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Is my right hon. Friend aware how much we welcome his bold and imaginative proposal which will give the long-term unemployed the incentive and opportunity to return to work? He said that a large proportion of the training will be on employers' premises, but how does he intend to communicate their responsibility to enough employers, and, in addition, to monitor the quality of such training?

Mr. Fowler: That will be very much a function of the Training Commission. We hope to encourage employers to come forward with such schemes and their quality will be monitored in very much the same way as the youth training scheme, with approved training organisation status and the rest. But, as I said to the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong), the crux of the matter is that we should provide not only training, but high-quality training.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): Is not the White Paper a whitewash—a con, even—because when we hear the Secretary of State and the statistics, we are really listening to lies, damned lies and Tory propaganda——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Not in this Chamber, please. Will the hon. Gentleman please withdraw that?

Mr. Brown: I accept that "Tory" is a four-letter word, and I withdraw it.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must withdraw those comments.

Mr. Brown: If it hurts, okay, I understand why. I withdraw what I said—reluctantly, under protest. I say that because back in my constituency of Leith we have record unemployment and youngsters leaving school with no hope, no job and no future, thanks to the Government. To talk about another slave labour scheme is an insult to them and their families and they will resist it. They will resent it, and they will fight back.

Mr. Fowler: That is an extraordinarily silly intervention. It even embarrasses the hon. Gentleman's Front Bench spokesmen. Unemployment has come down not only for one or two months but for 18 months in succession, and it is down by over 500,000 in the year to December. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would have welcomed that, but that would be to ascribe to him rather more good sense than he obviously has.

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): Is my right hon. Member aware that his absolute commitment to voluntarism will be widely welcomed throughout Britain, as will his support for voluntary projects and the part that they have played in the community programme until now—and indeed, the part that they will play in the adult training programme in the future? Was my right hon. Friend surprised when he learned, for the first time, that the number of vacancies unfilled in Britain was 700,000? Does he agree that that figure is, frankly, a disgrace, because it represents a waste of human resources—people who should be in those jobs—and a waste of Britain's economic resources, because we are having to support those people in idleness when they could be working? What does he propose to do to reduce that figure drastically, and soon?

Mr. Fowler: We confirm that there are over 700,000 vacancies. We had always believed in the past that the number of vacancies in jobcentres represented about a third of the vacancies in the economy, but the survey confirms, on the latest information that we have, the basis of that previous estimate. As I have said, it means that, during 1987, about 7·5 million vacancies became available throughout Britain. There are certainly vacancies for management and professionals, but 18 per cent. of the vacancies are in non-manual jobs such as clerical work, 33 per cent. in retailing or catering, 21 per cent. in skilled and semi-skilled occupations, and 17 per cent. in unskilled occupations. There are vacancies not only throughout the country but over a range of occupations. The one message that comes through is that, if the long-term unemployed are to take those vacancies, they require training in the necessary skills.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): The Minister said that training agents will need to demonstrate that they can meet the required standards to ensure high quality training. Therefore, will he explain why, when the Scottish Office was asked to supply comparative information on the performance of managing agents under the job training scheme, it responded by saying that it was not the Government's policy to provide such information? Will he assure the House that comparative information on the performance of training agents under the new scheme will be made available to hon. Members so that they can judge whether high-quality training is being given under the new programme?

Mr. Fowler: Training agents are a new concept under the programme. Nothing like them exists at the moment. The idea is that every person entering the programme will be assessed and given suitable training. In other words, people will be given a personal training plan. The training agent may be a chamber of commerce, a voluntary organisation or a training body, but certainly we shall seek to ensure that the standards of the training agents are high and that as much information as possible is given.

Mr. James Cran (Beverley): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, in a contradistinction to the dreary but wholly predictable welcome that his statement has received from the Opposition, it will be welcomed in my constituency, which is in the north of England, because we in Humberside also have skill shortages? Does he also accept that critical to the success of his plans is the involvement of employers and that many hon. Members as well as others believe that employers have not done as much as they ought in the past to secure the training of the work force? Will he outline how he intends to convince them of what is in their interests and those of the country?

Mr. Fowler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I recognise his experience in this area. We intend, in the Department and in the Manpower Services Commission, to have talks with the employers' organisations and with the employers themselves to point out to them the advantage of being involved in programmes of this kind. The fact is that a good adult training programme is good not only for the long-term unemployed but for employers and for the economy as a whole.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in the north of England a high proportion of people already receive training in their first job? Is he aware that the overwhelming need on Teesside at the moment is for skilled people, particularly in the banking and financial sectors, where employment is rapidly increasing? Is he also aware that 76 per cent. of firms on Teesside recently responded to a survey by saying that they expected to increase their employment opportunities in the next year? Is he aware, further, that there are no Cleveland Labour Members in the Chamber at the present time?

Mr. Fowler: I hear what my hon. Friend says on the last point. I pay a tribute to him for the work that he does in the area. As I have said before, the training that is carried out must be geared to providing people with skills, and those skills must be relevant to the local Labour market. That seems to me to be the essence of the approach that we must take.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): May I put to the Secretary of State again the very important question that was put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) and not answered? Will he give an undertaking that this scheme will never be designated under clause 26 of the Employment Bill? If he will not say never, will he say at least for the lifetime of this Parliament? Does he understand that, if he will not give that undertaking, he will be breaching the recommendation of the Manpower Services Commission, which said that it was an absolute requirement that the scheme be voluntary? We look forward to the Secretary of State's giving that undertaking.

If the right hon. Gentleman does not, we shall all know what it means. It means that he plans a compulsory scheme. It means that he plans a scheme that will pay people £10 a week on top of their benefit but expect them to pay their own work expenses—and the DHSS says that the average cost of getting to work is £7 a week. It is compulsory work experience, not training, and it is not good enough to call work experience training for the long-term unemployed. It is an insult to the unemployed and it is unacceptable to the voluntary sector throughout the land, which does not want to become a police force for the unemployed but wants to run valuable projects that help the community and the unemployed.

Mr. Fowler: I am not prepared to take lectures from the hon. Lady on voluntary organisations; nor do I recognise her power to speak on behalf of voluntary organisations in this country. I believe that many voluntary organisations—I hope, all of them—will want to co-operate in this programme. The hon. Lady has done her best over the past few months to sabotage and damage the programme—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I very much hope that her efforts will not be successful, because I think that they are against the national interest.

As for the scheme itself, I have made it clear that it is a voluntary scheme; I have made it clear that I have no plans to designate it approved training; and I have made it clear that I accept the Manpower Services Commission's proposals on it. Anyone who has ears to hear will understand what that means.

Points of Order

4.26 pm

Mr. Harold McCusker (Upper Bann): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. For three successive weeks now, very important talks have been taking place between this Government and the Government of the Irish Republic about matters affecting the vital interests of the people of Northern Ireland, matters of life and death for them and increasingly matters affecting people on the mainland as well. I appeal to you as a defender of Back-Bench and minority interests in this regard.

The role of Members of Parliament from Northern Ireland is already very circumscribed. The events of the past 54 minutes prove that. A very important statement was made. It does not apply to me; nor does it apply to my colleagues. In some obscure meeting in Fermanagh, a member of the Northern Ireland Office will tell the people of Northern Ireland what is going to happen to them, and we cannot even debate that. We are legislated for in a manner completely different from that applying to any other part of the United Kingdom, and we cannot amend that either.

If the only role left for me is to come here and try to make the colonial system of government which applies to Northern Ireland at least answerable to the elected representatives from Northern Ireland, will you tell me how I can do that, or can you confirm what Ministers refuse to confirm, that I do not have any role here, that I am now redundant?

Mr. Speaker: That is certainly not the case. I frequently hear the hon. Gentleman take part in our debates in this United Kingdom Parliament, and at Question Time too.

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I rise again to ask you, Mr. Speaker, if you can give me any advice as to how we can do something to make sure that my constituent Claire Wise gets her operation in Birmingham. I have been in Birmingham all morning. There are four beds in the intensive care unit. One child has been prepared for an operation and there is no bed for him because there are no beds designated for intensive care for heart surgery. We desperately need to do something. We have had promises and undertakings from Ministers. Unless we get a statement on the Floor of the House about our individual constituents, and, more important, about immediate provision for that hospital in Birmingham, I am afraid that more children will die. I believe that we really must do something about this.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On the same point——

Mr. Speaker: I know it will be the same point. Yes?

Mr. Winnick: My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) has explained admirably what the situation is at the children's hospital in Birmingham. I am very saddened, as we all are, that Matthew Collier, the son of my constituents, died at the hospital on Sunday. I am sure that all hon. Members will wish to extend their deepest sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Collier and that Matthew will be remembered for a very long time in the west midlands.

There is an acute crisis at the children's hospital because of inadequate staffing and funding. My hon. Friend has referred to her constituents' child whose operation has been delayed again. Matthew's operation was delayed three times. Another child——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What is the point for me? It seems to me that these are political issues, which have nothing to do with the Chair. I have allowed the hon. Gentleman, out of sympathy for the loss of his constituents' child, to make those comments but, sad though they are, they have nothing to do with me as a matter of order.

Mr. Winnick: The point I am making is that we have a duty and an obligation to raise these matters on the Floor of the House. I would have wished that, following the private notice question on Friday, which I did not know was coming, the Minister would have made a statement in the House. There is this crisis to which my hon. Friend and I have been referring. There are parents who are desperately afraid that their children are going——

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman had been here on Friday when that question was answered, he would have been called. Although I have allowed him to raise the matter under the cloak of a point of order, these are political questions which are not for the Chair.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 1987 (S.I., 1987, No. 2227) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Ryder.]*

National Health Service (National Lottery) Bill

4.28 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a national lottery to provide additional funds for the National Health Service; and for connected purposes.

So that there may be no confusion as to the purpose of the Bill, I emphasise that it has nothing to do with Government funding of the Health Service, but seeks to raise funds over and above the record levels of Government spending, to provide equipment such as kidney machines and CAT scanners, to help with building programmes such as the one at the Great Ormond street hospital and to reduce waiting lists.

Comic Relief, Band Aid and many other charitable fund-raising activities on a local level over many years have shown that there is a rich seam of good will towards deserving causes. Many countries which have completely diverse political directions run lotteries. Communist Russia has a lottery, and many of the free-enterprise states of America have lotteries. Socialist Spain and conservative West Germany have lotteries, as does cohabiting France.

To see the potential success of raising additional funds, one has only to look at the record of those lotteries. In 1983, in the 23 states of America that had lotteries, $5 billion was raised in sales revenue. Last year that figure had jumped to over $12 billion. If we assume that between 40 and 45 per cent. of the takings were spent on health, education or senior citizens in those American states, we are talking about a substantial sum of money. The same pattern is reflected in Europe. The French lottery in 1983 raised £1·7 billion through sales revenue; West Germany raised £1·8 billion; and last year the sales revenue in Spain was £3·5 billion.

The development of computer technology is making the running of lotteries infinitely safer and less likely to be the subject of fraud or chicanery. I envisage that we would have between 17,000 and 25,000 retail sales outlets at confectioners and tobacconists, with machines similar to cash registers which are connected to a central computer, so that information and winning numbers can be transmitted instantaneously.

The average price of a ticket, depending on the scheme to be introduced, would be £1, which is within the range of most people over the age of 18. That is less than the price of a pint of beer or a packet of cigarettes. To make the proposition attractive, substantial cash prizes would be offered, with the possibility that if one was successful in one week the main prize money would be rolled over to the next week, as is done in the United States. In that way, people would have the excitement of hoping to win some money and at the same time giving money to a genuine good cause that they want to help.

For too long we have not given thought to organising a lottery; now is the time. While we are debating the review of the Health Service and its efficiency and ways of raising funds, a lottery should be seriously considered as a way of involving the country in a worthwhile exercise. For that reason, I beg the House to approve the motion.

4.33 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): The hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) carries the heavy burden of having been described by *The Daily Telegraph* on 14 December last year as a "cerebral Thatcherite zealot" and one

"to watch when picking the next-prime-ministers-but-three."

The most useful contribution of this short debate is a clue to the direction in which the Tory Right wishes the country to go; that is its only use.

The last major investigation into national lotteries was the Royal Commission on Gambling in 1978, which warned against transplanting lotteries from Europe and America into Britain. The hon. Gentleman quoted some figures from the Peacock report which looked at the financing of the BBC by lotteries. He gave the sales figures of the lotteries, not the revenue figures after deducting the cost of prizes and administration.

In the American states the hon. Gentleman mentioned, the highest amount raised by a lottery was £200 million; in France it was £540 million; in Spain it was £690 million; and in Germany it was £910 million. Those figures are based on December 1987 prices and exchange rates. Even if his harebrained scheme were successful, the money raised would amount to 10 to 15 per cent. of the current underfunding of the National Health Service being met by a lottery.

The biggest caveat is that in all those countries there are no pools or premium bonds—and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) has said, no bingo, casinos, horse racing or dogs. Vast amounts of money are spent on gambling in this country. Last year, £4·5 billion was spent on horse racing and dogs, £1·6 billion was spent in casinos, £775 million was spent on bingo and £600 million was spent on the pools. If the hon. Gentleman were serious about raising money for the NHS, he should have brought forward a Bill to nationalise horse racing, casinos, bingo and the pools to raise money for the National Health Service. But that would take away some of his mates' profits, so that would be the last thing in this mind.

Does the hon. Gentleman want to promote gambling? Is that what the Prime Minister means when she talks about Victorian values? Are we to have television advertisements promoting gambling, such as the advertisements for BP shares, with a 1980s equivalent of Hughie Green talking about doubling our money? Has he talked to the Treasury about the tax revenue from the pools, which is about £250 million a year?

All the investigations on this issue have concluded that a lottery would be successful only at the expense of the pools, premium bonds and small lotteries run by charities and sports clubs. I assume that that is why Baroness Trumpington said a year ago that her Department's estimate was that at best a lottery would raise £50 million. That £50 million would be less than 3 per cent. of the current level of underfunding of the NHS.

The hon. Gentleman, in his article in *The Times* yesterday, talked about Band Aid, Comic Relief and telethons, and the generosity of young people. Yet the Government, days after the first Band Aid concert in July 1985, rewarded all those young people by abolishing the wages councils for under-21-year-olds and now intend to abolish supplementary benefit for 16 and 17-year-olds—precisely the same young people who are expected to have money in their pockets to contribute to charities.

The hon. Gentleman talked about computer technology. Did he not watch the "Horizon" programme on BBC2 last year? If he wants to improve computer

technology, he should look first at the Civil Aviation Authority at West Drayton, which has a 17-year-old computer and desperately needs money for a new one. We need computers in the NHS for recall systems for cervical cancer screening and to reduce the waiting lists, not to pick out numbers for a lottery.

The NHS has real problems in the west midlands. Those problems have been described graphically today by my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) and for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). In the past few months, hardly a family in the west midlands has not been troubled by the crisis in the National Health Service. Over this past weekend, we as a region have grieved over the two deaths and the other deaths in recent months which have been caused by the Prime Minister's lottery—whether the raffle system works, whether our bairns get their operations when they need them at the Birmingham children's hospital. This weekend, two children lost their gamble

My region had £30 million cut from its funding this year, and over the past six years, according to the Select Committee on Social Services the nation has lost almost £2,000 million from its National Health Service funding. There is only one source for that finance, and it is not the ideas of the loony Right. On 15 March, the Chancellor of the Exchequer will offer a reported £3 billion to £4 billion in tax cuts to the richest 5 per cent. of the population. He should put at least £2,000 million of that into the Health Service to cure the underfunding and £500 million into improving the wages and conditions of those who work in the Health Service.

We are told that there are 21 rich countries in the world. Britain is 17th in the league when it comes to funding the Health Service. What are the consequences of that? I have spoken about the consequences in personal terms. Last year, for the first time since 1970, infant mortality in this country rose. That is light years away from a Tory Cabinet stuffed with BUPA cards in its back pocket and from a Secretary of State for Social Services who could afford £1,000 a week when he was ill before Christmas.

The underfunding has taken its toll on Health Service staff. Twenty-seven thousand nurses join the Health Service each year, but 30,000 leave each year. Sixty nurses a week leave the Health Service. That is not surprising, when nursing auxiliaries start at only £90 a week. That is the problem that needs curing in the Health Service.

According to a local newspaper in my constituency, a state-enrolled nurse in Coventry asked for five light bulbs to be replaced on a ward last November, and she is still waiting. Patients are being treated in corridors because 100 beds have been closed. A geriatric hospital is due for closure, if the Government approve the closure plans. Before Christmas, physically and mentally handicapped people, from children to old-age pensioners, suffered the supreme indignity of being told that there was no more money to supply incontinence pads in Coventry. Some of my constituents and drying out used incontinence pads on radiators overnight so that their parents can use them the next day.

Then the loony Right comes in and says, "Let's solve the problems with raffle tickets. Let's salve our conscience by having a bit of a flutter." We do not need escapism; we need a bit of realism from the Government. We need the £2,000 million which it is estimated is needed to solve underfunding of the Health Service.

There is huge, widespread and deep anger among working people in this country about the callous indifference of the Cabinet towards the Health Service. In the past few months, health workers have come out on strike everywhere — today, it is COHSE members in south-east London and Kent. Next Wednesday, Scottish workers will come out on strike. On 5 March, the TUC will hold a national rally in London, which I predict will be bigger than the industrial relations rallies of the early 1970s. COHSE has called for 14 March, the day before the Budget, to be a national day of action in support of the Health Service. That will receive enormous support throughout the country, particularly from young people.

We cannot end the suffering of hundreds of thousands of families or improve the working conditions of Health Service workers through raffles, jumble sales or lotteries. We can do that only through the industrial action of workers on 14 March, nationally and in a generalised fashion, to force the Government to give back the money which they have robbed from working people in recent years. The hon. Member for Chelmsford and his hon. Friends should wipe the smiles off their faces. The day that they come forward with a proposal for a lottery or a flag day for Trident, we could think about a lottery for the National Health Service.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 121, Noes 164.

Division No. 180] [4.45 pm

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carrington, Matthew
Cartwright, John
Chapman, Sydney
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Devlin, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles

Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Redwood, John
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Speller, Tony
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Watts, John
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nicholas Bennett and
Miss Ann Widdecombe

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darling, Alistair
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Alice Mahon and
Mr. Bill Michie.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Nellist: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Having won three of these debates in a row, may I keep the Mace, or have I to fight the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) for it?

Orders of the Day

Immigration Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New Clause 3

EXAMINATION OF PASSENGERS PRIOR TO ARRIVAL

'(1) This section applies to a person who arrives in the United Kingdom with a passport or other travel document bearing a stamp which—

(a) has been placed there by an immigration officer before that person's departure on his journey to the United Kingdom or in the course of that journey; and

(b) states that the person may enter the United Kingdom either for an indefinite or a limited period and, if for a limited period, subject to specified conditions.

(2) A person to whom this section applies shall for the purposes of the principal Act be deemed to have been given on arrival in the United Kingdom indefinite or, as the case may be, limited leave in terms corresponding to those of the stamp.

(3) A person who is deemed to have leave by virtue of this section shall be treated as having been given it by a notice given to him by an immigration officer within the period specified in paragraph 6(1) of Schedule 2 to the principal Act.

(4) A person deemed to have leave by virtue of this section shall not on his arrival in the United Kingdom be subject to examination under paragraph 2 of Schedule 2 to the principal Act but may be examined by an immigration officer for the purpose of establishing that he is such a person.

(5) The leave which a person is deemed to have by virtue of this section may, at any tine before the end of the period of twenty-four hours from his arrival at the port at which he seeks to enter the United Kingdom or, if he has been examined under subsection (4) above, from the conclusion of that examination, be cancelled by an immigration officer by giving him a notice in writing refusing him leave to enter.

(6) Sub-paragraphs (3) and (4) of paragraph 6 of Schedule 2 to the principal Act shall have effect as if any notice under subsection (5) above were a notice under that paragraph.

(7) References in this section to a person's arrival in the United Kingdom are to the first occasion on which he arrives after the time when the stamp in question was placed in his passport or travel document, being an occasion not later than seven days after that time.'.—*[Mr. Renton.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.55 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Tim Renton): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

It may be helpful to the House if I sketch in the background to the rather long new clause which seeks to achieve a simple point. I do not think that the debate will be as exciting or fundamental as the wide-ranging debate on the ten-minute Bill that my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) wished to present.

The intention of the new clause is to remove any legal impediment to the operation of pre-clearance arrangements. As hon. Members who served on the Standing Committee will know, the new clause is related to clause 7, which makes it possible for additional services to be provided against payment at the request of port operators or carriers. One of the most important of these services is likely to be the process known as pre-clearance. It involves immigration officers travelling abroad so that United Kingdom immigration control procedures can be completed either at the port of embarkation or during the journey to this country.

Such arrangements have featured for many years at certain cross-Channel ports and at Southampton for generations of liners, latterly restricted to the QE2. But as clause 7 holds open the possibility of the extension of such arrangements into wholly new areas, we think it right that we should formalise the position on the face of the statute. That is what the new clause will do.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will undoubtedly know that the Standing Committee on the Bill met for about 62 hours. During its deliberations, the Minister for Sport referred in passing to these arrangements. Although I accept that it is not without precedent for a Government to introduce a new clause on Report, it seems unusual that the Minister did not see fit to bring forward the new clause in Committee. I am sure that this would not be regarded as a welcome precedent.

Surely the Standing Committee should have been given the opportunity to consider the new clause in detail and to question the Minister about its background. Perhaps before he proceeds with his speech he will explain why he did not present the new clause in Committee rather than here.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I do not think that that is a point of order or a matter for me, but perhaps it is a point for debate which the hon. Gentleman might raise when subsequently he seeks to catch my eye.

Mr. Renton: I agree with the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on one thing. We did sit for 62 hours in Standing Committee; it seemed an interminable length of time to most of us, particularly on the Government side. I hope that I can move the new clause, and that perhaps the House will pass it, in not much more time than the hon. Gentleman took in his intervention.

It may be helpful if I summarise briefly why we wish to look at possible ways of expanding the operation of the pre-clearance approach into new areas. We must realise that congestion at our major air terminals, which is already heavy at peak periods, is likely to get worse as international passenger movements increase. Congestion and delays have been notably helped at Gatwick and at Healthrow by the introduction, about a year ago, of visit visas for five countries, three on the Indian sub-continent and two in Africa, but there remains fierce competition for the early morning arrival slots. This can lead, as hon. Members on both sides of the House know, to the near-simultaneous arrival of a very large number of passengers which the immigration service is extremely pressed to clear within a reasonable period.

Pre-clearance, particularly for north Atlantic traffic arriving at Heathrow and Gatwick in the early morning, has been shown in a pilot scheme that we ran last year to be a way of mitigating some of the difficulties and delays that result. It also proved to be to the liking of both passengers and carrying companies. I stress, however, that such pre-clearance, if requested by the airlines, could be carried out as well at Delhi, Dhaka and Islamabad, as it has been at Kennedy airport.

However, it is only right that this kind of special service should be provided against payment by the organisation that requests it. Clause 7 provides for that. I make it clear

[Mr. Renton]

to the House that pre-clearance will not be imposed on any port operator or company, and will be introduced only at the request of one or the other.

In relation to the practicalities of operating a system of pre-clearance, I stress that in a scheme involving, say, the pre-clearance of transatlantic passengers at Kennedy airport in New York, the immigration officer concerned will have the ability only to grant, and not to refuse, leave to enter. Where he concludes that refusal of leave is the appropriate course, that will take place only on arrival in the United Kingdom. Of course, where a passenger presenting himself for pre-clearance is found to have inadequate documentation—for example, a visa national may not have a visa—it would be appropriate for the immigration officer to point out our requirement and, if the warning is not heeded, advise the carrying company before departure. Allowing a passenger to board in those circumstances and then imposing a penalty on the carrier under the Immigration (Carriers Liability) Act on the passenger's arrival in the United Kingdom, would rightly be considered unfair treatment by the company involved.

5 pm

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): Would a carrier that avails itself of this service be able to advertise the fact that it had been granted the service? Would it be safe to advertise generally, or would that be done merely for occasional flights or a series of flights?

Mr. Renton: I thank my hon. Friend for asking that question. Once the service has been provided at the request of the carrier and the appropriate charge has been agreed with the Home Office and the immigration service, I see no reason why the carrier should not advertise. I think that some carriers would do just that, because they would regard it as an extra service to their customers.

The main point of the new clause is that it will apply to people who are examined by an immigration officer, either abroad or during their journey to the United Kingdom. At that time they would have the stamp placed in their passport or other travel document. It will make it possible for the leave to enter granted to such people to take effect immediately on their arrival in this country.

This is not a major new clause. It breaks no new ground, but taken with clause 7, it will enable us to use the resources of the immigration service more effectively, which I am always most anxious to do. The existence of a system of pre-clearance can bring with it benefits for all concerned, and it seems likely that the next few years will bring interesting developments in this direction. The new clause takes account of such developments, and I commend it to the House.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston-upon-Hull, West): The Opposition have listened carefully to what the Minister said about pre-clearance. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) said, we regret the fact that we did not have the opportunity to debate the matter in Committee in the way that we would have liked. We have reached the Report stage now, and there has been very little time to debate the matter or to consult trade unions and others who could be affected by the developments. Many of us are still uncertain about how this will grow and be extended, and what will be the terms and conditions of those working in the immigration service. Many of them are port-based workers, and it seems that their role will change very much.

I understand that some of the people involved are worried because they believe that they will move from a port-based operation and become more like aircrew, working on a rota basis and travelling around the world. The scheme will affect many people working in the industry. For this reason, we would have liked more time to consider the matter. Perhaps the Minister will tell us why he did not bring this new clause forward before the Report stage. I cannot understand why he has left it so late. Is it because of sloppy drafting, or is it because he thought of the new clause late in the day?

The effect of the proposal seems to be that immigration officers will be drafted to various parts of the world, where they will clear passengers at ports of departure, or during flights and sea passages. As the Minister said, the point of the provision is to overcome some of the problems of queues, which we have all experienced at some of our major ports, especially at Heathrow airport. As we all know, during peak periods queues create great difficulties at Heathrow. There is tremendous congestion and there are difficulties in getting trolleys. People cannot get their baggage quickly. It is a shambles there, and something has to be done to improve the position.

We have some further worries about pre-clearance. We might end up with a three-tier immigration service. The Minister said that the airlines of the relevant countries may make an application to carry out pre-clearance work. We shall see how that develops. Our worry is that one tier of the immigration service could be dealing with the visa countries, which, as we all know, are almost exclusively black Commonwealth countries.

There might be a second tier of non-visa countries, which are predominantly white, and, of course, there will be the super-privileged countries, whose carriers will be able to use these facilities. This category embraces countries such as Australia and the United States.

It is important to get it on record that we believe that it would be wrong for the sort of service to which the Minister referred to be arranged in such a way that it was available only for white people, with a second-class arrangement for black people. We are also worried that there could be some losers if there were a multi-tier immigration service.

Can the Minister tell us how the fees will be recovered? I am not sure how the scheme will work in detail, but presumably when an immigration officer is asked to go overseas to carry out pre-clearance work, his passage fee and living expenses will be met, as well as his salary and pension and all the other things that go with that. How will the charges be spread? Will they be wholly met by the airline, or by the applicant concerned? How will these services operate for Bangladesh and other countries in the Indian sub-continent?

I want to touch on the working conditions of immigration officers. As I have mentioned, we have picked up their concern that they will be expected to work on a rota basis, rather like airline cabin crews. What discussions has the Minister had with the Civil Service unions, and are they happy with the arrangements? If the arrangement is extended substantially, it will involve moving a considerable number of people around the world. Does that mean that staff will be diverted from their existing

work to provide the new services and that the establishment in such places as Lunar house may fall, with a further deterioration in services?

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Minister's desire to clear up the delays in the posts abroad is in direct contrast to the chaos and crisis in Lunar house, where over 200,000 letters are lying unopened? The new clause may well result in vital members of the service at Lunar house being diverted abroad, leading to further chaos and crisis in Croydon.

Mr. Randall: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. Unquestionably, there is a shambles there. It is a public scandal that an Administration should operate in such a way that 200,000 letters are unopened. I understand that letters that arrived in November 1987 are only now being opened.

Mr. Vaz: It is disgraceful.

Mr. Randall: It is indeed an appalling situation.

If the new clause is passed, what will happen to staffing levels? If we take staff away to provide immigration services for the super-privileged, those who rely on services from Lunar house may lose. I should like an assurance that the Minister has taken that point on board and that we will not be providing services for the rich white traveller at the expense of the poor black traveller.

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman admits that many Home Office employees are working very effectively and with great dedication in many uncomfortable parts of the world as entry clearance officers. We are not asking immigration officers who go abroad to carry out a very strange and different job.

Mr. Randall: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point. Nevertheless, although I am sure that he is right, we are discussing a substantial change in working conditions for many people who have started jobs in the immigration service assuming that they will be port-based, rather than having high-flying, jet-setting lifestyles. That may not be conducive to the interests of some people. It is possible to be frivolous about this matter, but it is important to establish whether the Minister has considered it and has had full consultations with the trade unions to find out whether they are happy. I have picked up some feedback which suggests that there are reservations.

I also fear that the move towards pre-clearance immigration procedures may be the first step towards the privatisation of the immigration service. In that event, immigration officers would be moved around the world at the behest of the airlines, which would, in fact, be the customers. It does not require much imagination to see how the involvement of an airline in the immigration services could be extended to checking documentation before people enter the aircraft. They already do some of that work, but where is the limit? It appears that the Home Office would have an opportunity to divest itself of those responsibilities and sell off that part of Government activity to the private sector.

I should like the Minister to comment on those points, which represent our main worries about the new clause.

5.15 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): I rise briefly to welcome the aims of the new clause. Anyone who has arrived at Heathrow or Gatwick in the early hours after an overnight flight and seen the appalling queues of people trying to go through immigration must welcome any proposals that will make arrival for overseas visitors less time-consuming and frustrating. No doubt some of us have experience of arriving in foreign countries and having to spend a good deal of time trying to go through immigration. I have occasionally taken at least an hour to get through immigration in Dallas, Washington and certainly Miami, so I have some idea of what is involved.

Like the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall), I feel that the Minister could have given us rather more detail about how the arrangements will operate. Rather than being based in this country dealing with the problem, immigration officers will be based in airports overseas. The Minister told us that the system would not be forced on airline operators against their will, but would apply only where they themselves had requested it. Presumably, that might mean immigration officers being available for perhaps one flight a day, or a couple of flights a week, from one city by one airline.

If, as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West suggested, staff are to be moved from this country to do the job, there must be a question mark over the economics if they are not fully utilised, because a limited number of operators take the opportunity presented by the new clause. If, on the other hand, the Minister intends staff already based at the embassy or the high commission overseas to deal with the problem, they will presumably be taken off work that they are currently doing. Either way, some staffing costs overseas must be involved.

All that the Minister has so far offered is a superficially attractive arrangement—which I certainly welcome. As we had no opportunity of exploring it in any depth in Committee—we only heard about it, without having the form of the new clause before us—it would be helpful if the Minister now spelled out, in rather more detail, how it will work.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Unlike the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), I have not had the advantage of arriving day in, day out, at Heathrow airport from such prestigious places as Dallas and Miami. I must belong to the wrong travel club. Perhaps there is an SDP travel club that makes such experiences rather easier.

I must say that I see some sense in the Minister's proposal. What worries me is that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) pointed out, we shall have a first-class and a second-class service. I can see Pan Am and TWA advertising, and having their own special terminals and immigration offices to make it easier for people to come from, say, the United States. I am not against any sensible kind of clearance, as long as there is an equal standard of performance for all travellers.

Unlike the hon. Member for Woolwich, I tend to arrive on the ferry from Boulogne, rather than flying from Dallas to Heathrow. I find, however, that the immigration reception at Dover is often disgracefully long. It is possible to sit in a car for half an hour trying to get through the passport facilities. That does not give a very good impression of this country. When travelling from one European country to another, it is possible to get across to customs within seconds. Often, no one wants to look at the passports. However, arriving back at Dover, even a United Kingdom citizen has to queue for half an hour along with other EEC citizens, waiting for clearance. If the

[Mr. John Fraser]

system is to operate, let it be extended to the Channel ports to make clearance easier not only for overseas citizens, but for our own citizens.

Mr. Hanley: Will the hon. Gentleman admit that the delays caused by customs and excise purposes are far greater than those caused by immigration?

Mr. Fraser: I have made a special note of this matter. I keep saying, "Next time I get the chance to raise it in the House of Commons, I shall do so." Well, now is my chance. The delays are not caused by Customs and Excise. It is passports that cause the often long delays at Dover. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but I have made a special note of the fact. I have kept meaning to mention it, and I am mentioning it now.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, West mentioned the absolutely disgraceful situation at Lunar house. I was on the telephone to Lunar house a few days ago, and my hon. Friend's comments were confirmed. Letters are only now being opened that arrived in November 1987. That can lead to the most extraordinary problems. The first thing that the Government should do about that is to get out of Lunar house all the applications that have been made for registration for United Kingdom citizenship.

Great teams of people have opened envelopes for privatisation ventures. I do not see why some of them should not be temporarily recruited at least to open those envelopes at Lunar house. When the Government were selling shares in British Petroleum, British Gas and British Telecom, millions of applications were opened within 24 hours. Why is it that, when people apply for leave to continue their stay in the United Kingdom and send their letters to Lunar house, they must wait three or four months for their letters to be opened, as opposed to those who applied for British Gas shares and who found that their envelopes were opened within 24 hours? That is exactly the point that my hon. Friend made from the Front Bench.

I should like to give one illustration of the sort of hardship that is being caused. Someone I know made an application to Lunar house to continue his stay in the United Kingdom. He has been here as a business man for some time. It is normal procedure to send in accounts and to ask for a further stay of 12 months. He made the application, but his wife happened to be out of the country in Vancouver, where she had had a baby. She wants to get back into this country to join her husband.

The husband has made his application, but because his wife is coming back to the United Kingdom to join him as a dependant, it is not possible for her to obtain a dependant's visa in Canada, unless the person upon whom she is dependent has cleared his immigration status in the United Kingdom. That woman has been waiting with her child for three months to get back into the United Kingdom on an application which is bound to be approved. Her passport is now running out in Canada, as is her visa. She is likely to be considered an illegal immigrant there, liable to arrest—with her young child—simply because somebody at Lunar house cannot open the envelope.

That is just one example of the many problems that are occurring. The Minister must address his mind to the difficulty about mail at Lunar house. He must realise what a mess that is making of immigration control. As he knows, as long as one gets an application into Lunar house before leave to be in the United Kingdom expires, and once the envelope is delivered in Croydon, leave is automatically continued. There are many people whose leave is being continued, sometimes against their will. Some people, whose passports are in unopened envelopes at Lunar house, would like to get their passports back so that they can leave the country. However, not even they can escape because it is not possible to identify any case unless one sends the letter by recorded delivery and marks the number of the case on the outside of the envelope.

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): Although to a great extent I share the hon. Gentleman's feelings, I think that in fairness he would agree that my hon. Friend the Minister of State has acknowledged the problems at Lunar house, which have been caused almost as a direct result of the Government's advertisement of the means by which potential citizens could take up their rights before the deadline—which I believe was 31 December 1987.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that, during the debate last month, my hon. Friend the Minister of State made several positive efforts toward reducing that backlog and increasing the efficiency at Lunar house. Those of us who served in Committee on the Bill recognised that there was a problem. We have not been talking in a partisan way; we have been talking——

Mr. Vaz: The hon. Gentleman did not say anything in Committee.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: From a sedentary position, the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) is making an entirely unfair accusation. I shall give way to him, so that he can make a statement publicly.

Mr. Vaz *rose*——

Mr. Fraser *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We do not have interventions on interventions.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: My hon. Friend the Minister of State has dealt humanely and efficiently with all the cases that I have taken up with him on behalf of the nearly 10 per cent. of my constituents who are immigrants. Where there was any doubt about any application, he has always exercised his discretion in favour of the applicant.

Mr. Fraser: I was not intending to make a partisan speech—I never apologise for making such a speech—I was simply trying to be helpful. I want the Minister to operate the same kind of efficiency at Lunar house as Littlewoods operates in Liverpool and as Rothschild and Barings operate in relation to privatisation issues—to open the envelopes and sort the letters so that the registration applications can be put in a separate pile because people are not greatly inconvenienced by a delay in their registration; although I concede that there will be priority cases.

On the whole, however, applicants will not be greatly embarrassed by a delay in registration. That would enable the staff at Lunar house, who on the whole are pretty devoted, to get on with the essential job of clearing the backlog of immigration applications that rests there. If the Minister does not do that, he will bring his Department further into disrepute, and, what is more, will create a great deal of unpopularity, frustration and anger with his own staff who operate in Lunar house.

Let us give the people who make legitimate applications to Croydon the same privileges as people who post their pools or apply for shares.

Mr. Hanley: I welcome the new clause. I am surprised that any Opposition Members should seek to create some sort of synthetic indignation in trying to oppose it, albeit with their voices and not their votes.

The new clause not only facilitates travellers coming to this country—for that reason, I should have thought that the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) would welcome it because it means that clearance is that much easier before a person comes here—but it reduces the pressure at our ports of entry. I should have thought that those who claim to represent trade union members would welcome that as reducing the work load and pressure on their members at our ports of entry. It seems an extremely sensible idea. I hope that it will catch on and that many carriers will avail themselves of the excellent opportunity.

While talking about Lunar house, one should remind hon. Members that Labour Members voted against an initiative that my hon. Friend the Minister of State put forward to reduce the cases at Lunar house by about 40,000 per year. Those clauses benefited five times more people than they hindered. Therefore, I find it surprising that Opposition Members should harp on this matter when we know full well that my hon. Friend is facing this serious problem constructively in trying to review the manning levels at Lunar house.

Mr. Madden: The number of questions that have been asked in this short debate and the number of bits of paper that are fluttering towards the Minister from the civil servants' Box highlight the fact that he would have been much wiser to table the new clause in Committee. That would have enabled all the questions that have been asked today to be put then and would have enabled the Minister to give some explanations.

I should like to ask three questions. I agree entirely with hon. Members who have said that the inevitable consequence of the pre-entry clearance arrangements will be the establishment of another category of entry. It will be primarily for white people and although in some cases it will be for black and Asian people, in all cases it will be for people who are well off, because clearly there will be a fee for arrangement. Therefore, only the well-off will be able to take advantage of it.

My first question is, what happens to the predominantly white and in all cases well-off passenger who seeks to pay a fee to get a "grant to leave" entry stamp in his or her passport, but does not get such a stamp put in his or her passport overseas? The carriers — the airlines—may well refuse to take such a person because she or he has not got the "grant to leave" put in his or her passport. However, it would be a breach of natural justice if they did that, because they would be presupposing that the passenger would not be given a grant to leave when he or she arrived in the United Kingdom.

I assume that the Minister will turn his face against any right of appeal—he turns his face against all rights of appeal—and I therefore ask him what will happen to a passenger who is refused a grant to leave under the pre-entry clearance arrangements and therefore a seat by the airline. I see the piece of paper going to the civil servants' Box, so I hope that by the time I have finished my remarks the Minister will be able to answer me.

5.30 pm

Secondly, what will be the estimated annual cost of the arrangements—in net and gross terms—to the British taxpayer? I assume that the Home Office has made estimates to ascertain the revenue implications of the arrangements. It would be very helpful if we could be given some idea of those implications.

Thirdly, what consultations have taken place with organisations representing immigration officers about the terms and conditions under which immigration officers will be expected to fulfil their responsibilities under the pre-entry clearance arrangements? Will the same requirements apply to those responsibilities as currently apply to transfer directions to immigration officers? I understand that immigration officers cannot refuse transfer directions and that a refusal to comply with such a direction is a disciplinary matter. Will the Minister assure us that refusal to accept a direction to participate in the proposed overseas pre-entry clearance arrangements will not be regarded as a disciplinary matter? What consultations have taken place over the terms and conditions that will apply under the new arrangements?

I agree with my hon. Friends who have criticised the present administrative chaos at Lunar house. Home Office Ministers talk as though there was something surprising about the large number of applications for registration. They had seven years to plan for those applications. They had almost a year to plan for them in considerable detail. We know that they did their best to keep the arrangements secret and to dissuade people from applying, but it is brass-necked of the Department and the Minister of State then to keep telling us that the words across the entrance of the Home Office are, "We are here to please."

The Minister says that he wants to provide a good consumer service and that that is the objective of the Home Office, yet customers who are being asked to apply for registration and pay £60 for it are being kept waiting month upon month while their applications are dealt with. It is an administrative disgrace that the Government did not appoint sufficient staff or make sufficient resources available to deal expeditiously with all the applications that they expected months and months ago at Lunar house. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser). I hope the Minister will take this opportunity to explain what action is being taken to deal with the chaos at Lunar house.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I understand that the new clause was not discussed in Committee and that we are therefore discussing something new. I do not want to make a long speech, but I should tell the Minister that at one stage in my life I had great difficulty with immigration authorities—the immigration authorities of the United States of America.

I happened to win a scholarship to the United States. I made my application, and everything seemed fine, but then the authorities discovered that in my youth I had been a member of the Communist party. I received a letter saying that I would not be allowed into the United States of America—luckily, before I arrived there. Then I had to get, as I put it, a letter from the holy ghost. I needed a letter from the theological college at Birkenhead, at which I lectured fairly regularly, and the general secretary of the TUC had to vouch for me as a fine upstanding young man who was no longer a member of the Communist party. I

[Mr. Eric S. Heffer]

was damned annoyed, because I thought that Communists or anyone else should have the right to go to the United States of America.

I make that point because I am worried about the provision that an individual who gets his card stamped and comes to this country can be refused entry if he is examined and an immigration officer decides that he may not be the person he purports to be. What happens at that stage? Surely the stamp on the passport should not be given before a person leaves unless it is absolutely clear that he is the individual concerned. Surely that can be ascertained from the photograph and so on. The provision could lead to all sorts of difficulties.

I am very much in favour of a provision that speeds up entry into this country. I have had many difficulties with the present arrangement. For example, my wife has a cousin who is a Baptist minister, responsible for quite a large circuit in the south of England. Two young Baptists from Poland came to stay with him. The House has no idea of the difficulties that they encountered. I might add that they were white. Imagine the difficulties that they would have had if they had been black. A young girl in my constituency has a Moroccan boy friend. He proposed to visit for only two weeks, but nevertheless there were letters and everything else.

I will welcome the new clause if it helps to get people in more quickly. We will send immigration officers abroad to examine the individuals concerned, and if they are satisfied and stamp the card, the individual will come in quickly. No one objects to that. It is fine; it is an improvement. However, I should like some further explanation of what will happen if the immigration authorities here decide that the person seeking entry may not be the person whom he purports to be. I should like a safeguard, so that if the individual concerned knows people in this country, he will have the right to get in touch with them immediately and appeal to them for help without further difficulty. Such a safeguard is not included in the new clause, which says nothing about appeals or the right of the individual. That is an important matter.

Mr. Renton: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. [HON. MEMBERS: "He has finished."] I did not realise that the hon. Gentleman had finished his speech. I shall answer his question in my reply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Has the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) concluded his speech?

Mr. Heffer: Yes, I have.

Mr. Vaz: I should like to speak briefly and raise two matters with the Minister.

First, we welcome any proposals that will result in a reduction in delays in the immigration service. We are concerned about the delays that have occurred at Lunar house in Croydon. I visited Lunar house last Monday and saw a number of the 200,000 letters that have remained unopened there. The Minister visited Lunar house on Friday of last week. I hope that he will tell the House what he saw on his visit and what proposals he has to reduce the delays there.

Secondly, the Minister is prepared to send immigration officers all over the world to reduce delays. We know that he is prepared to send his immigration officers to Leicester, because we understand that a meeting is taking place there this evening at which an address will be given by five senior officials of the Home Office. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), who is present, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) and I were not informed of that visit until 11 February. That was 24 hours after I had tabled a question asking the Minister why immigration officials were visiting Leicester without its Members of Parliament being informed. A better approach would have been to keep the five senior officials at Croydon and put them to work opening those 200,000 letters.

Mr. Renton: I shall answer the question raised by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), but first I should like to thank him and my hon. Friends the Members for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) and Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) for their support for the proposal in the new clause.

The new clause deals only with giving immigration officers, in laymen's terms, new powers to tackle pre-clearance matters. It does not concern appeals, which we shall discuss shortly. We carried out a pre-clearance trial at Kennedy airport at the end of last year. I should stress to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) that no one has to go through pre-clearance. It is a voluntary operation for passengers.

Those who went through pre-clearance at Kennedy airport had their passports and landing cards stamped with the suitable stamp for entry into the United Kingdom. When they entered the United Kingdom, they were required to show the passport and the landing card with the appropriate stamp on it so that the immigration officer here could link the two and ensure that the person carrying the passport, by virtue of the landing card, was the person concerned. That was the system used for the trial. Whether we shall use it if we set it up more generally remains to be seen.

I should stress to hon. Members who have queried the matter that this is only an enabling clause. We have not had discussions with trade unions representing the immigration service, and as yet it has not been fully costed. We intend that this operation should wash its face completely, but we did not think it appropriate to cost it until we had received agreement to this enabling power from the House.

Those who say that we did not discuss the matter in Committee, such as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall), are wrong. We discussed it in Committee—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes we did. We did not discuss this clause, because it was not tabled, but we discussed the principle of pre-clearance entry during the debate on 21 January. I accept that hon. Members were running out of steam by that time. They had gone on for 62 hours and were not very interested in this process.

5.45 pm

We discussed the matter in relation to clause 7, and I shall quote two of the remarks that I made during the debate. I said:

> "Since then, we have received requests for additional immigration officers from commercial operators who will be prepared to pay for an enhanced service. Additional services might be provided when an operator seeks a greater number of immigration officers on the control at particular times and places than would be justified by the overall traffic pattern, or when an operator seeks special control arrangements for a particular flight."

That was a broad outline of what we had in mind. I continued:

"But in order to introduce those arrangements on a more permanent and routine basis it is necessary to extend the powers of immigration officers. We shall table an amendment at a later stage to facilitate pre-clearance arrangements. It is right that the Committee should be made aware of that potential arrangement." — [*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 21 January 1988; c. 724-25.]

I appreciate that the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) and the hon. Member for Walton will not be aware of that matter because they did not serve on the Committee. I would not expect them to have read the minutes of our Committee proceedings. For those hon. Members who served on the Committee to pretend that they did not know that we had this in mind is to stand the facts on their head. It would be far better to agree that, in broad terms, this is a good idea and that it is intended to facilitate movement through our airports to prevent congestion.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West referred to a shambles at Heathrow. It must be encouraging for immigration officers who work at terminals 2 and 3 to hear the Labour party's Front-Bench spokesman use those words. He should at least give credit for the fact that the shambles is very much less now——

Mr. Vaz: It is the Government's fault.

Mr. Renton: No. There has been less of a shambles since we introduced the visa system for countries of the Indian sub-continent. Anyone who has visited terminals 2 and 3 will know that that is so.

Mr. Randall: Is the Minister aware that since the visa system was introduced there have been no improvements for people going through Heathrow or in the number of people detained there? The Minister must recognise that there is a shambles at Heathrow. It is a modern airport, providing supposedly modern facilities. If he accepts what is happening at Heathrow, his appreciation of an effective airport must be limited.

Mr. Renton: This is straying rather far from the purpose of the new clause. The hon. Gentleman may fly down from Hull in a local British aeroplane. I do not know how he is treated when he arrives at Heathrow. Since I took over my responsibilities I have visited Heathrow many times. I have visited terminals 2 and 3 during the busy periods of the day. I know that the difficulties with congestion—immigration officers will bear this out—are nothing like what they were in the autumn of 1986 when we introduced the visa arrangements. The hon. Gentleman should visit Heathrow when the trans-continental aeroplanes land, and he would see the truth of what I say.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Recently, I visited a terminal and found a queue of people waiting to enter. I was told that some of them had had to wait for over two hours because there were not enough immigration officers. The amount of time that people had to wait depended on the number of jumbo aircraft arriving at the time. Nothing could be done about it. It was entirely the Government's fault, because there were not enough immigration officers. It was a shambolic chaos. It is a disgrace that visitors have to wait in such queues. Matters have not improved, because the rules have been used as an excuse for keeping down the number of immigration officers, instead of improving arrangements for our visitors.

Mr. Renton: I am surprised that the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), who is normally reasonable and accurate, should talk in that manner. What he said about queues at terminals 2 and 3 is incorrect. If there are delays of two hours during the difficult early-morning slots, I can only say to the hon. and learned Gentleman that they would have been much worse in the autumn of 1986. That, in any event, is precisely why we are introducing these arrangements in clause 7 and in the new clause. That is the last time that I shall give way.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister take it from me that we have received a number of reports that people at terminal 4—I notice that he has not referred to this terminal—are regularly required to sleep on the floor overnight because of continued delays since the introduction of visas? I ask again: what will happen to passengers who volunteer for the pre-clearance arrangement and are not granted leave to enter? Will they have rights of appeal against a refusal by a carrier to bring them into the United Kingdom?

Mr. Renton: I stress again that this system has had only one trial experiment. This is an enabling clause and we have not yet gone into lengthy discussions with the trade unions or carriers about it.

I pointed out two things to the hon. Gentleman a few moments ago. First, no one is required to go through pre-clearance—it is a voluntary business. If someone went through pre-clearance and was refused by the immigration officer, I assume that the officer would think it appropriate to point that out to the carrier, because the carrier would not want to have to pay a potential fine of £1,000. There would be no appeal in this country in that circumstance. In a country in which a visa was required, however, the applicant would have every reason to go back to our consulate to find out what had gone wrong and to discuss the matter with the immigration officer. This is, as I said, a voluntary business.

Have there been discussions with the trade unions? Not yet. This is an enabling power, and pre-clearance will take place only if requested by the operator and if the immigration service agrees. If the House agrees with the clause and we go ahead with it, we shall discuss any arrangements with the trade unions before they are introduced.

To hon. Members who asked about costs, I say clearly that the intention will be to recover the full costs, including those of the staff involved in operating a pre-clearance system. In each case it will be for the carrying company that requests the service to decide whether the charges we will require it to pay are reasonable or acceptable. Our intention will be to recover the full costs. The carrier will then have to decide whether it wants to go ahead with pre-clearance. That also answers the point made by the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), who has now left the Chamber.

To answer the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West, who asked why we did not mention this in Committee — we did. I have already quoted from *Hansard* to show that. To go further than that, the trial in New York was conducted last October. The evaluation was not completed until after Christmas. The policy decision on whether to go forward with this was not decided until the trial had been evaluated, when the new clause had to be drafted. That is why I gave the Committee

[Mr. Renton]

a clear idea of our intent on the matter, so that there should be no surprise when we brought the matter before the House on Report.

The hon. Member for Bradford, West implied that the pre-clearance arrangement might have something to do with the financial status of the passenger. If he meant that, he was not correct. The service will be provided at the request of the carrier only. The passenger will not pay, and that will be the end of the matter. As I have already said, the passenger does not have to present himself for pre-clearance—he can decline to do so.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West said that he had heard some rumbles from the trade union side of the immigration service to the effect that it was worried about this provision. The immigration service has an active trade union side—that is good—but I have heard no such rumbles. If we go ahead with this, we shall consider and discuss it in full with the immigration service.

The question of the delays at Lunar house was raised by the hon. Members for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), for Bradford, West and for Norwood. The hon. Member for Norwood raised the issue in moderate terms. Perhaps, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will allow me to deal with that matter straight away. I want to put a few points about it on the record.

First, it is typical of the hon. Member for Leicester, East that the first thing he did in the debate was to get up and talk about the chaos at Lunar house. He asked my Department to arrange a visit for him to Lunar house on Monday 10 days ago. We arranged it at considerable expense of management time. He arrived 45 minutes late, spent only one and a half hours there and the first thing we knew of it was that he had left and told the home affairs correspondent of *The Independent* about the chaos at Lunar house and about how we are proposing to privatise the operation.

What did I hear at Lunar house on Friday? I heard great concern from the trade union side about whether the remarks made by the hon. Member for Leicester, East were justified. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that that was a helpful way to deal with the problems at Lunar house, which certainly exist, I suggest that it would have been much more helpful—I can see the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West nodding in agreement with what I am saying——

Mr. Janner: I am agreeing with my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz).

Mr. Renton: The hon. Member for Leicester, East must be an uncomfortable neighbour for the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West.

Mr. Vaz *rose*——

Mr. Janner: He makes a change from Bruinvels.

Mr. Renton: "Bring back Bruinvels; all is forgiven," is the cry from the House, I am sure.

I do not often speak about my meetings with hon. Members. In fact, I make it a habit not to. However, I must say that the hon. Member for Leicester, East came to see me the following day about a constituency case. It would have been more helpful and appropriate, given that my Department had arranged his visit for him, at his request, the day before, if he had talked to me about the difficulties and asked me about our proposals for solving them, rather than running—publicity-seeking, as always—to a national newspaper to air his worries.

Mr. Vaz: The Minister was in Committee for more than 62 hours. On every occasion during every sitting of the Committee this matter was raised with him. It is high time that the matter came before the public, rather than being covered up by the Minister and his officials at the Home Office. What proposals does he have to end the delays? He should tell us that, rather than indulging in a personal attack on another hon. Member.

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman's lack of courtesy is typical of him and disturbing to the staff at Lunar house, who did their best to show him everything that he wanted to see on Monday.

I come now to our proposals and to a little background. I fully accept that the delays that are experienced by applicants at Lunar house are unacceptable, and I shall detail the steps being taken to remedy them.

I stress to all hon. Members that the backlog is largely due to the great surge in applications for registration for citizenship that we received in the last two months of last year, particularly in December. In 1986, we received 37,900 applications for registration, and 19,000 for naturalisation. We estimate that in 1987 we received six times that number of registrations for citizenship, and three times as many applications for naturalisation. That came to a total of 291,000 applications, in contrast to the 57,000 that we had received the year before.

It is ironic that the Labour party, which castigated us throughout the autumn of last year for not advertising the deadline for registration well enough, should now castigate us—by implication—for having advertised it too well. We put out many advertisements and forms, and as a result we received a large number of applications.

Before I detail the specific steps that we will take, I hope that the House, including the hon. Member for Leicester, East, will pay tribute to the magnificent efforts of the staff in the immigration and nationality department at Lunar house in coping with the huge influx of citizenship applications before the deadline on 31 December last year.

6 pm

The staff worked under sustained pressure, including long hours of overtime before Christmas and between Christmas and the deadline of 31 December. They dealt with many thousands of last-minute requests for application forms, and a very large number of requests for advice about citizenship status in letters and from personal callers. But the scale of the increased flow of work is so large that those measures, and the efforts of the available staff to serve the department's customers, would be insufficient to process the cases through the initial stages—sending acknowledgements, accounting for fees paid and so on—within a reasonable time within the present method of working. Therefore, after detailed discussions with the trade union side, we have introduced, as an emergency measure, a large-scale redeployment of staff to undertake those initial stages.

Mr. Madden: Ha!

Mr. Renton: The hon. Member for Bradford, West laughs, but I should have thought that he would be pleased. However, as always, he is a constant surprise to me.

About 160 staff have been redeployed from a significant part of their normal duties to open unsorted applications, to account for the fees, and to acknowledge receipt. As part of this process we are returning to applicants any passports and other documents that were submitted with applications. This is to avoid the inconvenience to applicants of their being deprived of travel documents—I appreciate the inconvenience that that causes — while the applications are under consideration.

We are also going to recruit more full-time staff for the post room, registry and nationality division, and we are carrying out an urgent examination of the means and resources that will be required to process the applications in a reasonable time. As I have said—it was especially acknowledged by the hon. Member for Norwood—the primary objective at this stage is to acknowledge applications as soon as possible and to return documents and passports submitted with applications. It is my hope that these processes will be complete within several weeks.

Mr. Vaz *rose——*

Mr. Renton: I shall not give way to the hon. Member any more.

I assure the House that if we bring in such arrangements for pre-clearance it will not be at the expense of any standard arrangements or standard level of service at United Kingdom ports and airports. We will do it simply as a service to any airline that requests it, no matter where a flight may have started from. Therefore, it will not be a service for whites rather than for blacks. It will be available for anyone who wishes it, provided that the request comes from an airline, we agree a fee and we are able to work out the details. I believe that these are thoroughly sensible arrangements, and I commend the new clause to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 1

VARIATION OF LEAVE: APPEAL PROCEDURES

'In subsection (2) of section 19 of the Immigration Act 1971 all the words after "based" shall be omitted.'.—*[Mr. Randall.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Randall: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

This matter was discussed at length in Committee. There was considerable concern about the way in which the Minister attempted to describe how certain procedures, particularly those associated with variation of leave, worked. As a result of the dispute in Committee, we felt it necessary to introduce the new clause.

The purpose of the clause is to give the appellate authorities powers that are outside the existing rules. This would enable the authorities, during variation of leave appeals, to take compassionate circumstances into account. On numerous occasions in Committee—I could present all the *Official Report* quotations to the House, but I shall not do so because we have a lot of business to get through—the Minister described how he thought the arrangements for the appeal procedures worked. Frankly, I believe that the Minister either failed to understand how the system worked, or he was given bad advice.

Without doubt, great concern was created by the Minister's inability to get things right. On 28 January a letter was sent to the Minister from the general secretary of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, the director of the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service and the president of the Immigration Law Practitioners Association. The letter set out their deep concern over the effects of clause 4 and said the Minister's justification for its introduction was based upon a fallacy.

The Minister suggested that there was no reason to think that when deportation cases were heard compassionate circumstances would no longer be taken into account. He said that during earlier stages of variation of leave appeals such matters were fully taken into account. We now know that that argument is utter tripe. The people who are involved with immigration matters have categorically demonstrated that the Minister is wrong. It is clear that the Minister does not know what he is talking about. I believe that clause 4 should be withdrawn because of the way in which it removes certain basic rights from people when appeal procedures are operated.

In Committee on 17 December, the Minister said:

"The decision to refuse further leave to remain, and the hearing of the appeal against that decision, provide the proper opportunity for compassionate factors to be taken into account . . . That is the point in the appeal procedure when facts, merit and compassionate circumstances should be considered."

Mr. Renton: That is right.

Mr. Randall: Let me prove why I believe that the Minister has got it wrong.

In Committee we talked about what happens in practice. We know that section 19(2) of the principal Act precludes the appellate authorities from making any decisions on matters outside the immigration rules that involve compassionate circumstances. Therefore, the appellate authorities are forbidden to make a decision involving compassionate circumstances.

I believe that the Minister recognised that, because he said:

"it is open to the adjudicator to take account of the compassionate circumstances of the case. When he regards the compassionate circumstances as compelling . . . he may, even while formally dismissing the appeal, recommend that the Home Secretary should exercise his discretion in the appellant's favour and allow him to remain."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 17 December 1987, c. 388-923.

In other words, an adjudicator who is compelled by the immigration rules to make a decision against an applicant may, if he or she chooses, temper that by recommending that the Home Secretary should exercise his discretion outside the immigration rules and allow the appellant to stay. The Minister acknowledges that the appellate authorities do not have a formal responsibility, although anyone can make recommendations. The crucial point on which the Minister's argument is so misleading is that representations are never made.

I have spoken to people in the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service who deal with such cases daily. One gentleman told me that in three years of case work he had come across one recommendation. I am surprised that the Minister is not aware of the reality.

There is only one means whereby that information can be conveyed to the Home Secretary, and that is on the determination of a case,. When the appellate authority reviews a case, it produces a determination which is sent to the Home Office and to all the agencies, which make

[Mr. Randall]

representations on behalf of the person concerned. Everyone is aware when a recommendation is made to the Home Secretary to take into account compassionate circumstances. Of course, the Minister, the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) who is grinning, and the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Malins) were party to that.

Mr. Renton: I shall deal with whether adjudicators make informal representations to the Home Secretary in my reply if I catch your eye, Mr. Speaker. However, I wish to make it clear to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) that there was no contradiction between what I said at column 391 of *Hansard* and what I said at a later sitting at column 759. Both those comments say precisely the same thing, at column 759 at greater length. At column 391, I said:

"The adjudicator may have to dismiss an appeal on the facts, but can, if he chooses, make a recommendation for compassionate consideration to the Secretary of State." — [*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 17 December 1987; c. 391.]

At column 759, I said:

"If he judges that the compassionate circumstances are such as to merit exceptional treatment, he can informally recommend to the Secretary of State that he should allow the person concerned to remain by the exercise of his discretion outside the immigration rules. Any such recommendations are considered seriously." — [*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 26 January 1988; c. 759.]

I stand by both those remarks. They fit each other and they are accurate.

Mr. Randall: The Minister knows that hon. Members and those involved in the provision of services to immigrants know that in Committee, he got it wrong. The Minister quotes parts of the *Official Report* where he was reading from a brief, but at other times he was freewheeling.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Croydon, North-West): Come on.

Mr. Randall: The hon. Gentleman speaks from a sedentary position, but he was not there. One can distinguish between the times when the Minister was speaking from a brief and when he was not. That is why we are so concerned about the way in which the Minister is dealing with these matters.

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman should be concerned. When I said in Committee that adjudicators could, if they dismissed an appeal, deal with compassionate circumstances through recommendations to the Secretary of State, the hon. Gentleman said that I was talking nonsense. That proved that he did not know the first thing about immigration. That was a statement from an Opposition spokesman new to his portfolio—within a week. He was saying that I did not know what I was talking about after I had served for years on the Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration. Now he must admit that he was wrong and that I was right.

6.15 pm

Mr. Randall: That is absolute nonsense. During a variation of appeal proceedings, compassionate circumstances are no part of any decision made by the appellate authority. That is a fact.

Mr. Hanley: It is official.

Mr. Randall: The hon. Gentleman says that it is official. It is not at all official. In reality, any of the members of the appellate authority could write whatever they wished on a determination. They could write that, if the case were to lead to deportation proceedings, they would recommend that the Home Secretary takes into account compassionate circumstances. However, in reality, they do not do that. The chief appellate officer has put it on record that he believes that the variation of appeal procedure is not the time and place to raise compassionate circumstances. He believes that they should be reviewed as part and parcel of the deportation procedure, which is a separate procedure, with different criteria.

First, the appellate authority may not, by virtue of the rules, make any decision taking into account such matters. Secondly, although anyone could recommend to the Home Secretary that, later on, compassionate circumstances might be taken into account if deportation is involved, in reality that is not done. That is a fact which has been substantiated to me by the people involved.

Mr. Hanley: It is hearsay.

Mr. Randall: The hon. Gentleman says that it is hearsay. Is he suggesting that because the chief appellate officer is saying what I am saying it is hearsay—when it is a comment by a man in that position?

The Minister cannot get away with it. He has suggested that compassionate circumstances are involved in the appeal procedures, and he used that argument to justify clause 4 and say that it would be acceptable. Clause 4 removes the appeal procedures from those who have been in the United Kingdom for fewer than seven years. The justification for doing that was that compassionate circumstances do not need to be taken into account at this stage because they will already have been taken into account. That is nonsense. It is a disgrace that the Minister did not make it perfectly clear. He has not done the proper research and made it clear that in Committee he was wrong.

I suggest that the Minister should admit that he was wrong and apologise from the Dispatch Box. If he admits that he did not understand what he was saying, or that he now understands what he is saying, he should support the new clause, which provides that compassionate circumstances should be taken into account and be made part and parcel of the decision-making process by the appellate authority. If the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes believes that that happens anyway, what is his reason for not voting for the new clause? Let us put into the statute what the hon. Gentleman and the Minister have said happens already. I suggest that they put their votes where their mouths are. This is a chance to test whether they genuinely support this idea.

I am confident that Conservative Members will fail to vote for the new clause, because they will do what their Whip says, and because, if they were to support the new clause they would be accepting that during variation, or even refusal to enter appeals, compassionate circumstances should be taken into account. Therefore, clause 4 will go on to the statute book when it should have been withdrawn by the Government because of the way in which it takes away basic rights of appeal. It is wrong, and it is a measure of how uncivilised and uncaring our society is.

To deport people without taking all the compassionate circumstances into account is deplored by Opposition Members, and that is why we believe that it is crucial that the House should support new clause 1. It is a good clause, which is worthy of support. If the Minister believes what he has said in the past, he too should support it. It seeks only to do what the Minister has claimed is already happening, but he will vote against it because he does not want such appeal procedures to be put into the statute. He should be straight with the House, come clean, admit that he made a mistake and vote for new clause 1.

Mr. Renton: The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) said——

Mr. Randall: Here come the insults.

Mr. Renton: No, I shall not insult the hon. Gentleman. I shall deny that we had a dispute. I shall simply say that there is a complete lack of understanding between us. There is a complete lack of understanding on the hon. Gentleman's part of the procedure of adjudicators when they are looking at cases within the rules and decide that, on the facts, they will not allow the variation of leave, but do make a recommendation, informal or otherwise, to the Home Secretary, suggesting that he might exercise his discretion.

I recognise that the hon. Gentleman's lack of understanding——

Mr. Randall *rose*——

Mr. Renton: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman lets me finish this point.

Mr. Randall: The Minister never answers my questions.

Mr. Renton: I am about to answer the hon. Gentleman's question. I suggest that he gives me a chance to do so.

I realise that the hon. Gentleman's lack of understanding was stoked by a letter that I received, signed by Michael Barnes of UKIAS, Ian Macdonald of the Immigration Law Practitioners Association and Ann Owers of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants. However, I replied to that letter and, in all fairness, the hon. Gentleman should have quoted from my reply. I clearly said:

"Moreover, the Home Office's experience is that the appelate authorities do make use of their freedom to recommend the use of the Secretary of State's discretion. If a recommendation is made on compassionate grounds the instructions to the immigration department's case workers are quite explicit in stating that the normal practice should be to comply with that recommendation. Such matters are treated very seriously indeed and any decision not to accept an adjudicator's recommendaton must be taken at senior level."

In Committee the hon. Gentleman asked me whether we kept statistics of the percentage of recommendations that were made on that basis which were and were not accepted. I said that we do not keep such statistics. However, I did ask Home Office officials to dig out a few recent cases where the adjudicator made a recommendation within the rules to the Secretary of State and where the recommendation was considered and, in most cases, accepted. I have them here and, if time permitted, I would gladly read them to the House. However, I do not think that that would please the House.

There are one or two examples here of where a recommendation was made which the Home Office did not accept——

Mr Hanley: Will my hon. Friend make it clear to the House that the adjudicators are independently appointed?

Mr. Renton: I thank my hon. Friend for making that important point. They are appointed by the Lord Chancellor's Department. Therefore, they are quite independent of the Home Office.

If the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West will allow me to take a little more time, I shall refer to four examples. I shall refer to the people involved simply by initials, because it is inappropriate to name names in this context. However, if the hon. Gentleman wants to come to my office and look at the cases, he is welcome to do so.

In July 1984, Mrs. D was refused indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom as a dependant of her stepson. Her appeal was dismissed, first by the adjudicator in August 1986, and finally by the tribunal in February 1987. The tribunal took the view—I am abbreviating this — that the circumstances were such that the Secretary of State could properly consider exercising his discretion in favour of Mrs. D outside the rules. It considered that if she had to return to Barbados it seemed that it would not be very long before she became dependant on her stepson. The Secretary of State accepted the tribunal's recommendation and in July 1987 Mrs. D was granted indefinite leave to remain.

The same applied to Mr. R, who arrived in the United Kingdom in August 1978. That was a case in which the arguments for accepting the recommendation from the adjudicator that he should be allowed to remain were far from clear-cut. But, after the adjudicator's view was subsequently endorsed by the tribunal, Mr. R was granted indefinite leave to remain in July 1987. I could continue ad infinitum——

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): It is striking that the Minister cites cases from 1978 and 1984. In what sense do those rare cases meet the points made in the letter by Michael Barnes, Ian Macdonald and Ann Owers that

"The Deputy Director (Legal) of UKIAS estimates that, of the many hundreds of appeals he has dealt with over the last three years, in only one such appeal did an adjudicator make a recommendation"?

The Minister will realise how important this is to many of us in our constituency casework.

Mr. Renton: I fully understand the hon. Gentleman's interest in this. He has many immigration cases himself. However, I stress that the cases that I have just mentioned are only two out of a bundle. Mrs. D's case started in July 1984 and finished in July 1987. I said that I had asked for recent cases. Mr. R arrived in the United Kingdom in August 1978, applied in September 1980 for the extension of stay to continue in work-permit employment, and in July 1987 was granted permission to stay.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, one of the problems about Britain's treatment of immigration cases is that the superstructure of appeal upon appeal—the number of safeguards that we have given those who come here—to which we have added a Member of Parliament's representations, means that we arrive at a thicket within which the immigrant is well protected. He goes from one appeal to the next while the years drag on; at the end, after eight or nine years, it is almost inevitable that he be given leave to remain in Britain. That is one of the problems of our system and one reason why one must seek clarity and simplicity in it.

[Mr. Renton]

I could go on at length. The next case, which I did not mention because I wanted to save the time of the House, concerns a Miss M, who arrived in the United Kingdom in July 1986. The written determination of the adjudicator formally dismissed her appeal, but he recommended that the Secretary of State should exercise his discretion in her favour exceptionally outside the rules. That recommendation has been accepted.

That is the common working practice in the Home Office. Recommendations come up from cases within the rules to the Home Office. They are seriously considered and, in many cases, are accepted. As for the particular reference to one case only in the UKIAS/JCWI letter, there is, I think, a mistaken reference to the chief adjudicator's comments in giving his opinion in the case of Mostashari, because the letter implies that that was intended to be a general recommendation, but I think that it was a particular recommendation in specific regard to the case of Mostashari.

6.30 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Bearing in mind that adjudicators are hardly likely to agree outside the immigration rules unless the compassionate circumstances are very compelling indeed, is there not a case for considering giving adjudicators and the tribunal, as this new clause would, the power in certain cases — they would be very few indeed — where the appellant would not qualify under the immigration laws because of the strictness of those rules, but where there is an overwhelming case on compassionate grounds, to allow the appeal; not simply to make a recommendation, but actually to allow the appeal? Adjudicators are hardly likely to act in an irresponsible manner.

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman has put his finger on the real point of this new clause, upon which the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West did not touch. As I see it, the real point of the new clause is not on the question of adjudicators making more recommendations to the Home Office on cases that fall within the rules, but to give them the power to make recommendations, or indeed to decide, on cases that are outside the rules. That is precisely the point to which I now want to refer, because I think that this would be giving far too great a power to the appellate authorities. The hon. Gentleman, with his customary acuteness in these matters, has put his finger on the real problem or challenge that this new clause implies.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West was quite wrong in thinking that if this new clause were accepted it would in any sense bite on the question of appeal rights of persons subject to deportation orders. That was implicit in his remarks, but it would not be so. The new clause does not bite on clause 4, because section 19 of the 1971 Act is subject to any restriction on the grounds of appeal.

The real problem regarding this new clause is that it would vastly extend the powers of adjudicators in cases that fall outside the rules. This would be a fundamental change of policy which would not be acceptable to us. It may help if I make it clear from the outset that in determining appeals, adjudicators are provided, under section 19 of the Act, with the ability to review the way in which the Secretary of State has exercised his discretion under the rules.

This discretion is available in a number of categories, the principal exclusion being visitors seeking extension of their stay beyond the maximum permitted by the rules. Where there is discretion under the law, account will be taken of any compassionate or other circumstances which may make a decision to refuse inappropriate. In reviewing the way in which the Secretary of State's discretion has been exercised, where it is available under the rules, adjudicators will in turn hear arguments about compassionate and other factors.

Section 19 sets out clearly that the jurisdiction of an adjudicator at an appeal is to dismiss an appeal unless he considers, first, that the decision or action against which the appeal was brought was not in accordance with the law or with any immigration rules applicable to the case; or, secondly, where the decision or action involved the exercise of a discretion, that the discretion should have been exercised differently.

The new clause would place upon the appellant authorities the task of reviewing the exercise of the Secretary of State's discretion not only where the rules provided for this but also in all other cases where compassionate or other circumstances had been put forward in support of exceptional treatment outside the applicable rules.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said that this would happen very rarely, but we can have no possible knowledge that that would be so. It would be a very great incentive to people who were refused their variation of leave by the adjudicators, in any circumstances outside the rules, immediately to bring in the full breadth of compassionate circumstances, however ridiculous, because, if this clause were accepted, they would know that the adjudicators would have to consider those circumstances.

Mr. Winnick: As perhaps the only Member in the House, or one of only a very few Members, who at one stage appeared before adjudicators regularly on almost a daily basis on behalf of clients, I found that adjudicators very rarely took the view that they should take into consideration other matters. Therefore, if the Minister has a fear that the adjudicators—who are now appointed, as I understand it, by the Lord Chancellor, but used to be appointed by the Home Office—would go out of their way to allow appeals on compassionate grounds unless the circumstances were very compelling, I can assure him from my experience of adjudicators that he has very little justification for his fear.

Mr. Renton: But it would be permissible under this new clause for appellants to bring forward any type of compassionate circumstances even if the case was outside the rules. That would have to lead to far greater delays in appeals and to much lengthier appeals, which is precisely what all hon. Members wish to avoid.

It would also mean—and the hon. Member, with his expertise, will take this on board — that there would never be mandatory immigration rules, because however the rules were worded the exercise of discretion outside the rules would always be a signficant arguable factor which the appellate authorities would be required to take into account. That puts into more elegant language the point that I have made to the hon. Member. There would obviously then be scope for abuse of the appeal system by those who see it solely as a means of prolonging their stay in the United Kingdom.

It would, for example, extend the rights in visitor appeals from a hearing on the facts of the case considered against the applicable immigration rule to a hearing of all the circumstances, exceptional or otherwise, which might have a bearing or an influence on the possible exercise of the Secretary of State's discretion outside the rules. It would thus leave the final decision on the exercise of discretion outside the rules not with the Secretary of State but with the appellate authorities. That is at the heart of my opposition to this new clause.

The new clause, in extending the jurisdiction of the appellate authorities, would also place upon them a far greater burden, increasing both the cost of the appeal system and delays in all types of cases being heard. It would also place them in an anomalous position whereby, under section 19(1) and (2) as amended by this new clause, they would be required to dismiss an appeal because the decision was in accordance with the law or the immigration rules applicable, or allow an appeal because in the adjudicator's opinion the Secretary of State's discretion outside the rules would have been exercised differently. This would be an unacceptable state of affairs and could be attractive only to those who seek to undermine at any cost the Government's commitment to fair but firm immigration control.

For all these reasons, I cannot possibly recommend the new clause to the House. I feel that it would undermine the effectiveness of immigration control as a whole, and I invite the House to reject it.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:——

The House divided: Ayes 211, Noes 272.

Division No. 181] **[6.40 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Cleiland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Cook and
Mr. Allen Adams.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*

Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Miss E. *(Devon W)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Richard Ryder and
Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 2

REFUGEES' RIGHTS OF APPEAL

'At the end of section 13(3) of the Immigration Act 1971 there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(3A) The limitation in subsection (3) above on the exercise of the right of appeal against refusal of entry shall not apply in any case in which a person is to be removed to a country where he claims to have a well-founded fear of persecution on grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group of political opinion."'.—*[Mr. Hattersley.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

This new clause aims to deal explicitly and specifically with the need to establish an appeals procedure which will protect entrants to Britain who claim political asylum. The removal and reduction of rights of appeal in other circumstances were debated a moment ago, and no doubt my hon. Friends will wish to turn again to the general

subject of appeal when we come, as I hope we shortly will, to Third Reading. They will want to debate appeal procedures as restricted by clauses 4 and 5.

The new clause deals with a point which is narrow, but nevertheless crucial in terms of the operation of immigration control. It seeks to meet an obvious need—the protection of asylum seekers from arbitrary removal to the country in which they fear persecution.

At present, the right of asylum seekers is exercisable only after removal. For some refugees—for example, Tamils returned to parts of Sir Lanka or opponents of the Khomeini regime returned to Iran—an appeal after return is obviously too late. Indeed, it is only necessary to describe the proposal of the immigration officer to see that the procedure is clearly absurd. The officer would say, "You claim to be an opponent of the regime. You claim to be in danger of your life. You have supplied insufficient evidence to convince me of that contention. Therefore, return to the country in which you say that your life is in danger and appeal from there."

The defence of the Home Office against the absurdity of the present situation falls under two headings. First, it states that there will be a referral procedure under which some asylum seekers will be examined by the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service. Secondly, it states that a full and automatic appeal system—appeal by right while in the United Kingdom—would produce a flood of applications, and, by implication, the Home Office means a flood of bogus applications.

If the Minister of State is to reply to the debate, he might do so with more capacity if he listened to the proposal. On 11 February, the Home Secretary said that there might be as many as 800,000 appeals—as many as there are currently in the appeals procedure of West Germany—if an automatic system were introduced. The fear of flooding which, in all circumstances, is an unhappy expression, is clearly nonsense.

Before the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 came into operation, the total number of applications for asylum in Great Britain was about 4,000. Clearly, carriers' liability will considerably reduce that number. As a continuation of our long and honourable tradition of helping refugees and supporting applicants for asylum, the burdens on the system, which our proposed appeal procedure would certainly create, could easily be borne by the Government and the Home Office.

The referral procedure is clearly inadequate. At best, it provides access to legal representation and advice about how to proceed with the appeal. More important, it is available only to those appellants who obtain permission from the Home Office to go through that process. The objective of an appeals system is that it should be independent, not least to avoid the political bias which, in part, is bound to creep into the application of asylum laws.

The new clause would allow the setting up of a procedure which was independent and quick. Under our proposal, a tribunal would be able, almost immediately, to uphold a Home Office decision, in which case the man or woman would be returned to the place from which he or she had come; or to overturn that decision, in which case he or she would be allowed to remain in the United Kingdom. If the claim was complicated and uncertain, the Home Office could call for a more detailed examination of the full merits of the case and of the justification for a fuller appeal.

The provision of such a system would be wholly in line with the traditional attitude taken by this country towards those who have applied to come here because they are being persecuted and their lives are put in danger by the regimes under which they suffer. Such a system would avoid the many bad decisions in respect of asylum which have occurred in the recent past. It would enhance Britain's reputation in the world. I hope that the Minister of State will tell me that, as it is such a modest proposal, the Government are prepared to accept it.

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): Under present legislation, anyone who arrives in the United Kingdom without a valid visa can be refused leave to enter, without access to the immigration appeals authority. A right of appeal is exercisable only after removal.

There is widespread concern that that situation violates basic natural justice. All the organisations concerned with the protection of refugees are calling for a right of appeal to be exercisable before removal. As the Minister is well aware, that is the basic policy of both the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and of the British Refugee Council and its member agencies.

I support the new clause. A review board would provide a quick and independent review of decisions to refuse asylum. I share the view of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) that the West German situation is quite exceptional, partly because the reference in the Grundgesetz, or basic law of West Germany, to appeal rights is itself exceptional, and partly because of the division of Germany into the Federal Republic and the Democratic Republic.

7 pm

A review board and review procedure could help, especially in the kind of cases on which I have recently made representations and of which I know the Minister is aware. The danger is that, without such a procedure, representations by Members of Parliament may not succeed in securing natural justice for asylum seekers in this country.

The Minister of State is well aware that a few weeks ago I made representations on behalf of two Iraqi Kurds, that I did so on a Saturday afternoon and that I gained an assurance that my representations would be accepted. In this very tragic case, early on the Monday morning the couple concerned were removed from this country back to Yugoslavia, which had been the intermediate point of transfer for them on their way to this country.

The position was unsatisfactory on the following grounds. A Minister of State in the Department works with officials who cannot necessarily be fully apprised of the details of cases in claims of political asylum in the very short time in which those claims are frequently rejected. It stretches the credibility of the use of the Minister's name in such a case that, when he was not in London, officials should choose to say that he had been able personally to approve the removal of these two persons. I do not want to make political capital out of that; I want simply to say that there are administrative problems. There would be problems for Ministers from parties on either side of the House if this were the basis on which decisions are taken to remove.

In the specific case of removal to which I have referred, because of the lack of a relevant alternative body or a review board to which such matters could be referred, the couple went back to Yugoslavia, where the wife slit her

[Mr. Stuart Holland]

wrists. The United Nations was involved. I made representations to the Yugoslav authorities by telephone, asking that the couple should not be automatically referred back to Iran. The United Nations intervened and declared the couple to have the status of mandate refugees. The mandatory status should be such that the Minister should be able to accept the couple back into the United Kingdom.

It is an on going matter on which I have made yet another representation to the Minister. I trust that he will be able to consider it sympathetically because, without elaborating on that case, yet another case has occurred of Iraqi Kurds. The woman in a different couple has also cut her wrists from fear of being returned and tragically, as I am sure both sides of the House will appreciate, has tried to smother her child. These are cases in which a procedure of individual representations by Members of Parliament is not adequate in addressing the issues.

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman is setting out details of tragic cases. I hope that the question which I ask him will in no way reduce my horror because of the words that he has uttered. Is it not the case that a refugee should claim refuge in the first country to which he travels after leaving the country where he feels frightened?

Mr. Holland: There is an inadequacy in the present rules and legislation. The fact that in this case the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees gave mandate status to these refugees shows that in his view there were exceptional circumstances which should have resulted in the refugees being able to stay in this country.

Mr. Renton: I know well the case to which the hon. Gentleman is referring. Doubtless we will be in further communication about it, either by correspondence or by a meeting. If the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees gave these people mandate status, surely that meant specifically that Yugoslavia, which was the safe third country for them—as my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) has just said—as a signatory to the United Nations convention, was bound to give them, as mandate refugees, full consideration of their refugee claim.

Mr. Holland: Although the Yugoslav Government have recently deported several Iraqi Kurds, they have not deported this couple, precisely because of the mandate status. I will move off this case shortly, but surely the most appropriate country for this couple is the United Kingdom, not Yugoslavia.

I should like to refer to the general principle of the new clause proposed by my right hon. Friend, and deal with refugees are escaping from a country. We have been talking about Iraqi Kurds so I shall use them as an example. Iraqi Kurds tend to come out via Turkey or through Iran. A refugee may have great difficulty getting travel documents; he may not have valid documents and he may be at risk of his life, as is the case with many Iraqi Kurds.

In response to the point made by the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), such a person does not hang around at the airport to get the optimum flight which would take him to the country of his primary choice, despite the fact that he may speak only, for example, English or French. I submit to the hon. Gentleman that many fewer people in the Middle East speak Serbo-Croat than English. That does not mean that this country has an obligation to accept anyone claiming political refugee status, but it should be possible to have a review procedure which does not depend upon a Member of Parliament responding to a telephone call from an airport at a time—at the weekend as in this case—when officials are not in the Minister's private office.

Cases slip through the cracks and procedures do not always work perfectly. Indeed, in far too many cases, the procedures work very imperfectly. If the new clause were accepted, immigration officers would recognise that in such a new review procedure they had a safety mechanism to which they could refer cases in which there was serious, but not in their view definitive, merit.

I have an anticipation, which I trust is unfounded, that the Minister may not accept the new clause. If that is to prove the case, I hope that nonetheless he will consider seriously this procedure and the terms in which it has been put forward.

Mr. Winnick (Walsall, North): I should like to praise the efforts made by my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) in his constituency cases. I have read about some of those cases and I am sure that all hon. Members, certainly on this side of the House, have the utmost admiration for the manner in which he has pursued them. It does him credit.

In the new clause, we are dealing with the most sensitive cases. It is difficult to imagine more sensitive cases than those which come before the immigration authorities. This country has a long and honourable tradition, which goes back centuries, as a place of asylum. It would be a bad day for us if that ever ended. We know that in the past many people who have had difficulties under their own regimes have settled here. I hope that the fact that Marx was among them will not be a reason for the Government not to look favourably on the new clause.

Unfortunately, there remain in the latter part of the 20th century far too many tyrannical regimes. The reputation of this country is at stake, as well as the very lives of some people, as my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall pointed out. What is vitally important is that no one should be sent back to a country where that person could face persecution or worse on grounds of race, nationality or, in some cases, of politics.

I may be anticipating wrongly what the Minister will say in reply, but I imagine he will tell us that negotiations are taking place between the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service and the Home Office on an agreed procedure. I am aware of those negotiations, as chairman of UKIAS, and I know that considerable progress is being made.

There is a feeling, certainly among organisations dealing with refugees, including the refugee unit of UKIAS, that the agreed procedure being negotiated between the Home Office and UKIAS is not a substitute for an independent review system. That is essential. If the Minister rejects the new clause, as I suspect he will, in my view—I am speaking personally on this matter—it is better to have procedure whereby passengers can be referred to the refugee unit of UKIAS than to have no system at all. I consider that the type of procedure being discussed by the Home Office and UKIAS is not as good as an independent review body.

Again, the Minister is likely to say that, if the new clause were accepted — I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) raised this point, although I was not in the Chamber then — we would be flooded out with many thousands of cases. I do not believe that that would be the position. Indeed, before the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 was introduced, fewer than 4,000 applications for asylum were made on average in the United Kingdom each year. That does not suggest that immigration authorities or a review body would be flooded out with cases on a daily or weekly basis.

The other point I wish to make absolutely clear concerns the new clause not being accepted. I hope that it will be accepted, but I am not one of nature's optimists. I see that the Minister is smiling, but I know very well what he will say to the House.

Mr. Vaz: I cannot believe that.

Mr. Winnick: That is an understandable view, but my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) has not been in the House as long as I have. He has a more optimistic nature than me, but I have known Tories well for so many years that I have become very pessimistic. I am afraid to say that my hon. Friend, in the many years that he will no doubt represent Leicester, East, will probably come to the same view. But, with any luck, we will be in government and the Minister will be in the Conservative Opposition.

In any event, the point that I particularly want to make concerns the new clause not being agreed to. In that event, we hope that a procedure can be agreed between the Home Office and UKIAS, giving an assurance that the right of hon. Members to make representations should not be taken away. I hope that we shall not reach a position where the Minister will say that passengers have been referred to UKIAS and the Home Office has dealt with the recommendations, and therefore there is no reason for Members of Parliament such as my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall to make representations.

It is my long-held view that if we are to make representations, which we do almost daily, on both sides of the House, on behalf of our constituents, about housing, social security and other matters, where passengers or their close relatives are making representations to us, those should be dealt with in the same way. We have a right as Members of Parliament to make those representations, and no Government should try to take that away from us.

I hope that the Minister will bear those points very much in mind. What is at stake here, certainly with regard to representations by Members of Parliament, are the very privileges and rights of Members of Parliament. I think that the Minister will find, like some of his predecessors who tried it, not very successfully, that we shall resist all such attempts, as we have done in the past. We have a right to make representations, and we shall continue to make them where we consider it is appropriate.

7.15 pm

Mr. Renton: I thank the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and the hon. Members for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) and for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) for the quiet and considerate way in which they supported the new clause. I am sorry that they have all anticipated my speech. I might just say "No" and then sit down. I would have immediate support from the Government Whip.

Nevertheless, I should like to go into these matters a little further. I understand the reasons that led Opposition Members to table the new clause. I understand, too, and share their concern about the cases of those who come here claiming that they are refugees and have a well-founded fear of persecution, in United Nations convention terms, in the country from which they have come, and who are seeking asylum. Those cases must always worry very deeply all of us who become concerned with them. If we accepted the new clause, I should be the person whose work load and burden of anxiety would be most relieved. Clearly the new clause would remove a very great load from the shoulders of the Minister with responsibility for immigration, and would in essence pass the responsibility to an in-country appeal system.

I know, without seeking tears of sympathy from anyone, that in the eight months since I took over responsibility for refugees at the Home Office, one of my major worries has been those very long and complicated files about refugee claims, which come to me virtually every night of the week and every weekend. Clearly, if there were an in-country appeal system, it would relieve much of that burden because we would be putting in an umpire, or arbitrator, to take it over. I had to disagree with the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, however, when he said that he regarded the new clause as a modest proposal. I fear that it is not modest, for reasons that I shall explain shortly.

Before I deal with that, I shall deal briefly with the case of the Iraqi Kurds that the hon. Member for Vauxhall has raised with me. It has been the subject of much agonising correspondence between us, and I use that word on purpose. It is true, as I said when I intervened in the speech by the hon. Member for Vauxhall, that Yugoslavia is a signatory to the United Nations convention. It falls to that country, therefore, to consider their asylum claim under the convention of 1951. There is no reason why those people should be sent to another signatory country, such as the United Kingdom, to make their claim.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall made a very interesting comment, when he added that he thought the United Kingdom was the most appropriate country in which those people's refugee claim should be considered. The hon. Gentleman has much experience in these matters, and he will recognise that if we accepted that principle it would go to the heart of, and destroy, the principles that lie behind the 1951 United Nations convention on the status of refugees. It is an intrinsic part of the convention that the first safe third country to which a refugee goes after leaving his own country is the one that will consider the refugee claim.

Clearly, that goes back in history to the time when the refugee convention was written, and it was essentially dealing with people moving across land frontiers, for example from parts of eastern Europe into Turkey or Germany, or later from Vietnam into Cambodia. Such refugees were moving across land frontiers to get away from an enemy of whom they were fearful and it was thought that the first safe country to which they came should therefore be the one that considered their refugee claim.

The convention including all that detail was written and designed long before the days of 747s and mass travel,

[Mr. Renton]

which, sad to say—although we have to accept the fact — enable people to be moved about the world by ruthless "travel agents", who take their life savings, give them false passports or visas, and say that they will get them into, say, the United Kingdom or Canada. "There," they say, "you must claim refugee status. Your claim will be considered, and it will take so long to be resolved that in the end you will be able to stay there."

The hon. Member for Vauxhall must think through that point. If we accepted that those who claim refugee status should end up in the most appropriate country for them, it could only add stimulus to what is already a worrying movement—aided by the ruthless travel agents whom I have described. There would be an increased tendency to move around the world people who, for wholly understandable reasons, seek to improve their economic conditions elsewhere, and who are advised that the best way to do that is to claim on arrival that they wish to seek asylum because they are afraid to go back.

Mr. Holland: Clearly, times have changed. The cross-border movements between east and west Europe as well as those from Eastern Europe, to, say, Turkey, have been superseded by jet air travel.

Taking that into account, surely the Minister will recognise that there are appropriate differences which should be taken into account in determining whether someone should stay in one country rather than another — for example, whether that person has relatives here, as well as whether he speaks the language. It may well be the case that we should be looking at the United Nations code, while preserving the crucial principle that, to prevent refugees from being bundled back into the country from which they came, the first country should be the prior country.

Mr. Renton: When we consider a refugee claim to this country and there is no safe third country, we always take into consideration whether the person has relatives here, particularly if we give exceptional leave to remain.

I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman's wish for a re-examination of the United Nations convention. I do not feel that it is working very well at present. One of the problems is that other countries are not as honourable as we are — I name no names — in living up to their obligations, although they are signatories to the convention.

One of our difficulties is that, because Heathrow is such a major airport and aeroplanes call there in transit throughout the world, it is easy for an immigration service in another country to plant refugees that it does not wish to look after on an aeroplane that will land in transit at Heathrow. While the passengers may be ticketed through from Heathrow, there will be no firm booking. Those are the people who leave the aeroplane at Heathrow and whom we find wandering around terminal 2 or 3. Their passports and air tickets have been destroyed, and it falls to us to consider their refugee claims — although it is clear that they have been in a safe third country on the way.

I fear that, if we open up the UN convention, given the pressures on economic migration throughout the world, it will be extraordinarily difficult to reach a definition of a refugee that is even as satisfactory as the present definition. If the hon. Member for Vauxhall can prove me wrong, I shall be delighted to listen, because I share his view that there are problems in the present convention.

Before I move on to the argument of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, let me say to the hon. Member for Walsall, North that I recognise his position as chairman of UKIAS, and I agree that Britain has a long and honourable reputation for looking after refugees. Where we may differ, however, is in my belief that we have nothing to be ashamed of in our present treatment of those seeking refugee status in this country.

It is not only that, over the past eight years, we have given refugee status to some 8,000 people, and have taken 20,000 Vietnamese. We have also given 7,000 exceptional leave to remain. It is a great pity that such organisations as Amnesty International, for which I have a great respect, occasionally put out circulars that give the impression that we are not living up to our obligations. I wholly reject that.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook described the new clause as a modest proposal. I do not agree, for the reasons that he himself predicted. It is not, of course, a new proposal; the Sub-Committee on Race Relations and Immigration made such a recommendation in 1985, and the issue has been taken up since by the British Refugee Council and by Amnesty. Each time that it has been raised, we have considered it very carefully.

The basic argument is, as I have said, persuasive. But, as SCORRI recognised—and as the experience of other Western European countries amply demonstrates — the proposed solution carries the potential for considerable abuse. At present, a person who arrives at a United Kingdom port seeking entry and is refused has no in-country right of appeal, unless he has an entry clearance or work permit. In that respect, asylum seekers are in the same position as anyone else who seeks to enter the country. If, however, we were to introduce an in-country right of appeal for asylum seekers, it takes little imagination to guess what would happen.

Some 23,000 people were refused leave to enter the United Kingdom in 1986, the last full year for which statistics are available. If all that they had to do to delay their removal was claim asylum, there is little doubt that many — indeed, probably most — would do so. They would simply say the magic words, "I fear persecution in the country whence I have come" — whether that country was Iran, Iraq or the United States. They would then be within our appeal system immediately, with all that that involves—including lengthy consideration and, it must be said, excessive delays. That certainly seems to be the experience of other European countries.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook referred to the West German experience, which is certainly the most dramatic. It may not be entirely typical, as the right hon. Gentleman said, because of the Berlin gap which has now been closed. It is a fact, however, that West Germany has some 800,000 outstanding applications for asylum, of which, from experience, only 8 per cent. of which are likely to prove well-founded. Because of the delays involved, the majority — perhaps as many as 90 per cent. — will ultimately be allowed to remain in West Germany. But it is taking years for their cases to be considered.

I know that full well, because a constituent came to see me about her brother, who was in one of the camps in West Germany and was seeking refugee status in that country. He had already been there for three or four years, and had no prospect of even getting out of the camp or of

learning German. My constituent's purpose in coming to see me was simply to ask whether there was any chance of his being able to come to the United Kingdom, because his future in the refugee camp was so bleak and it would take so many years for his claim to be considered.

Mr. Hattersley: The Minister's logic puzzles me. He tells us that Germany is always untypical, and agrees with my contention that there is no comparison. He then goes on to say that our proposals cannot be implemented by comparing what may happen here with what is happening in Germany. That does not make sense to me.

Mr. Renton: Very well. I will read the statistics for other continental countries.

The same enormous increase has occurred in virtually every other west European country. The total number of asylum seekers in west European countries, including Austria, went up from 92,000 in 1984 to 184,000 in 1986. Denmark is in many ways a much more interesting example than West Germany, because it has no Berlin gap. Denmark introduced an in-country appeal system no different from that pressed on us by Opposition Members. Within a month, 3,000 people applied for asylum there. As a result, Denmark did what a number of other countries are now beginning to do, and introduced a system much closer to ours—in which, I understand, there is no in-country appeal system.

Mr. Madden: I can understand why the Minister of State is taking so long defending the status quo when I gather that the Home Office is shortly to announce a new referral system for refugees, whereby UKIAS will be the referral agency. I understand that the Minister is quoted extensively in *New Society* this week as saying that the arrangements have been agreed and that UKIAS will receive additional funding to enable it to carry out that referral work. May we have some information about those arrangements, rather than the tedious defence of that existing situation?

7.30 pm

Mr. Renton: I should like to think that the hon. Gentleman found my defence of the present position extremely conclusive. Whatever the superficial and emotional attractions of the in-country appeal system, we do not want to fall into the same trap and the same pitfalls as some of our western European neighbours, from which they are now having to resile, with all the unhappiness and the inconvenience, not least to the asylum applicants in their own countries, that has occurred from going down the wrong route.

The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) made a point about IKIAS and I shall come to that in my closing remarks. Unfortunately, I am not like the hon. Gentleman and do not receive my copy of *New Society* three days early. I do not get it until the weekend, so I have not yet had the benefit of reading what will be written on Wednesday or Thursday of this week.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook argued that the scope of his new clause would be limited to those travelling directly from the country in which they fear persecution. I think that the right hon. Gentleman said that it would not be possible for a person to use the safe third country and claim that he feared persecution in that country. That is certainly in the new clause as drafted. Surely that is incorrect, because all that a person would have to do to achieve an in-country right of appeal would be to claim to fear persecution not only in his country of origin, but in whichever country he has travelled from.

Thus, an Afghani, travelling to the United Kingdom via Pakistan, would claim to fear persecution in both Afghanistan and Pakistan and would then have an automatic right to remain in the United Kingdom while his appeal against refusal was heard. Even in cases that are clearly absurd and even abusive—where, for example, the third country was the Netherlands or Sweden—there would be no denying an in-country right of appeal.

Therefore, I am afraid that the new clause would, as I have said, substantially increase the number of applications made at ports in the United Kingdom. It would thus introduce lengthy delays in the determination of such applications and that, frankly, would be to the disadvantage of genuine refugee applicants coming here. I hope that the Opposition Members who have tabled the new clause will, on second thoughts, see its great intrinsic disadvantages.

I return to the point raised by the hon. Members for Walsall, North and for Bradford, West. I accept that some form of independent input in the refugee determination procedure is desirable. That is why I and my officials have been discussing revised referral arrangements with UKIAS and UNHCR, whereby the majority of cases arriving at ports will be referred to UKIAS, which will be able to consider the cases and offer observations on them. They will then be carefully considered and if there is any difference of view between UKIAS and officials in the refugee unit, I shall look into the case personally.

Although that does not go as far as a full appeals procedure, I hope that hon. Members will agree that it will be a useful safeguard. We are not there yet and, contrary to anything that *New Society* may say, the hon. Member for Walsall, North knows that we have not yet reached full agreement with UKIAS on all the details. I understand that a further meeting is planned shortly and, for the reasons that I have stated, I hope that we will reach agreement soon.

Mr. Winnick: I do not want to comment on the negotiations as that would certainly not be in order. However, I should like the Minister to confirm a point that I was making a few moments ago. Does he accept that any agreement reached between UKIAS and the Home Office must not and cannot take away the right of hon. Members to make representations when they consider that that is appropriate?

Mr. Renton: On Third Reading, I propose to make a few comments about hon. Members' representations, on which Opposition Members have aired their views. I should like to leave the hon. Gentleman's comments until that debate.

Although as I said, the UKIAS procedure is not yet finalised, I hope that that will be so in a matter of a few weeks.

I appreciate that the treatment of refugees is an emotional matter. It is important that all refugees—that is, all those who come here claiming asylum—should have their cases deeply considered, but, for the reasons that I have stated, I do not believe that Opposition Members have thought through the consequences of their new clause. I hope that on consideration they will not seek to press it to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

[Mr. Renton]

The House divided: Ayes 207, Noes 263.

Division No. 152] **[7.35 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Hefler, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen Adams.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal

Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Robert
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Miss E. *(Devon W)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

SCHEDULE

Minor Amendments

Amendment proposed: No. 3, in page 7, line 2, leave out from 'words' to end of line 6 and insert

'"and the immigration officer does not at the same time give him indefinite or limited leave to enter, he shall be deemed to have been given leave to enter for a period of six months subject to a condition prohibiting his taking employment and the immigration officer shall as soon as may be give him written notice of that leave."'.—*[Mr. Renton.]*

Mr. Randall: Opposition Members fully support the amendment because, essentially, it is the amendment that we tabled in Committee. We claim full credit for it and expect all hon. Members to support it.

Amendment agreed to.

Order for Third Reading read.

7.48 pm

Mr. Renton: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill has now been considered fully in the House. In Committee alone, some 62 hours were spent examining its provisions in detail. That reflects the importance that the House rightly attaches to immigration matters. It also reflects the loquacity of the Opposition. On one occasion, they spent two hours complaining that the telephone number at the Home Office had been changed. That showed their determination to waste the Committee's valuable time rather than get down to the important matters of immigration policy that concern us all.

On the whole, the Committee was very amicable in its approach to the problems. I am pleased that—as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) said—we were able to accept on the last morning an Opposition amendment to substitute the word "six" for the word "three". It was an important amendment, and I am pleased that, in the typically moderate manner that characterised Conservative Members' conduct throughout the proceedings in Committee, we were able to agree with the Opposition on this matter.

As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I have said, the Bill does not make major alterations to the structure of immigration control. The Immigration Act 1971 will continue to provide the overall framework within which immigration control will operate, but the Bill does make important changes, and it is therefore right that it should have been subjected to close scrutiny.

The Bill has stood up to that scrutiny very well. I do not propose to take up the time of the House by rehearsing in detail its contents and the effect of its provisions. Hon. Members who served for 62 hours on the Committee will be well aware of its detail. I see my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) nodding in approval.

[Mr. Renton]

I shall mention briefly the parts of the Bill that will have perhaps the greatest impact in improving the fair and efficient working of immigration control. Clause 1, which repeals section 1(5) of the 1971 Act, will make control fairer by removing the discriminatory advantage that the 1971 Act confers on just one group of people — Commonwealth male citizens who were settled here before 1 January 1973.

Clause 3, by making universal the wholly sensible requirement that people claiming the right of abode in this country should establish that right from abroad before travelling here, will close an avenue of possible abuse and will therefore be fairer to all those who wish to come here.

Clause 4 will enable action to be taken more effectively against overstayers and those who breach the conditions of their leave. In effect, clause 5 will ensure that prosecution action can be taken against those who knowingly remain in this country after their leave has expired. As the Committee found, those are wholly reasonable provisions. They protect the interests of those who are already lawfully settled here, while being fair to those who wish to come here from overseas. Their intentions and effects have been examined thoroughly in the House, and they now go forward for further scrutiny in another place.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): I understand that earlier the Minister referred to the mountain of almost 250,000 applications for registration under the various nationality proposals and that he made an announcement about the redeployment of staff to deal with that. In the past hour, I have received a written reply from the Minister, in which he refuses to give the grounds that will be considered acceptable to justify a late application for registration as a British citizen made by Commonwealth and Irish citizens resident in the United Kingdom since 1 January 1973.

The Minister says that the circumstances of each case will be considered. Will he explain what those circumstances are, so that Members of Parliament and bodies such as the Coventry community relations council can advise people whether a late application is likely to be heard by his Department? The answer that I have received today, like those that other hon. Members have received in recent weeks, leave us in the dark.

Mr. Renton: I cannot take that intervention from the hon. Gentleman. He did not serve on the Committee and he was not present during the debate. To go on Third Reading into the detailed circumstances in which every application for variation of leave will be considered at Lunar house would be a terrible waste of time. I have given the hon. Gentleman a written answer to his point about the circumstances in which late applications will be considered. If the hon. Gentleman has not been sent a copy of it, I shall ensure that he is sent one.

Mr. Nellist: I have it here.

Mr. Renton: That gives the hon. Gentleman the answer that he requires. I shall mention briefly two subjects and then broaden my remarks before concluding. Although, strictly speaking, they are not relevant to the Bill, I hope that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, will allow me to do so, because they have been the subject of comment by, and interest among, hon. Members in recent months.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I must remind the Minister that Third Reading is very narrow. What he has to say must be confined to the Bill.

Mr. Renton: I shall try you out, Madam Deputy Speaker, and hope that you will forgive me. If you do not, I shall move on immediately.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I do not forgive easily.

Mr. Renton: The two issues are Members' representations in immigration cases and DNA testing. As hon. Members will know, these matters were discussed at length in Committee.

Madam Deputy Speaker: In that case, it is part of the debate on the Bill.

Mr. Renton: You are generous, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I am sure that your decision will be welcomed by hon. Members.

The House will recall that we are reviewing the system by which hon. Members can make representations. I mentioned this earlier in answer to a query from the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). The review is not yet complete, and I do not wish to anticipate what we shall put forward by way of detailed proposals. However, I should stress that we shall not take any action without full consultation. It will be some little time before the review is completed, but we shall bring our proposals before the House at the earliest possible date, and I remind the House that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has already confirmed that there will be an opportunity for a debate.

Mr. Winnick: With regard to hon. Members' representations, is the Minister saying that that review could lead to the rights of hon. Members to make representations being undermined?

Mr. Renton: No. The hon. Gentleman cannot lead me down that path. I said clearly that I did not want to anticipate what we would put forward by way of detailed proposals. It would be wrong for the hon. Gentleman to ask me to do so by giving hypothetical answers in response to one particular category of proposals or another. The hon. Gentleman will have to be patient.

Hon. Members will be pleased to know that the report of the DNA pilot trial that we have been running has been drafted. I do not want to say anything yet about its conclusions, because we are consulting the scientists who have been concerned with the trials to ensure that the report — this will be of particular interest to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz)—is accurate and complete. The report will be published as soon as possible after those consultations.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister confirm a recent parliamentary answer from the Attorney-General, in which he made it clear that legal aid is available to cover the costs of DNA applications where the issue of a relationship is central to the application, and that guidance has been issued to local legal aid committees in the hope that they will adopt a consistent approach in this matter?

Mr. Renton: It is not for me to confirm an answer given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General. I have seen that answer, and if the hon. Gentleman wishes to query any detail of it, doubtless he will do so by writing to my right hon. and learned Friend.

The Labour party has consistently tried to make a major issue out of the Bill.

Mr. Vaz: It is a major issue.

Mr. Renton: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. It started with the excessive denunciations of the Bill by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) on Second Reading, and it continued for 62 hours in Committee. We heard the cries of the hon. Member for Leicester, East, who is always seeking publicity and headlines in the *Asian Times*, that the prime purpose of the Bill—I remember the headline well—was "to divide families". To that was added the implication of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) that we were completely removing the right in all appeals to argue on compassionate grounds. Much though I enjoyed listening to the hon. Gentleman in Committee, he often showed an astounding lack of comprehension of the Bill. Labour's determination to make a major issue out of this surprised me.

When most people see a bonfire smouldering in a potentially dangerous spot, they tend to run to it with a bucket of water, but on immigration issues Labour Members approach the bonfire with a large can of paraffin. Unfortunately, on their way, they usually trip on some great rock of misunderstanding or lack of comprehension and spill the paraffin on the ground. That is just as well, because if they reached the bonfire with their load of fuel they could and would cause a lot of damage.

Labour's whole approach has been foolish and wrong. It has been foolish, because no one should approach race relations other than with great care, having first thought the matter through very carefully——

Mr. Vaz: The hon. Gentleman should know.

Mr. Renton: I do know. That is why I say that no one should approach the subject without thinking carefully what is the wise minimum that can be said that will enhance the stability of our mixed community.

Race relations are calm in Britain at the moment—thank God for that. They were not an issue at the last election, and the Government have embarked on many positive steps to improve the integration of the ethnic minority into our community, not least in the difficult inner-city areas. To mention only a few examples, we are continuing to support the work of the Commission for Racial Equality in countering unlawful discrimination with an £11 million grant in 1987-88. We are providing grants to local authorities, under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966, to meet special needs. Ten thousand posts that are currently funded, mainly in education, cost the taxpayer £100 million. The police force is—I hope—becoming more responsive and representative. There are now more than 1,000 ethnic minority officers, and vigorous action has been taken to combat racial attacks, and to improve training in community and race relations. That is all as it should be, and the Home Office, in which I am a Minister, will continue to do its best to achieve greater harmony.

If people keep crying, "Racist, racist," often and long enough, someone will believe them. That works to the benefit of no sensible person, yet the speeches of the hon. Members for Bradford, North (Mr. Wall) and for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) in Committee harked on the racist theme and, in the process, served the interests of no one who believes in good community relations. Opposition Members lectured us in Committee, saying that only they knew the minds of the ethnic minority and that we did not — a presumptuous and self-seeking attitude. How did they use their knowledge? They sought to destroy stability, to arouse disharmony and to excite fear by attributing all sorts of changes to the Bill that it did not contain.

I am pleased to see the hon. Members for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) and for Leicester, East in their places tonight. I had thought that they would bring an insight to our discussions, but they did not. The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington declaimed to the Committee, not from the head, but from the stomach, the seat of all passion; but passion is not the best emotion for the sensible consideration of race relations. Calm, shrewd judgment and wisdom are needed. The hon. Member for Leicester, East, a solicitor who specialises in immigration cases, might have given us—I thought—those qualities, but he did not either. From him we heard long-winded exaggeration and torrents of hyperbole that drowned us in a mixture of boredom and nausea.

The Labour party was foolish and wrong, because, as the Home Secretary has said all along, this is a modest Bill —no more and no less. It reinforces our immigration code in a few areas in which gaps have appeared since the 1971 Act. The ethnic minority in Britain——

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall) *rose*——

Mr. Renton: I am coming to the end of my remarks, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will have a chance to speak later, if he catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The ethnic minority in Britain have much to fear from the Labour party, with its ill-thought-out promises completely to repeal the Immigration Act 1971 and the British Nationality Act 1981. Opposition Members have never given any thought—*[Interruption.]* I am glad that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West is waking up. They have never given any thought to the effect that repeal of those important measures would have on race relations in Britain or on the greatly increased numbers that would then come for primary settlement in this country.

Mr. Bidwell *rose*——

Mr. Renton: Despite what Opposition Members have said, the ethnic minority have nothing to fear from the Bill. Stopping abuse of our immigration system will lead to better and more harmonious community relations, because no one, whatever his background or racial origins, likes to see evaders who are illegally here getting away with their evasion. I commend the Bill to the House.

8.4 pm

Mr. Randall: One thing has been clear on Second Reading and in Committee: there is uncertainty about why the Government have introduced the Bill, which is restrictive. Essentially, it has to do with taking rights from people. The scope of the restrictions is considerable, and I shall briefly summarise them.

Clause 1 is about the breaking of a promise made by a Tory Government in 1971. It will have the serious effect of preventing the reunification of families. From now on,

[Mr. Randall]

I do not see how the Government can claim to be called the party of the family. The Government's actions in this clause can only be described as anti-family.

For example, as a result of clause 3, children will lose their chance to be present at an appeal in the United Kingdom when they wish to exercise their rights to settle here and there is dispute about their relationship with their parents. Much of the anguish experienced by some of those people could be overcome if the Government stopped dragging their feet over their decision to introduce DNA testing, which can prove family relationships and which should be free of charge, particularly for poor families.

We are emphatically opposed to clause 4 and believe that the Government should have withdrawn it. It will remove the appeal procedures that take compassionate circumstances into account when those who have overstayed are to be deported. The Labour party does not condone breaking the law, but it is vital for hon. Members to recognise that overstaying can happen for all sorts of technical and seemingly trivial reasons, sometimes outside the control of the person concerned.

For instance, a student may become an overstayer because his college registrar persistently fails to deal appropriately with certain forms and documentation to do with the student's courses, in conjunction with the Home Office. Deportation is such a serious matter that, before it happens, the merits of a case should be considered in an appeal procedure. However, the Government have decided to strip people of these fundamental appeal rights, and we deplore that.

In clause 5, the Government have decided to use the unnecessarily heavy-handed approach of the criminal law to deport overstayers, rather than the perfectly adequate and effective administrative procedures that are currently in force. Clearly, there is a serious risk that race relations —especially in our inner cities—could be impaired by the unnecessary use of the police in deportation cases. The police are already overstretched, attempting to deal with the record levels of crime that have arisen under this Government, without having also to become involved in immigration control. It is wrong and unnecessary for the Government to have recourse to the criminal law in this way.

Why have the Government introduced this unnecessary and highly restrictive Bill? They have two motives. During the general election last year, the Tory Party decided to play the race card in an attempt to save the rapidly sinking Conservative candidate for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central, Mr. Piers Merchant. As we know, Mr. Merchant lost his seat and the Tory party was landed with a number of commitments, which essentially meant placing restrictions on black people and their families.

The emphasis on polygamous marriages during the election campaign—there are only about 20 cases a year —was one element of the Tory party's obscene tactics. The Government are now expected to deliver a Bill that meets the commitments made during the election campaign, but which will do nothing for race relations. Clearly, the Bill is a wasted opportunity.

The second Government motive is to reduce the administrative burden in the immigration and nationality department, at a time when the demand for its services is growing. Currently there is an administrative shambles at Lunar house, Croydon, with roughly 200,000 unopened letters. Those received in November 1987 are only now being opened. The Minister has told us of some of his plans to deal with that absurd situation, but it is remarkable that he failed to take action before to prevent that chaos arising. He should have pre-empted the demands that arose as a result of the registration system and its deadline of 31 December 1987. That failure makes the Minister look quite inept.

The Government's obsession with cutting public expenditure means that the Home Office is attempting to tackle the chronic problems at Lunar house with what could be called "efficiency improvements". Such measures require the staff to do less work on certain types of case, and that is achieved by removing fundamental rights— for example, the appeal rights that we discussed earlier. Those rights have been taken away from immigrants or would-be immigrants. Clearly, one way of protecting those rights would be to provide more building space and staff at Lunar house, but that would cost money.

I believe that a parallel can be drawn between the National Health Service crisis and the administrative crisis that exists at Lunar house. In the NHS, services are being withdrawn from some of our hospitals because there are not enough nurses, as a result of cash shortages, to provide them. The consequence is hardship or, in some cases, death. The evidence from our hospitals unequivocally demonstrates that problem.

Cash shortages in the immigration service also mean insufficient staff and other resources to cope with the current work load. As a consequence, the Government are reducing vital services, and that in turn is causing delay, worry, stress and hardship for immigrants and their families.

It is clear that the Government's second motive is to reduce service levels to the users to save money, irrespective of the effect on families and individuals. That is a ruthless and inhumane strategy and it deserves total condemnation. That policy shows—as in the case of the NHS — that the Government have no scruples in attaching greater value to money rather than to the well-being of people. For that reason, the Labour party strongly condemns the Bill.

The Government's credibility on improving the cost-effectiveness of the administration of the immigration service must surely come into question when one considers the visa system that was introduced in 1986. On that occasion, the Home Secretary said:

"Changes have been made . . . because of the pressure on Heathrow airport in particular . . . changes will improve conditions for all passengers arriving at our ports and for all those in this country who come to greet them.—[*Official Report*, 27 October 1986; Vol. 103, c. 86, 91.]

It is clear that the Home Office has failed — the blame must rest with the Minister — to meet its objectives. There are still serious delays at our ports, especially for non-British and non-EEC passengers. Indeed, serious delays are still being encountered at Heathrow.

One objective of the visa system was to improve things for visitors to our country. However, it should be noted that there has been no improvement in the condition of detainees at Heathrow. People are having to sleep on benches or on the floor, without food, blankets or even drinks. Reports suggest that some immigration officers are so appalled by the treatment of detainees that they pay for

tea and sandwiches out of their own pockets. In 1987, one of the detainees who was kept in such unacceptable conditions was a pregnant woman.

That is a disgraceful way in which to treat visitors to our country. It shows that the Government's attempt to contain staff costs as a result of efficiency improvements has, at best, resulted in no improvement in service levels for visitors to this country and those people who go to Heathrow to greet them.

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman is always extremely critical of our decision to introduce the visa system for five countries a year ago. If he were ever in office, would he cancel that system?

Mr. Randall: I believe that the Minister has completely missed the point——

Mr. Renton: Answer the question.

Mr. Randall: I am. The fact is that the visa system had the aim of improving the services for visitors to this country with regard to delays and detention conditions. However, I have reports from the Home Office that show that those conditions have not been improved satisfactorily. We must consider the treatment of people and how their treatment reflects on the credibility of the Minister. The Minister has missed the point—I am talking about the administration of his Department.

If the introduction of the visa system is anything to go by, it is difficult to feel confident in the Minister's ability to resolve the administrative crisis in the immigration service. There is an obvious mismatch between the demands on that service and the resources needed to meet them.

About a week ago, the House debated the latest changes in the immigration rules. The main purpose of those changes was to reduce the work load at Lunar house for particular types of case work—for example, foreign nationals wishing to extend their stay in the United Kingdom. Although I said then that I accepted that some of those changes were welcome, it is a matter of considerable concern that the so-called "improvements" in cost-effectiveness could result in a deterioration of services for some visitors.

The new rules state that, on arriving in this country, all visitors will be granted the right to remain for six months. However, it is important to note that many people currently entering the country as visitors are granted a two or three-month stay because immigration officers are suspicious about their motives, but do not have the information needed to substantiate their suspicions. According to the new rules, such suspicious people will now be granted six months leave to remain in this country. However, what happens to those people in practice is unclear. The discretion available to an immigration officer to deal with such cases will be included in the manual "Instructions to Immigration Officers", which, as we know, is unpublished.

We are extremely worried that many of those so-called "suspicious" people will be refused entry altogether by immigration officers. I hope that the Minister can allay our fears. If such refusals were to take place—in our debate, the Minister said nothing to suggest that that would not happen, although I asked him to do so—it would be another example of how the Government's efforts to contain costs will result in a deterioration in the service levels for the users, in this case visitors to this country.

That worries Opposition Members. I should be grateful if the Minister will tell the House what discretionary powers he intends to grant to immigration officers through the "Instructions to Immigration Officers" manual to refuse entry to those suspicious people, and whether he expects the number of people refused entry to increase. I hope that the Minister will answer that question.

The Government are making continuing efforts to reduce the rights of Members of Parliament in immigration cases, which the Government clearly view as extra work for the Home Office. Unquestionably, Members of Parliament play a vital role in protecting the interests of constituents and their families. I should like to make it absolutely clear that Opposition Members will strenuously oppose any further attempts by the Government to reduce the influence of Members of Parliament in immigration cases. Clearly, if the Government were to get their way, there would be a serious deterioration in the services provided to immigrants by the Home Office through Members of Parliament. I hope that the Minister will comment on the latest position with regard to the Government's discussions and considerations.

On the face of it, there would appear to be no reason for the Government to restrict the intervention of Members of Parliament in immigration cases, except for the cost of servicing the inquiries of Members of Parliament. The service is so important to our constituents and to their families, and adequate resources must be provided so that the Home Office can deal with that vital work.

In conclusion, the structure of this highly restrictive Bill has been influenced, among other things, by the totally inadequate administrative systems—not the people, but the systems—at Lunar house and in other parts of the Home Office. Those inadequacies are related to the fact that there are insufficient staff and other resources available to cope with the demand. The current situation at Lunar house proves that beyond any reasonable doubt. Clearly, the root cause is the Government's obsession with reducing the levels of public expenditure, irrespective of the effect of that policy on people and families.

However, there are other considerations. The Government showed their attitude towards black people during the general election. That attitude, which has manifested itself in the Bill, was condemned by the British Council of Churches, black Church leaders and the Quakers. When I asked the British Council of Churches for a theological statement on the immigration policy in Britain, it referred me to Leviticus 19 : 34:

> "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you a native among you, and you shall love him as yourself for you too were strangers, when you were in the land of Egypt."

The Bill should have emerged from such a basis. Instead, we have something different.

The British Council of Churches seems to sum up the Conservative Government's attitude to immigration in its letter to me when it referred to the Prime Minister's predilection for the good Samaritan. The letter said:

> "a Government supporter coming down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho would presumably have asked the beaten man if he was an overstayer seeking the right to remain in the

[Mr. Randall]

country on compassionate grounds. Had he answered yes, he would no doubt have been rolled off the road down into the ditch; or if he were seeking to bring his wife and children in from another country, he would have been denied all assistance because of the drain on public funds—less of a problem if he died."

That is what the British Council of Churches think, about the Bill. For those reasons, the Labour party will be voting against this dreadful Bill tonight.

8.25 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I shall not detain the House for long. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, we have already spent 62 hours considering the Bill in detail in Committee.

I start by taking great exception to the words used by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall). I strongly resent being tarred as a racist, which was the import of his remarks.

Mr. Randall: I never used the word "racist" in the whole of the Committee proceedings or in today's debate. I said that the Government have played the race card. All hon. Members know that the Government played the race card during the general election. One has only to look at the newspaper reports to see the way in which polygamy was pressed during the later stages of the election campaign.

Mr. Jack: I thank the hon. Member for slightly clarifying the situation.

Mr. Renton: In regard to the word "polygamy", my hon. Friend will remember, as I do with pain, that Opposition Members debated polygamous marriages for six hours, but failed to vote on the relevant clause. That is a typical example of their determination to waste time.

Mr. Jack: I accept my hon. Friend's point. I shall make some remarks about polygamy in a moment. I thank the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West for at least clarifying the words that he used. Many Conservative Members would take exception to his remarks, as we have great concern about race relations and harmony between ethnic groups in Britain. I hope that the hon. Gentleman was not suggesting that one letter in the general election campaign tars the entire Conservative membership with the same brush.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on the way in which he conducted the Bill and I compliment him on his humour and patience. Indeed, it was with great patience that we had to listen to many of the comments from Opposition Members.

On the issue that Opposition Members put to the House, I live next to Preston, where there is an immigrant community, from which I have received no representations whatever on the matters contained in the Bill. I made inquiries because hon. Members representing constituencies which do not have large numbers of immigrants within their boundaries, have been chastised and told that we do not know or care about these issues. I made inquiries about whether it was a local issue. I was put firmly in my place by those involved in race relations in Preston, who told me that the Bill was not an issue; it had not been discussed, nor had it appeared in the local newspapers. I was available for comment and nobody came to see me.

We have heard a great deal about the operation of the visa system. I note from a letter that I received from the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office—an interesting letter dated 11 January that was sent to a number of hon. Members. On the subject of visas and their operation, the Minister drew my attention to the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants' report "Out of Sight". The letter states that that report

"acknowledges the success of our aim to provide a quick service for the majority of applicants."

It goes on:

"Ministerial colleagues and officials visiting the Indian Sub-Continent have heard expressions of general satisfaction with the new visa regimes and a recognition that for bona fide travellers it offers a good service and a trouble-free passage through immigration formalities on arrival."

That underwrites the effectiveness which is demonstrated by one figure for the period 1 November 1986 to 31 October 1987 when in Islamabad, 31,950 visa applications were received and 24,340 visas were issued — a considerable amount of work most effectively and efficiently done.

I comment on the Bill from the background of a constituency which does not have a large immigrant population. I make that point specifically because some Opposition Members, for good reasons, have approached this subject with something akin to tunnel vision. They have not seen the wider issues and concerns of those who live in areas without large-scale immigrant population.

Much of the Bill has to do with tolerance and good race relations. In many clauses and many ways it seeks to tighten and amend the law and certain regulations where they have been abused or found wanting. The Bill will do much to reassure people that their concerns have been properly addressed.

There is a real worry about people who come to Britain without the necessary bona fide credentials. It may surprise Opposition Members to know that, despite the Bill, some people in Britain still feel that our regulations are extremely lax. *[Interruption.]* If hon. Members want to contribute, I am sure that they will be able to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Many people do not understand the enormous range of opportunities that exist for various forms of appeal and our immigration facilities. For them, somebody either has the right to come here or not. It may interest hon. Members to know that, in the course of reviewing clause 1, and some other clauses, I made some inquiries about how other countries view their visas. It may surprise Opposition Members to hear that Britain is extremely tolerant and fair and that our waiting lists are short.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): If entering Britain is as easy and fair as the hon. Gentleman thinks, why did the family of a constituent of mine have to wait 12 years for entry clearance to come to this country from Bangladesh as perfectly legal immigrants and dependants of my constituent? They have suffered the most appalling indignity, family disunity and poverty as a result of the Home Office's inefficiency and incompetence and its deliberately understaffing the High Commission in Dhaka to reduce the number of people who come here.

Mr. Jack: That is an individual interpretation of the situation. Had the hon. Gentleman been present in Committee for our debate on this subject, he would have found such an accusation thoroughly repudiated, particularly by my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond

and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) who had visited the Indian subcontinent and had reported to us on the improved situation in the various queues that he had seen. Therefore, I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's point.

I have here the United States' official visa bulletin dated January 1988. I recommend that Opposition Members should read that document, because they will find that, in certain cases, unless application has been made before 1971, certain categories will not be able to enter the United States. That is not the case in Britain.

Mr. Hanley: Does my hon. Friend agree that, should America relax those visa requirements, it would be as a tribute to our own strong system of immigration control?

Mr. Jack: I accept that valid point.

A similar situation also applies to appeals. I checked whether the United States, Australia and Canada had any form of compassionate appeal. When it came to technical infringements of their immigration regulations, I was staggered to find that the decision was either yes or no. In other words, a person who transgressed the regulations left, and, once having left, could not reapply to enter the United States for five years. I make these points because they put the Bill in perspective. We are not imposing such draconian measures on appeals and visas as already exist in other countries.

Polygamy is not acknowleged by the majority of people in Britain. They will be extremely pleased that this minor measure has been included. The length of the debate that we had to suffer on this matter in Committee was a great surprise, since the Opposition then agreed.

Overstaying is dealt with in clause 5. Many people in Britain will not understand that, before this Bill, the law gave little opportunity to prosecute those who were found to have overstayed in Britain. They will have been profoundly worried by some of the implications of stories appearing in *The Sunday Times* this weekend about people who were clearly here on some dubious pretext in pursuit of some kind of college education. Whatever the reason for such people being induced to come here, such stories undermine confidence in our immigration policies. Our measures on overstaying seek to plug that important gap.

There is much in a Library note on overstaying which underpins my support for clause 1. It refers to the evasion of immigration control printed as an annex to the Commission for Racial Equality's report on immigration control procedures in 1985.

Mr. Corbyn *rose*——

Mr. Jack: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman. I have some information to give and only a little time in which to give it.

Mr. Corbyn *rose*——

Mr. Jack: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to contribute to the debate, I am sure that he will have an adequate opportunity to do so.

The report to which I referred said:

"Overstaying constitutes a greater problem than illegal entry because of the large number of people involved."

Clause 5 seeks to address and tighten the legal loopholes on overstaying.

I have a relatively simple view of the matter. Someone who comes to Britain must abide by our regulations. It is not just a matter of coming here for six or 12 months and then finding some way around the regulations. The Bill makes it relatively easy for those with bona fide reasons to come to Britain for various lengths of time, but it tries to tighten up on those who seek to abuse our regulations.

The tightening-up measures in the Bill will do much to reassure the bulk of the British people that the Conservative party takes immigration control seriously, but couples that with a deep concern for good-quality race relations.

8.38 pm

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): I shall be brief because I know that my hon. Friends want to have a good innings, having sat patiently through the Committee stage of the Bill. I was unable to serve on that Committee, and I apologise to the House for not having been present earlier. It was because I was engaged in other parliamentary duties. Many of us suffer from the fact that we have to be in two places at the same time.

At this late stage of the Bill, I want to reflect on some of its provisions, because I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) that it seems to have had something to do with the general election. As I said on Second Reading, in order to secure a majority in Parliament, the Tories had to try to make out that they would do much better on immigration control. They tried to make out that they would be much tougher on immigration control — which meant keeping black people out of Britain — than a Labour Administration would be. That has been underscored, and it is right that it should have been.

Secondly, what is proposed is intertwined with the mess that the Home Office has got into administratively. It has not been prepared to employ sufficient additional staff to overcome that difficulty, and things are still in a mess.

The rules that followed the 1971 Act are of extreme importance and are debated in the House from time to time. They have for a long time been much too harshly drawn. The immigration Minister, because that is what he is, is not, he tells me, also the race relations Minister. It is a matter of some consequence that the two jobs in the Home Office seem to have been separated. I assumed in the Second Reading debate that the hon. Gentleman was the race relations Minister as well as the immigration Minister. All through the years, those two jobs have been intertwined, because they are, in conscience and in administration, inseparable.

The immigration Minister is thus now protected from having to visit from time to time the areas that are most concerned with these problems. He goes to the Indian subcontinent, and I do not know whether he also goes to the West Indies and Africa, and he would gain from such experiences, but he is not able to gain from visiting the areas most concerned. Former Ministers, whether Labour or Tory, have so gained. It was because I wanted to question him on the separation of the duties that I sought to intervene in his speech—and he can intervene now, if he so wishes.

I will tell the hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) why the attitude to which he referred exists in the black community in Britain. The mood is that this is the Tories at it again. They expect to get harsher immigration restrictions from the Tories. That is why, by and large, they vote Labour at general elections.

There is no reason why the present immigration Minister should go down this road. He could emerge as the most humane and the sanest immigration Minister of all

[Mr. Sydney Bidwell]

time. I believe that he is a man who is capable of listening, and above all of listening to me, a Member with the experience that I have had over the years. I pay tribute to the Home Office staff for the co-operation that I have always had from them. I hardly miss an opportunity of saying that, because I think that I owe it to them. Their courteous attitude to me is something that I cherish. They have been of enormous assistance to me over the years, and I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree about that.

In the light of these additional restrictions on immigration and the removal of the differences between those who came after the operation of the 1971 Act in 1973, and those who were here before that, and in the light of the visa restriction on visitors, which is a harsher control than hitherto because it has cut out the temporary admissions that hon. Members were able to arrange, I do not believe that everything in the garden is lovely. There have been many refusals to grant visas for visits to this country, and there have been special pleadings through me and others to the control overseas. Once that decision is made, appeals are invited, but if someone wishes to visit Britain for family purposes, or even to play Kabbodi in a tournament here, and a blank refusal has been given in Delhi, it is not much good appealing when the appeal will be heard long after the application and when the tournament is over. The appeal system has not coped with the consequences of the restrictions imposed overseas.

We need more flexibility. We were challenged to say that we would remove this element of immigration control. I do not know whether we would, but we would certainly go very deeply into the administration of the whole system. The present system is very rough justice and, if we could achieve justice only by chucking out the visa system altogether, we would do so.

Our policy is to review substantially the British Nationality Act 1981, which took away the right of children born in this country whose parents were not British citizens automatically to be regarded as British citizens. There was no need at all for that, and as a result of one of the hon. Gentleman's predecessors going to Southall that was to some extent mitigated. That is the sort of thing that the hon. Gentleman will be missing. As a consequence of that visit, a change was made for children who were resident in Britain, regardless of the status of parents, and that still prevails as far as I know.

The Minister could have come to the House and said that there was such a terrible mess in the Home Office that he wanted to cut down the administrative activities; that they had promised in the election that they would be tougher than a Labour Government but that he would look again at the immigration rules. We have not finished with him yet. He is going to come back and tell us how they propose to change the immigration rules. We shall be looking anxiously for the details of that.

One thing that the Minister could do is relax the restrictions on the widow who wants to come to Britain to join her offspring, on the grounds that she is emotionally attached to her children and grandchildren here, instead of applying the harsh rule that she has a close relative to turn to and is not wholly dependent on her offspring in this country. He could ease that considerably, and he would be the pin-up boy in the areas affected by these problems.

I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman wants to be a good immigration Minister. When his colleague at the Home Office comes to areas such as mine to have a pow-wow and go into the realities of these matters, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will come along as well. He will not get eggs chucked at him, as immigration Ministers are said to have had in other areas. He will get a constructive agenda for the discussion of the nitty-gritty matters that could not be sewn up in the 1971 Act.

The rules need continuous review, especially over the $64,000 question of husbands and wives and their purpose in wanting to come here. There are women now waiting for their husbands to join them, or perhaps they are over in India with their husbands who are trying to get them back here to settle, as is their right. This is what the Government's policy is supposed to be about, and it is what the European convention on human rights is supposed to be about.

Even when a child is born to a couple, it is still said that their marriage was one of convenience. All marriages are a matter of convenience. My marriage was a matter of convenience. What is a marriage of convenience? A marriage is an agreement between two people, and they have to see each other, but that is not enough. There may be a delicate balance as to whether the young man or woman wants to come to Britain simply for economic purposes after the marriage, but that should be good enough and the rules should be changed accordingly. I give the Minister those two tips so that he may be seen in a better light than at present in the eyes of the black community.

8.50 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I speak in support of the Bill because it represents an intention to tighten the regulations on immigration and to ease the considerable pressure on Lunar house. I represent 7,000 Sikh constituents in Gravesend and Northfleet. Every week at my surgeries I come across cases involving immigration and I deal with them as any other Member would. Some cases cause considerable concern and it is clear that the regulations must be improved. The Bill represents improvement, but at each stage of the recent improvement we have had the same scaremongering from Labour Members, which worries vulnerable people in the community.

I refer to a case in point. The Government wisely introduced visas for visitors from India and elsewhere, in the light of the terrible scenes that used to occur at Heathrow, where people came to this country from India and elsewhere to visit their families and did not know until they got here whether they would be admitted. This put unreasonable strain on the traveller and on my constituents who went to meet their families, so the Government sensibly arranged for the clearances to be done in India through the visa system.

How was the new regulation received by Opposition Members? I noticed that when the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) was asked whether Labour would repeal the visa requirement, he wriggled on the hook and did not give a clear answer. Opposition Members are concerned only to cash in and play on the fears of people.

The House should be told how the visa operation is progressing. I quote from a report of the community relations officer in my borough, a Sikh gentleman who is

also a Labour councillor, by the name of Mr. Gurdev Singh Talwar. He travelled to New Delhi and visited the high commission to see how the issuing of visas was being handled. Councillor Talwar said:

"I went there to find out for myself how the new regulations were working. I was sceptical before my visit, but now I think everything is being done fairly."

He said that while at the high commission he sat in on interviews, and added:

"I was quite satisfied with the treatment given to the applicants."

That is from a Labour councillor who is concerned with the real issues affecting the Sikh community in my town. That contrasts remarkably with the emotive claptrap and the kind of comment I heard earlier from Labour Members.

Mr. Madden: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, since the introduction of visas more than 1,000 men, women and children per month have had their visas refused and that, if they choose to appeal against refusal, they must wait 12 months for an appeal? Has he had representations from his constituents, as I have had from mine, about the unfair way in which the visa regime is working?

Mr. Arnold: For the information of the hon. Gentleman, I can do no more than quote from Labour Councillor Talwar, who looked at the number of visa applications processed and the number refused—looked at the facts and figures—and said:

"That's certainly less than under the old regulations."

Mr. Madden: That is not true.

Mr. Arnold: This comes from a Labour councillor who is concerned with community relations. If the hon. Gentleman says that that is untrue, perhaps he can sort out another internecine dispute within the Labour party. I am concerned that the immigration controls, which we all accept must be tightly exercised, should be exercised in a humane manner and must be brought up to date. That is what the Bill attempts to do.

8.55 pm

Mr. Vaz: I am grateful for the opportunity to address the House on the issue. I have the good fortune of having spent nearly 62 hours in Committee, watching the Minister sitting across the table with a smile like an operation stretch mark, waiting to stab the black and Asian communities in the back with further legislation designed to damage relations between the black and white communities.

Conservative Members opposite have spoken of compassion. All Labour Members who have spoken against the Bill have argued on the ground of compassion that the Bill should be amended substantially.

Mr. Hanley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Vaz: No, I will not give way.

We face the intellectual inflexibility of the Minister and some of his silent colleagues. The hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) had a habit of jumping up and down in Committee and claimed that he was an expert on race relations because he once visited Bangladesh and he was able to speak with some authority on the needs of the black and Asian communities.

The Bill will not, as the Minister says it will, foster good relations between the communities. It will damage relations, specifically between black and Asian communities and the police. The front line in immigration matters is not Karachi, Dhaka, Calcutta, Bombay or Nairobi; the front line in immigration control has become Coventry, Southall, Bradford, Birmingham, Leicester and London. Family after family come to our surgeries every week and show us that the existing immigration rules and legislation are racist and unfair.

The Bill seeks to limit and restrict the rights of black and Asian people and to truncate the rights of appeal. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) today and previously has highlighted the various clauses of the Bill. It goes beyond the rights that are described. Clause 1 goes beyond restricting rights of appeal and breaks a promise made in 1971 by a previous Conservative Government, a promise that was accepted by successive Labour and Conservative Governments. It affects especially, but not exclusively, the Bangladeshi community in Britain and, because of the crisis in local government and the pressure on housing and local government expenditure, it removes the possibility of men settled here bringing in wives and children from abroad.

Clause 3 removes further rights. Clause 5 makes the offence of overstaying a continuing offence, thus involving the police yet again in immigration control. Clause 4 imposes an arbitrary restriction and time limit of seven years. We were not clear why the Government had introduced that seven-year limit. The hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes told us that it was because of the legislation relating to limitation——

Mr. Hanley: I did not.

Mr. Vaz: —but, of course, the Minister was able to rebuke him on that occasion, as he did on previous occasions.

Mr. Hanley *rose*——

Mr. Vaz: The purpose of legislation was to alter the decision made by members of the Court of Appeal and the other place in a number of immigration cases. It was referred to in an interview which the Minister gave to *The Guardian* the week before Second Reading, when he described the Bill as

"an attempt to close loopholes and to stop judicial activism."

The Bill sought to reverse the decision of the Court of Appeal and the other place in such cases as Grant *v.* Borg.

In the schedules, we find new provisions which will mean that people who apply for indefinite leave to remain in this country will for the first time be charged a fee. Those who have experience of dealing with immigration cases will know that it requires only one letter to be sent to Lunar house. The Government are proposing to add to the £6 million profit that they have made on previous nationality and citizenship matters by charging people.

All the appeals to the Minister from organisations outside the House to try to change or amend the provisions of the Bill fell on deaf ears. Appeals have been made by the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, the Immigration Law Practitioners Association and members of the World Council of Churches. A special delegation of black Church leaders went to see the Minister and were treated by him in a patronising way. Other organisations, numerous trade unions and individuals have written to the Minister to complain about the legislation.

[Mr. Vaz]

The legislation will seek to divide families. It will prevent the unity of families. Those who come to me and to my hon. Friends to complain about the unfairness of the immigration legislation will know what it is like to be caught in the spider's web of immigration control. Organisations in Leicester, such as the Asian Youth Project, Belgrave Bheano, the Self-Help Project, Leicester rights centre and the Highfields advice centre, deal hourly, daily, weekly and monthly with those immigration matters. A constituent of mine, Mrs. Joghirs, has been waiting nine years to be reunited with her husband. It is a long delay when it takes nine years to be reunited with one's family.

In his speech on one of the previous clauses, the Minister made great play of my visit to Lunar house, and said that I arrived 45 minutes late. I wish to correct him, because that is yet another fact that he has got hopelessly wrong. I arrived at 10.30 am last Monday morning, having got up at 4.30 am and driven from Leicester to go to Heathrow airport, where I met members of the immigration service, who told me unanimously that they needed more members of staff at terminal 4.

I arrived at Lunar house to view some of the 200,000 unopened letters which arrive at the rate of 2,000 a week. I saw extraordinary shortages of staff. Out of a full staffing complement of 66, only 30 people were present that morning. Out of the 22 people who should have been answering telephone calls in the public inquiry office, only 11 people were present that day. Out of the 26 people who were sitting in the public inquiry office, not one was able to speak Punjabi or Urdu. That is the state of the crisis at Lunar house.

We should make one point clear. We are in no way criticising members of staff at Lunar house or in the immigration service. They are working under intolerable conditions which have been created by Government policies and the bad management of one person—the Minister on the Treasury Bench. If the Minister had any decency he would resign. If any other Department of Government had 200,000 unopened letters, I think the Minister would have proffered his resignation.

Mr. Renton *rose*——

Mr. Vaz: I will give way when I have finished this point.

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Renton *rose*——

Mr. Vaz: I will give way in a moment. I do not know why the Minister is getting so excited.

The Minister has talked about the waste of taxpayers' money on me being shown round Lunar house. I am a Member of Parliament who has dealt with over 2,000 immigration cases since my election. The Minister recently went to the sub-continent. The cost of his trip was £10,600. I think that the exependiture involved in one morning on one person being shown round Lunar house by one official is quite proper for a Member of Parliament who deals with the number of immigration cases that I deal with.

Mr. Renton: For the record, the timetable that I have from Lunar house of the hon. Gentleman's visit is that he arrived at 10.45 am, 45 minutes late and not 30 minutes late; perhaps his watch was wrong. He departed at 2.20 pm. During that time he spent one and a half hours at a local engagement. The time spent in Lunar house was two hours five minutes precisely.

The question I should like to ask him is: what does he think he achieved? All the figures that he has given about unopened letters have been dealt with already by me in answers to questions. When he came to see me at the Home Office the next day, why did he not discuss the problems and suggest solutions rather than run off to tell his story to *The Independent* as quickly as he could?

Mr. Vaz: The Minister has a nerve to tell us that we have not raised these matters before. We have raised them every day in Committee. We have proffered examples. My hon. Friends the Members for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) and I have come forward with solutions, but he chose not to take those solutions.

Four days after I went to Lunar house and released my findings to the press, the Minister got on his broomstick and went from Queen Anne's gate to Croydon, where he had discussions with the unions. *[Interruption.]* I am delighted that, four days after my well-publicised visit to Croydon, the Minister made a visit himself to meet the unions and to come up with his proposals. It is important to show the Minister — *[Interruption.]* The Minister should not interrupt so much; he should listen to what I am saying, and I will explain why his proposals will not work.

The Minister tells me that the crisis occurred at Lunar house because he was so successful; he was the victim of his own success and his own public relations exercise. He says that because, the week before the deadline on 31 December, he made a broadcast, which we heard on Radio Leicester, urging people to apply for citizenship, and everyone decided to apply.

I can tell the Minister something that he has not told the House: there are 72,000 passports in Lunar house at present. He nods his head. I am surprised that when he went to Croydon he did not get that information from the officials. Perhaps they were terrified of him. I asked this very question of the officials; I asked, "How many passports do you estimate are at Lunar House?" Their estimate, which they have not told the Minister, was 72,000. Therefore, 72,000 people have been waiting for their passports to be returned by the Minister.

The Minister came to the House, not before time, and apologised for the delay. He agreed that the delay was unacceptable. He said that the work load had risen because of his marvellous public relations. He proposes that there will be an emergency deployment of 160 members of staff—that is, 160 members of the existing staff. On Monday morning of last week, the head of the post room was in negotiation with the trade union for three and one half hours; I do not know whether the Minister knows that. When the Minister went to Croydon on Friday, I am sure that he spoke to officials and to members of the trade unions.

The proposals of the officials to send back the 72,000 passports and to acknowledge the receipt of 200,000 letters will cause further delay for people, because the Home Office is not even considering photocopying the passports before they are sent back. That will mean that, at a later date, Home Office officials must write back to applicants and those seeking a variation of leave, to ask for the passports to be returned. That will certainly create further

delays. I hope that the Minister will take this suggestion back to his officials, that those passports are photocopied before they are sent back to people, and kept in appropriate places in Lunar house.

The second suggestion I have to make is that, instead of redeploying staff, the Minister should take on additional staff immediately. One way to ensure that this mail was opened would have been to send some of these hard-working officials, whose time he has wasted tonight sitting in this useless Report stage, back to Lunar house today. If they had been sent back there today, each of them would have been able to open at least 1,000 letters over these six hours of debate.

Not only that but, in relation to a question I raised earlier but which was not answered by the Minister, at 7 o'clock tonight in Leicester there was a meeting of five of the most senior Home Office officials from Lunar house, who were meeting community organisations. Neither myself, the Member of Parliament for Leicester, East nor my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) who is sitting in the Chamber, nor my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) was informed of this visit by Home Office officials.

It was only after I tabled a Question on 9 February that, two days later, a letter arrived from the Minister informing me that the officials were to visit Leicester the next day. The parliamentary Question was replied to on Monday 15 February, and the meeting was tonight. How was it possible for my colleagues and myself to be in Leicester to hear what the Home Office officials say, when we are supposed to be here in the House opposing this squalid legislation?

If those five officials, instead of being sent to Leicester, were added to the nine officials who are sitting here, and sent to Lunar house in Croydon, that would be one way to solve the crisis of understaffing at Lunar house.

Mr. Renton *rose*——

Mr. Vaz: No, the Minister can take up this point in his wind-up. He will have plenty of time.

Mr. Renton *rose*——

Mr. Vaz: I will not give way.

When the Minister spoke earlier, he gave us no new information about the way in which representations by Members of Parliament operated. All he said was that he was seeking consultation.

I will give way to the Minister in a minute if he hangs on, when I have developed this point. I would like the Minister to tell us in his wind-up speech, if he is proposing to wind up, why Members of Parliament who represent areas such as Leicester, London, Birmingham, Bradford, Coventry, Manchester and Glasgow, who take up many immigration cases, are not being consulted about these new proposals. The Minister may grimace, but I have not received a letter from the Minister asking my views about representations in immigration cases. I will give way to the Minister now.

Mr. Renton: The hon. Member is not yet speaking for the Opposition on immigration matters. That may be his ambition, but he is not yet in that position.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has written to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) on this matter. I believe that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook still speaks for the Opposition on immigration matters. Perhaps he will give a copy of his letter to the hon. Member for Leicester, East.

On the hon. Gentleman's specific point about advising him about Home Office officials visiting Leicester, I know very well that I signed that letter to him and to other hon. Members representing Leicester constituencies on Thursday 11 February. We did not know until Thursday that the debate was to be today. I wrote to the hon Member on 11 February. I should have thought that he would congratulate the Home Office on sending senior officials to Leicester, as they have been to Blackburn, to explain to his community leaders what is happening about the Immigration Bill. The Home Office officials are there at the invitation of Leicester county council.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. This Third Reading debate lends itself to fairly wide discussion, but I should like to hear a little more about the Bill.

Mr. Vaz: I am only introducing matters in the same way that the Minister did when he moved the Third Reading. His point is wholly frivolous. The meeting was planned two months ago. It was planned because Home Office officials wrote to the county council two months ago and requested a visit to Leicester. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West and I were not informed until 12 February. The letter was signed on 11 February, and received the following day. My parliamentary question was put down on 9 February, when I requested information on why the meeting was taking place without the Members being informed. Before the Minister comes back to the House with the details of his consultation, the Opposition would like to see a list of the individuals and organisations whom he will be consulting.

I am pleased that the Minister has now accepted that the DNA report is completed, and Opposition Members would like to pay tribute to the work of Doctor Alec Jeffreys from Leicester university, who pioneered the scheme. I hope that the Minister will not come to us at a later date and cast doubt on the authenticity or the authority of the report, because Opposition Members believe that it should be accepted. I also believe that the test should be made freely available, and that the cost of £105 is absurdly high.

In conclusion, let me say that the Opposition Members who sat on the Immigration Bill Committee realise one thing——

Mr. Renton: It was a waste of time.

Mr. Vaz: The Minister says that it was a waste of time. I believe that immigration issues are of great importance to many people in this country. However, we cannot see a single clause or even sentence in the Bill that will relieve the hardship and misery of the many thousands who wait in queues—not just those waiting for applications in this country, but those who are confined to the misery of a queue in Karachi, Dhaka, Bombay and Calcutta.

The Minister now has his one opportunity to say firmly that he will withdraw the Bill. Otherwise, he will have the greif and misery of millions of people on his conscience for the rest of his life.

9.17 pm

Mr. Hanley: I merely want to put on record three or four facts that the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr.

[Mr. Hanley]

Vaz) would not allow me to mention in the middle of his speech. The gross discourtesy with which he refused to allow me to intervene was not something that I should like people to imitate, either inside or outside the House. It is sad that someone who, as we know, has better manners was so frightened and shaky that he had to deny me the chance of making a comment during his speech.

The hon. Gentleman said that immigration law was, by its very nature, racist. He said that the Conservative Government, in the way that they have introduced changes to immigration law since 1979, were also racist. But how can a Government be racist when since they came to office they have allowed in, for permanent settlement, more than 600,000 people, over half of whom have come from the Indian sub-continent? How can a Government be racist when, since 1979, they have allowed in more than 25,000 refugees—and, of course, 20,000 Vietnamese boat people?

This cannot be a racist Government. True racism is choosing to exploit race for one's own purposes. [HON. MEMBERS: "For political purposes."] For political purposes—indeed. Racism is choosing to manufacture fears where they do not naturally exist. It is true racism to use those from a particular racial background for political purposes, and to whip up their anxieties to manufacture —as the hon. Member for Leicester, East has shown today—fears based not on a law that is ultra-restrictive and aimed specifically at people of a particular colour, but on a minor administrative law tightening loopholes that have been exploited by those who, I should have thought, have caused as much shame to the hon. Gentleman as to others in the House.

Too many people try to exploit immigration. As I have said, more than 600,000 people have patiently applied to settle in this country by using the immigration rules that were set down by the party of the hon. Member for Leicester, East when in government, and by our own Government. However, there are those who cannot bear to wait and who decide to push ahead. Many are helped by those who exploit them financially and mercilessly, as I have seen in Bangladesh. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would have more respect for a law that has been democratically passed by this Parliament, but no, he looks for loopholes so that they can be exploited. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will live to regret that. One day, in some far distant future, he might have some responsibility for immigration in this country—although I doubt it—and perhaps he will then live to regret some of the words that he has used tonight.

Good race relations are essential. Firm immigration control is a part of society's framework that leads to good race relations. Unrestricted immigration will lead to bad race relations. I hope that the hon. Member for Leicester, East, and his hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott), who made long contributions in Committee, will realise that there is considerable passion, concern and affection for those in our community who make up our multiracial state.

We believe that orderly immigration is essential for an orderly society. The Labour party—especially some of its newer and younger Members—seems to think that exploiting the race issue will bring them favour. It will not do so, even among the communities that they claim to represent. Let them listen to their wiser brethren, and perhaps eventually they will understand that playing the race game for political purposes is cheap, cynical and disgraceful.

9.21 pm

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The Minister accused me of speaking on this subject, and specifically on the Bill, with passion. He made that accusation as if it was entirely negative. I advise him that I plead guilty, and I hope that I will always speak with passion in this House on issues about which I feel strongly. That is what my constituents, both black and white, would expect.

Conservative Members have implied that the number of hours that we spent on the Bill in Committee was, in some sense, a waste of time. I beg to differ. Although it is a relatively short Bill, it will have wide-ranging effects on the civil liberties of thousands of people. My hon. Friends believe that it was right to spend as much time on the Bill as we did.

I wish to pick up two specific points that the Minister made. He started by saying that the intention of the Bill was to make control fairer. I cannot see how that will happen. Hon. Members have referred—as I do—to the plight of the Bengali community in Tower Hamlets. This is the single largest community that will be affected by clause 1, which takes away rights that were promised to Commonwealth citizens way back in 1971. The Minister knows perfectly well that the Bengali community is the largest single community that is still attempting to reunite its families.

When the Bill becomes law, the Bengali community and other affected groups will find that the promise that was made to them by successive Conservative Governments and their Ministers that they could bring in their families without let or hindrance will be taken away. They will find themselves in double jeopardy. They cannot bring their families in unless they can provide housing, but they cannot get local authority housing because their families are not with them. I suggest to the Minister that to the average Bengali resident of Tower Hamlets it is not at all clear how the Bill will make immigration control fairer. On the contrary, it will inevitably lead to separated families.

The Minister talked about the Bill protecting the rights of people who are already here. On the contrary, in many instances all that the Bill will do is take away peoples' rights. The Minister talked about the Bill making controls fairer, yet the Bill will put overstayers in double jeopardy. *[Interruption.]* Anyone in the Gallery listening to Conservative Members' comments would believe that the Government had no recourse against overstayers. That is quite wrong. There are already clear and effective administrative procedures for deporting overstayers. By adding a criminal sanction to the administrative procedures that already exist, overstayers are being put in double jeopardy quite unnecessarily.

The Bill is supposed to make control fairer. One of its most unfortunate aspects — as my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) and I said in Committee—is that in certain cases it will limit the right of appeal. I realise that to the Minister and Conservative Members anything that my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East and I say about immigration is in some sense invalid. Perhaps the 1957 Franks report will carry

some credibility with Conservative Members, and I therefore quote what that report said about the right of appeal:

"The existence of a right of appeal is salutary and makes for right adjudication."

The Wilson committee report of 1967 said:

"It is fundamentally wrong and inconsistent with the rule of law that power to take decisions affecting a man's whole future should be vested in officers of the executive from whose findings there was no appeal."

Conservative Members may sneer at my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East and me when we raise these matters, but they have been fundamental matters of public procedure for many many years and the limitation of the right of appeal is just one of the issues on which the Bill ought to give right-thinking people cause for concern, and just one of the ways in which we believe that, far from making control fairer, the Bill will make control less fair.

Mr. Renton *rose*——

Ms. Abbott: If the Minister will allow me, I shall develop my argument.

The Minister claimed for the Bill that, as well as making control fairer, it would enhance stability and the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) talked very generally about immigration controls promoting good race relations. I put it to the Minister that the Bill will not enhance stability. Quite apart from the general atmosphere of uncertainty that it will create, there is the specific question of the way in which it will widen the role of the police in immigration control. By virtue of the clause that makes overstaying a criminal offence for all time, the Government are necessarily extending the role of the police in immigration control.

I am aware that what my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East and I say on this matter carries no credibility with Conservative Members. I would hope that what William Whitelaw, the then Home Secretary, said in 1980 carries at least a little credibility with them. He said:

"The enforcement of the immigration laws is among the most delicate of the tasks which the police have to perform."

The 1984-85 report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs said:

"The involvement of the police in the administration of immigration control has sometimes harmed their relationship with ethnic minorities".

The Commission for Racial Equality has said:

"The police should not participate in immigration control work as a matter of routine."

Public policy in the early 1980s was moving away from the routine involvement of the police in immigration control because it was recognised that it did nothing for community relations. By criminalising overstayers, the Government are widening the role of the police in immigration control. We believe that that is not in the interests of stability in the community. The Government have ample administrative sanctions against overstayers. Day in and day out, my constituents are caught in that net. There is no need for these criminalising provisions. Their wider ramifications for community relations give us cause for concern.

The Minister accused us, with more vehemence than he showed in Committee, of exciting fear and promoting disharmony. Perhaps it would help him if I explained what excites fear and promotes disharmony. What excites fear and promotes disharmony among my constituents is the case of Marion Gaima. She has been in this country since 1973, she is aged nearly 40, she is frightened to return to her country of birth for political reasons, she has twice had the police knock at her door, and twice she has spent time in police cells, accused of overstaying. For many months she has lived in fear of her future and the threat of deportation. That is what excites fear and promotes disharmony.

I should tell the Government that what most excited fear and promoted disharmony in the early 1980s were fishing raids on factories, shops and restaurants, when dozens of black people were taken away, but in the end perhaps a handful of overstayers were found. People had their homes raided in the middle of the night. It was those midnight fishing raids that excited fear and promoted disharmony. Even without this criminalising clause in the Bill, my constituents are stopped in the streets or while driving their cars and asked for their passports. When they visit hospitals for treatment, they are asked for their passports. That is what excites fear and promotes disharmony.

Every week in my surgery, I see constituents whose elderly relatives are humiliated at Heathrow and Gatwick when they try to come here for a holiday. The atmosphere surrounding registration for nationality and all the problems and troubles connected with it—many of my constituents had to get forms and find the money to register—excites fear and promotes disharmony.

In 1987 Conservative Members returned from the sub-continent and said that 25 per cent. of wives seeking entry to this country were polygamous wives. That matter made the front page of *The Times*, but later those Members had to retract that remark. We have now found that there are about only 20 cases per year of polygamous wives trying to enter this country. Such ill-considered remarks promote fear.

The casual remarks of the Prime Minister about swamping excites fear and promotes disharmony. The proposals that are being introduced to limit the rights of Members of Parliament to speak and act for their constituents will promote fear. Many Opposition Members can speak——

Mr. Hanley *rose*——

Ms. Abbott: With the greatest respect, I have sat through the entire debate without speaking. The hon. Gentleman has spoken many times, and he must allow me to develop my point.

The Minister spoke of inciting fear and disharmony, and I was trying to tell him that it is not I, or my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East, or Opposition Members, who promote fear and disharmony. It is the nature and implementation of our immigration legislation, and the atmosphere created by the remarks of some Conservative Members——

Mr. Renton *rose*——

Ms. Abbott: If the Minister will only allow me——

Mr. Renton *rose*——

Ms. Abbott: I would dearly love to give way, but I have sat through the entire debate and I wish to draw my remarks to a close.

Mr. Renton: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mr. Heffer: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have been sitting here watching the Minister's behaviour. If all Tory Ministers were to act in the way that he has acted this evening, they would be an utter disgrace.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman leaves that to the Chair.

Ms. Abbott: The Minister has accused us of creating fear and disharmony. We beg to differ. We are merely trying to act as responsible representatives should and reflect the genuine fears of our constituents. The Minister has claimed that the Bill will bring about no major changes, but we believe that the Bill, and its legacy if it becomes law, will mean that British residents who happen to be black will have fewer rights than EEC nationals to bring in their children, parents and grandparents.

The Minister referred to the contributions of my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East and myself in Committee. To give him credit, he did so with only the merest hint of condescension in his voice. We plead guilty to feeling strongly about immigration and to being new hon. Members. However, we believe that history will show that it was no bad thing that the Committee that examined the Bill for so many hours genuinely reflected, for the first time, our multiracial community.

We have been accused of tunnel vision and, explicitly and implicitly, of reflecting the views only of black and ethnic minority people. Opposition Members think that immigration control is not a matter only for black and ethnic minority residents of this country—or only for white residents. The nature, implementation and administration of immigration control is a matter for anyone who is concerned about fairness, justice and equity in public administration. It was in the spirit of concern for fairness, justice and equity that we kept the Minister and Conservative Members considering the Bill for so many hours and came here to fight on Third Reading. We do not apologise for our passion, because if the issues that the Bill covers are not worth being passionate about, few issues that come before the House are.

9.39 pm

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the debate. I must admit that, after listening to Opposition Members rehearse the same arguments time and again for 62 hours, it is difficult to remember exactly what we are discussing. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) for referring to equity, and I am particularly keen to dwell on that notion.

I believe that remarks made on both sides of the House about fear and disharmony are not beneficial to immigration matters and are certainly not beneficial to race relations. I believe that it was positively harmful to racial harmony when the Leader of the Opposition said, in India, that he would repeal the Immigration Act 1971.

I hope that Opposition Members — I especially address this remark to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden)—will remember that DNA testing is not in any way a carte blanche entry system that will enhance their political positions. They should not use DNA testing for that purpose. Such testing can prove extremely harmful to family relationships in ethnic communities—I ask them please to be aware of that. I make the same appeal to my hon. Friends.

I have had a number of representations on this subject and it is distinctly clear, especially among the Asian community, that the test is something to which they do not look forward. It needs careful treatment and I beg Opposition Members to remember that fact and to remember that serious family consequences may ensue if it is mishandled. That matter was aired at length in Committee, so I will not detain the House by discussing it further.

Mr. Jim Marshall *rose*——

Mr. Hargreaves: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have a chance to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, later.

In the interests of racial harmony, I also hope that Opposition Members remember that Conservative Members, including those of us who served on the Committee and who listened to the arguments put forward by Opposition Members, also represent the interests of true racial harmony. No matter what the disparity which may exist between the numbers of immigrants whom we may represent, Opposition Members must not instantly dismiss what we say as either meaningless or unrepresentative. Conservative Members who served on that Committee, as well as others of my hon. Friends, care very greatly about racial harmony in this country. Therefore, we ask the Opposition to take our remarks seriously. I support the Bill.

9.42 pm

Mr. Pat Wall (Bradford, North): The Bill is unnecessary. It does not arise from any great social upheaval or any threat of mass immigration to this country. It would appear to follow proposals made by senior Home Office civil servants some years ago. In essence, it serves much the same purpose for immigration as the think tank conducted by the present Secretary of State for the Environment when he was considering trade unions.

Most of the Bill's provisions affect a relatively small number of people and therefore its harshness is particularly repugnant. However, it affects a substantial number of people in relation to the abolition of the right of men, settled here before January 1973, to bring their wives and children to this country without first having to satisfy the various marriage tests, including the notorious primary purpose test, and the various accommodation and needs tests.

The Bill arises from the Government's peculiarly warped attitude to sexual equality or, indeed, to any form of equality. The Government were brought before the European Court of Human Rights for discrimination against women in the provisions of the Immigration Act 1971. The Bill, instead of giving women the same rights as men, brings men down to the same level suffered by women. On shift work and night work in industry, the Government take the opposite tack, but with a similar result. Women have been brought up to the same level of exploitation as men regarding such work. No doubt in future the Government will equalise the retirement age at 65 on the grounds of equality.

As has been pointed out, the last major influx of immigrants into Britain were Bangladeshis who arrived in the 1970s, fell victims to the recession of 1974-5, and suffered even more from the worse recession in 1981-82. They did not come here in the same way as earlier immigrants, who were enticed here as a source of cheap labour at at time of full employment and relative boom. They came during a recession in which they suffered greatly.

That meant that it was much harder for them to gather together the material needs to bring their wives and

children to settle in Britain than it was for the people who arrived in more prosperous times. They have had to compete for jobs in a declining market in the manufacturing industry, heavy industry and certain sections of plublic service. As they were the last major group to come here, their mastery of English is less good and that has made it even more difficult for them to compete for jobs.

I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) the representation of an area in the city of Bradford called Manningham. A housing survey was conducted by the Bangladeshi youth organisation on the Cornwall road area in my constituency. The housing needs of Asian residents in Manningham are entirely relevant to the Bill as it relates to the repeal of section 1(5) of the 1971 Act.

A higher proportion of Bangladeshis than other ethnic groups have not been able to bring their wives and children to Britain because they have lacked the economic means to do so. Home Office figures show that in 1986, 30 per cent. of wives given entry clearance to come to Britain were coming to live with people who came from India before 1973. The comparable figure for Pakistan was 55 per cent. and for Bangladesh was 70 per cent.

If the Bill is passed, unlike Common Market citizens who have no such tests and old Commonwealth citizens including white South Africans who rarely suffer such tests, all new Commonwealth citizens and citizens of Pakistan will have to satisfy the accommodation and needs test. That is discrimination on the basis of colour, class and material wealth. The poorest male immigrants take the longest to bring over their wives and children, and they will suffer most through the repeal of section 1(5). They are most likely to fail the needs and accommodation tests, and they and their families will be permanently divided.

I should like to quote one section from Manningham housing report:

"The existence of owner occupation cannot be taken as an indication of high standards of housing or indeed wealth. Owner-occupation has become the only alternative to over-occupied scarce rented housing. In order to meet the economic burdens of mortgage repayments and housing maintenance, the sharing arrangements by large Asian families alleviates to some degree the serious level of poverty.

High percentages of home ownership have therefore been achieved by economies of scale in the presence of relatively larger numbers of persons per house. The cost of home-ownership in social terms is revealed by cramped and severely overcrowded conditions within the Asian community. The largely held assumption of home ownership being linked to prosperity is therefore deceptive. Whilst there undoubtedly exists a greater inclination and desire for owner-occupied housing within the Asian community, the availability of large rented houses is non-existent."

In that survey, out of 772 people old enough to take up employment, only 117 were employed. In large numbers of extended family houses, no person had a job, and in the vast majority, only one person had a job. That happened against a background in the city of Bradford of a backlog of £60 million in housing repairs and cuts in housing improvement grants which has meant that in the past few years, 10,000 people have been refused those grants.

Those are not the clever schoolboy words, jokes and remarks of Conservative Members. This is the real world in which Asian working people in Bradford live. They have appalling housing conditions with little chance of a job. They are directly affected by the Bill because they have virtually no chance of bringing their children and wives to Britain to unite their families.

The removal of the right of appeal for overstayers, whether they deliberately flout the immigration laws or overstay or because they face severe domestic or personal problems, is a draconian and inhuman act. Overstaying is a summary offence and summary offences attract only moderate penalties under our law. The maximum penalty is usually six months in gaol and a relatively limited fine.

Deportation is much more serious than six months in gaol or a fine. Deportation means the break-up of families, losing a job, depriving children of a parent, and, for refugees and those seeking political asylum, it can mean imprisonment, torture and death. Therefore, our consistent demand on Second Reading and in Committee for an independent system of adjudication and appeal for deportation cases is a most modest, reasonable and humane demand. The Minister's refusal to accept that demand is a real condemnation of the Bill.

I want to add one point to those made so clearly by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott). There will be police intervention because of the criminalisation of overstayers. One would think that the Scarman report on the Brixton riots had never been written. To return to a situation where people can be stopped in the street on the basis that they are overstayers or illegal immigrants will create enormous problems for Britain's black community. Anyone who is really serious about race relations will have to think about that.

My hon. Friend is right. We are moving towards the pass laws so hated in South Africa. People already have to produce their passports in hospitals or in DHSS offices. They will now have to carry them everywhere in case they are stopped in the pub, the club, the street or their place of worship by the police for questioning about whether they are illegal immigrants or overstayers. That is exactly the same situation as in South Africa at present.

The only liberal, reasonable part of the Bill is the clause that deals with the Common Market. It gives 230 million citizens in the EEC the right to come here freely, to bring their spouses, their children, their parents, their grandparents, and, in some cases, their grandchildren. It gives them the right to take a job without restriction, to use our social services without restriction and to set up in business without the sort of financial penalties imposed on Asian business men coming to Britain. I welcome that—I am no little Englander; I believe in internationalism—but that is a sharp contrast to the position of black people coming to Britain.

When the first immigrants were attracted and enticed to Britain, it was in the hope that they would provide a source of cheap labour in heavy industry, manufacturing and the public services at a time of full employment. The economy has now moved away from those industries and that is why black unemployment is twice the average level of unemployment in Britain. We have now moved more into service industries.

I predict that the rights of Common Market citizens will mean that the Portuguese, Spaniards and Greeks, who earn even less than British workers, may well be attracted to Britain's hotels, restaurants and service industry. Anti-trade union employers in those industries may hope that they will provide another source of cheap labour. If they come, they will learn, like the Caribbean and Indian sub-continent workers who came here in the past, how to join trade unions and how to fight.

[Mr. Pat Wall]

I will make another prediction. If the Conservatives are faced with electoral defeat in the future, there will be a new immigration Bill, an anti-EEC bill aimed at those workers, because that is precisely the role that the Tory party has played in immigration throughout its history.

9.55 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I confess to some trepidation in speaking from the Dispatch Box for the first time, but I have no such doubts about the need to speak out vigorously against a Bill that will do enormous damage to family life, community relations in the United Kingdom and Britain's reputation abroad as a country which values justice and humanity.

In Committee, Opposition Members sought earnestly, repeatedly and at length even to persuade the Minister of the damage that the Bill will do if it becomes law. We have tried again tonight, and hon. Members who were not in the Committee will now appreciate the contrast between the points made by Opposition Members, based on considerable practical experience, and the bureaucratic incantations with which the Minister has replied.

Tonight, in opening the debate, the hon. Gentleman sought to insult my hon. Friends in order again to avoid the real issues at stake in the discussion of the Bill. Simple logic has exposed the Bill as a hollow sham. On the one hand, the Minister has told us that it is a simple, modest measure that will have minimal impact on genuine applicants. On the other hand, the Government have pushed it through with a vigour that owes more to the electoral calculations of Conservative Central Office last May and June than to knowledge and experience of immigration practice. The hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) cannot dissociate himself from those electoral calculations as he tried to do tonight except by voting against the Bill, and I hope that he will do that.

We believe that the numbers involved as a result of the Bill may be small, but the damage to family life for those involved and to community relations generally will be enormous. The questions are simple.

The first is how, in any logical sense, it can be compassionate or humane to extend the separation of families as the Bill will do. I received a letter, as many of us in the Opposition do today, saying, on behalf of the family concerned:

"Please will you help this family and rescue them from worry and despair. They want to be back together again as a family."

That is just one example, but the Minister today has been anecdotal as well, and it is an example of the sort of thing that has been brought up by Opposition Members continually in Committee. My hon. Friends the Members for Bradford, North (Mr. Wall), for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) and for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) have given example after example which one would have expected to persuade the Minister, had he been willing to respond to the arguments being put forward.

The Minister sought tonight to lecture us on community relations, but how can it help community relations to make it more difficult for families to be reunited? The Minister has claimed that the Bill will help community relations. This week I spoke to the community relations people in my constituency and they responded with disbelief, disquiet and anger that the Minister should make such a suggestion. On the other hand, the Minister has produced no evidence at all for his contention that community relations will be helped.

The anger of the Opposition and the anger in the immigrant communities is based on knowledge and experience. If right hon. and hon. Members doubt me, I suggest that they listen instead to the voice of the British Council of Churches as quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall). The Minister doubted the authenticity of that voice, so a group of distinguished black Church leaders met him and have raised their voices passionately in opposition to the Bill, but in tones of reasonableness and patience. He has not listened to them either.

Will the Government listen to no one who seeks to help by trying to remove their blinkers on this Bill? Compassion has been talked of a great deal in Committee and today. I am sure that the Minister is compassionate when circumstances allow him to be himself, but he has sought to tell us that the removal of statutory appeal rights will do no damage because appellate authorities would draw his attention to any compassionate grounds so that he could consider them. He has repeated that argument today.

On this matter he will not listen to Labour Members, who pointed out that the appellate authorities are ruled out of making such considerations and that they stick to the rules and refuse to hear argument on compassionate grounds. They say that they do not have to pass on compassionate grounds to the Minister, and the chief appellate officer thinks that they should not do so in any event.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Immigration Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Ryder.]*

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Mr. Michael: The Minister was so confident in suggesting that compassionate grounds would be considered by him that we thought we might be wrong and that all the lawyers who are experienced in immigration case law and those involved in immigrant welfare were mistaken, so this week I gave the Minister a chance to prove his point. I asked him two written questions. The first was

"in what proportion of cases in which he received a recommendation from the appellate authorities in respect of individuals appealing against refusal to vary leave to remain in the United Kingdom the adjudicaton have *(a)* refused to hear or consider compassionate grounds and *(b)* made no recommendation that he should exercise his discretion to consider compassionate grounds".

Even more tellingly, I asked him

"how many recommendations he has received from the appellate authorities in respect of individuals appealing against refusal to vary leave to remain in the United Kindom during each of the last three years; or how many of those cases the adjudicator recommended that he should consider compassionate circumstances; and in how many of those cases he did exercise discretion in compassionate circumstances."

They were detailed questions which the Minister should have found it easy to answer, but what was the answer? In both cases it was:

"No central record of these recommendations is held." —[*Official Report*, 15 February 1988; Vol. 127, c. *439*.]

In other words, the Minister, on a central point in his justification of the Bill, does not know, and the Government do not know. He may not have known at the beginning of the debate in Committee and he may not have known at the Second Reading, but he has had time to find out. The Minister and the Government do not want to know.

We have yet to see the true extent of the Government's rush to minimise humanity in this field of law. The Bill is bad enough, but its administration will be in accordance with immigration rules which have yet to be published. On 3 December, the Minister promised in Committee that he would give us those details. He did not promise to give us some vague outline or just to talk about them. He said:

"I shall present the changes that are consequential on the Bill receiving Royal Assent. I shall gladly do so at the earliest opportunity, for example, next Tuesday."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 3 December 1987; c. 138.]

The Minister promised to tell us what would be in the rules. That was clearly greeted with horror and panic by his ministerial colleagues and officials and he has chosen to be more economical with the truth than he intended. Instead of draft rules, he gave us meaningless gobbledegook. Instead of withdrawing his promise, which would have been the honest thing to do, he withdrew all meaning from his response to our questions.

It is inconceivable that the Government could have come forward with the Bill without a clear idea of what will be in the rules. It is inconceivable that the Minister has not had a final draft of the rules in his in-tray for weeks or even months and could not have made it available to us. It is an insult to the House that we still do not know what the rules will be. I warn Conservative Members that they do not yet know the full extent of what will happen as a result of the Bill.

Many people were convinced that the Government would be bound to withdraw clause 4, which does such damage to appeal rights. On Second Reading, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) condemned the Bill as wholly unnecessary, denying the rights of British citizens who happen to be black or Asian and denying the right of family unity to men and women living in the country.

Nothing has changed, despite all our efforts in Committee. This remains a Bill which panders to prejudice and will heighten rather than reduce racial tension. That is a simple statement of fact, not an inflammatory comment. It remains a disgrace to a democratic Parliament. If any Conservative Members remain who still retain a concern for fairness, justice and humanity, they will surely feel honour bound to join us in voting against this nasty, squalid little Bill.

10.4 pm

Mr. Renton: My hon. Friends and I disagree with almost everything that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) has said. However, I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate him on his maiden speech from the Opposition Dispatch Box. Although I disagreed with him, he showed a degree of vigour. He said that we had showed a degree of vigour in pushing through the Immigration Bill. Those of us who sat in Committee and spent six hours per clause on a modest Bill may wonder about that vigour, but I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comment none the less. I am sure that it was well-intended.

I do not intend to delay the House long, as we have gone over the arguments repetitively and incessantly and the House has still to deal with some important business. I wish only to make two or three minor points.

I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and for Fylde (Mr. Jack) for their interesting and wise speeches and for their support of our visit visa system and the way in which it is operating at present. They saw the wisdom of the system and the protection that it gives people. That was in contrast to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) who, typically, talked about a spider's web of controls. In the eight months that I have been Minister responsible for immigration, it is not the spider's web of controls that has struck me, but the superstructure of appeal upon appeal that we have created to protect people, to ensure that the overstayer is not sent away unfairly and that a person is not improperly deported.

When I took up my post at the Home Office, I was struck by the number of letters that I was required to sign, pointing out to Members of Parliament who had made representations to me that they or their predecessor had first written to me in 1983, for example, saying that the person about whom they were writing had originally come here for 30 days. He had then disappeared and had not been seen or found for three or four years. He then made an appeal to change the leave under which he was in this country. The case had gone to the adjudicator, then to the appellate tribunal and then to a Member of Parliament.

I am still writing frequent letters to hon. Members saying, "Your constituent first came here for 30 days, perhaps five years ago."

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Renton: No, I shall not give way, as the House wishes to go on. With respect to my hon. Friend, I must get on.

I continue my letters to hon. Members by saying, "Your constituent has exhausted the system. It is time for him to go."

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman *rose*——

Mr. Renton: That is how other countries see us. We have a superstructure of appeal. We are the only country in Europe, other than West Germany, to have an appeal system for those who are refused visit visas, yet we get no credit for that from the Opposition. That was reflected in the speech of the hon. Member for Leicester, East.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) and other Opposition Members rebuked us for the chaos at Lunar house. I have already described the measures that we are taking to deal with that. It must stick in the craw of Opposition Members that they voted against our changes in immigration rules three weeeks ago, when routine changes to those rules would have removed about 20 per cent. of the immigration cases from Lunar house. It is therefore impossible for people to be as hypocritical as Opposition Members and to chide us for those delays, yet vote against procedural changes that would deal with those problems.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman *rose*——

Mr. Renton: I will not give way to my hon. Friend. I do not propose to give way to anyone, because there is important business ahead for the House.

We established one thing of which my hon. Friends who were not in the Chamber earlier should be aware. I asked the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West whether, if he was ever in office, he would cancel the visit visa system that we had introduced. He could not answer. We heard from the hon. Member for Leicester, East that he would cancel it and from the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) that he would cancel it, but the Opposition Front Bench does not know.

That emphasises the problem of the Opposition on immigration. They have told us that they would cancel the Immigration Act 1971 and the British Nationality Act 1981, but we never hear what they would put in their place. All they tell us is that they would do all this, and that only 1,000 more people would come into the country every year. What hypocrisy; what humbug—and they know it as well.

The Bill has been discussed enough. I support fully the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) who talked about the importance of racial harmony. I share that view. I believe that racial prejudice and racial discrimination are barbaric habits which have no place in a civilised or democratic society. Fair but firm immigration control is an essential precondition of racial harmony. The Bill makes modest but sensible changes. Our immigration controls will remain effective and flexible. That is in the interests of all people in Britain, whatever their ethnic origins. I commend the Bill wholeheartedly to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 278, Noes 214.

Division No. 183] **[10.12 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bigge-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Robert
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith

Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alan Howarth and
Mr. Richard Ryder.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Cleiland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malion, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Prevention of Terrorism

10.24 pm

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. First, I wonder whether it will be possible to save the time of the House. I understand that this matter has been referred to earlier in today's sitting and that Her Majesty's Government have already given an undertaking to another Government, namely the Irish Government, and disclosed to that Government the Home Secretary's intentions. I understand that that has been done during adjourned discussions, totalling about 10 hours. As I understand it, our debate tonight will last for one and a half hours. I do not know whether it will be possible to reveal to the House of Commons what was said in advance and the commitments that were given to the Government of another country.

My second point is brief. As the order is based on a Bill that extends mainly to Great Britain, which originated only in Great Britain and which now refers to international terrorism and not solely to Irish terrorism, I wonder whether someone in authority could tell us whether the Libyan or Iranian Government have had the same facility for consultation as the Irish Government.

Mr. Speaker: Those are patently questions that I cannot answer, but perhaps the Home Secretary can.

10.26 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hurd): I beg to move,

That the draft Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 25th January, be approved.

The effect of the order will be to renew the 1984 Act for a further 12 months from 22 March. The House will want to discuss several aspects of the order, but the main message should be clear enough, and I am sure that the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) will not dissent from it. There is still a threat of terrorism hanging over the citizens of this country, including Northern Ireland. That arises not just out of the affairs of Northern Ireland but, as the right hon. Gentleman said, from the middle east and the sub-continent. Our defences against that threat must not be weakened.

In Northern Ireland in 1987, 83 people were killed by Republican or Protestant paramilitary groups. The bomb outrage at Enniskillen on Remembrance Sunday is still vivid in our minds. On the mainland in 1987, we thankfully had no successful attacks stemming from Irish republican extremism. However, I have no doubt that the Provisional IRA continues to wish and to plan further death and destruction among us. We must remain totally vigilant to defend ourselves against this threat.

We cannot ignore the threat which comes from international terrorist organisations. As the right hon. Gentleman said, the original Act did not cover international terrorism at all, but the world has changed for the worse since then. During 1987, there were six murders in Great Britain, which the police attributed to international terrorism. Those who died were three members of an Indian religious group at a service, two opponents of the Khomeini regime, and a Palestinian journalist.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act expires in March next year. Against the background that I have sketched, we need to consider what should take the place of that Act when it expires. It is right that I should say something about that this evening.

In April last year, I asked my noble and learned Friend Lord Colville of Culross, who conducted an independent review of the operation of the Act in 1986, to widen his net in 1987 and consider in greater depth the effectiveness of the legislation. His report was published in a White Paper in December. His scrutiny of the operation of the Act last year, which he concluded in January this year, was made available to Parliament on 8 February. I should like to express my gratitude, and, I believe, the gratitude of the House, for the effort and care that Lord Colville has devoted to these reports. He has taken a great deal of care to visit the ports and to consult many individuals and organisations who have an interest in the legislation.

I come immediately to what is undoubtedly Lord Colville's central recommendation. He says that he accepts the continuing need for legislation against terrorism. It would be foolish, he says, to pretend that terrorism in some form will not threaten lives and property in western countries for the foreseeable future, so he recommends that what he describes as the core controls enshrined in the legislation should no longer be subject to annual renewal, but should be enacted into fully permanent legislation, albeit with a continuation of the existing system of annual reviews.

We accept that the problem of terrorism in one form or another is not going to go away. We have to protect ourselves from terrorism from many sources. It is not just a matter of Irish terrorism, as the statistics show. None of the six deaths that occurred last year in Great Britain as a result of terrorist acts was the result of Irish terrorism.

We accept entirely the need for continuing legislation designed to prevent acts of terrorism in this country, but after careful reflection we do not believe that it would be right to interrupt the process by which Parliament is asked to take a positive decision each year to renew the provisions.

The BBC report today was inaccurate on one crucial point. In its hurry to get the story early the BBC got it wrong. We propose to return to the arrangement that existed when the Labour Government introduced the 1976 Act. The new Act that we shall propose will have no limit on its time span. It will not expire after five years, like the current 1984 Act under which this order is made. But the powers in the Act will have to be renewed each year. That is the arrangement that the Government of which the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) was a member introduced in 1976, and in the light of experience we intend to return to it, I am sure with the support of the Labour party. Moreover, the powers will be renewable in whole or in part, and there is a good reason for that. Lord Colville suggested that the powers that relate especially to Irish terrorism — proscription and exclusion—should remain on a temporary basis.

By retaining the requirement for annual renewal in whole or in part, we meet that point by making it possible to drop any provisions that no longer appear necessary. Because of the exceptional nature of the powers contained in the Act, it is right that its operation should be scrutinised by an independent person, as the 1984 Act has been, and that arrangement, too, will continue.

I would like to deal with two points that I have heard made in the past 24 hours but to which I have not been able to respond, for obvious reasons. There is nothing in the criticisms that have been voiced about timing. One cannot insist on annual debates and then complain about timing when the time for the annual debate comes round. The order had to be debated at this time, and obviously the House requires that the Minister sets out his future intentions in the debate.

There is a more fundamental point. The people of Northern Ireland suffer more from terrorism than any of the rest of us. It is overwhelmingly in their interest, in that of the citizens of the Republic, and in that of all Irish men and women living this side of the water, that terrorism should be checked and then crushed. It is inevitable that the powers needed for that purpose should occasionally bear on innocent people, causing delay, inconvenience and controversy. But the powers are not aimed at those innocent people; they are aimed at their oppressors—the terrorists.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Hurd: I should like to get on. It is a short debate and I am afraid that I have a bit to say.

Lord Colville points out—and I remember vividly from my time as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—the resentment that use of these powers can produce. I would be delighted if they could be safely removed, but safely is the key word. While they exist, they must be carefully and intelligently used; and we must take every opportunity to prove—as we can—that they are there for the protection and not the oppression of the citizen.

We intend, in replacing the current Act, to implement Lord Colville's recommendation that the principal port powers, which are now in the order and the comparable Northern Ireland order, should be incorporated into primary legislation. Powers given to the police at ports — notably on examination and detention — are important, and, as with similar ones in the Immigration Act 1971, we now think that they deserve full consideration by Parliament and a place on the face of the Act.

We have considered Lord Colville's recommendation that the police powers at ports should be extended to cover ports handling traffic outside the common travel area. Those ports are covered by controls provided by the Immigration Act 1971, and we are not at present convinced that there is a case for extending police powers at those ports.

The House will have noticed Lord Colville's endorsement of the value of the powers in the prevention of terrorism legislation for the arrest and detention, for up to seven days if necessary, of people suspected of involvement in terrorist acts. In England and Wales, detention in police custody is subject to procedures laid down in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act and the codes of practice issued under it. Some of the requirements apply, with modifications, to detentions under the Prevention of Terrorism Act; others are expressly disapplied.

I see force in the changes proposed by Lord Colville to bring procedures for those detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act closer to those for people detained under ordinary police powers, as long as the police investigation is not jeopardised, and we are examining the feasibility of that.

When Lord Colville's report was published before Christmas, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary announced straight away that we could not accept the recommendation that the power of exclusion should be abolished. We thought hard about that, but we did not believe it would be helpful to the House or anyone else for there to be any uncertainty on our views. Now is not the right time to give up that power. It is used sparingly. I look at every application with care and I refused, in the past year, three applications for orders from the police. I made 17 orders in respect of people who had previously been excluded, but 19 orders were not replaced when they expired. The total of exclusion orders in force at the end of 1987 was 111 in Great Britain and 23 in Northern Ireland, which is a slight rise on the previous year.

I dislike the idea of the use of Executive power to inhibit free movement of a person within his own country. I believe that other hon. Members, if confronted, case by case, with the information that is put in front of me as to the activities and intentions of these individuals would agree with me that the restrictions placed on their freedom of movement is justified to save lives, which is what the use of the power is about. Under section 10 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, it is an offence to make available, to invite others to do so, or to receive, funds to be used in connection with Northern Irish terrorism.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): Understandably, the Home Secretary has praised Lord Colville. Will he bear in mind the fact that Lord Colville described exclusion orders as being similar to internal exile, which is a point that I have debated with the Home Secretary? Does he accept what Lord Colville recommended that it is undesirable for a politician, however senior, to have the power of exclusion which is not, in the first instance, overseen by a court of law?

Mr. Hurd: It is undesirable, but I simply repeat the point that I made when I explained why I disagree with Lord Colville's recommendation on this point. If the hon. Gentleman—who is a sensible person—were confronted with the facts that are laid before me in these applications, he would not accept all of them, and I do not accept all of them. They need careful probing, and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, I have three completely independent advisers to advise me on these matters. Nevertheless, I believe that, for the time being, with the facts as they are today, it would be putting lives in jeopardy if we were to abandon that power of exclusion. Therefore, I believe that it should be used sparingly and carefully for the protection of citizens, as it is today.

Under section 10, as I was saying, it is an offence to make available or invite others to do so or to receive funds to be used in connection with Northern Irish terrorism. Lord Colville believes that the section could be useful in relation to international terrorism because there is evidence of fund raising by international terrorist groups in this country, to purchase arms and explosives. This is difficult. We agree with Lord Colville that it is wrong that contributions could be made in this country to international terrorist organisations and not be caught by our anti-terrorism legislation, and we are considering his proposals carefully.

[Mr. Hurd]

We have some further work to do, but, in principle, the points I have outlined will be incorporated in the Bill which we shall introduce to replace the present Act when it expires in 1989. We mean to accept a number of other useful recommendations made by Lord Colville. They will be drawn to the attention of the police in a circular of guidance.

We are debating tonight the continuance for one more year of the powers in the present Act. It would be a great strength if the House could unite behind this proposal—and a great shame if it could not.

I know that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook and his colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench would, if they were sitting on the Government Benches now, try to find a way—contrary to what they announced today—of keeping a Prevention of Terrorism Act alive. Of course they would: they would have to. The right hon. Gentleman has a particular difficulty because it was he, in 1982, who led the Opposition's drift away from reality into irresponsibility. He was a Minister when the Act was passed. He did not vote against it till 1982. If he now claims to be leading his party back towards responsibility, he cannot vote against the order tonight. It is a simple and straightforward test.

All the efforts that the right hon. Gentleman is making to get on better terms with the police and to try to repair the damage done by his right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) will be futile if he fails this test. He must decide whether to stand up to the Left wing, which forced him to make that lamentable change in 1982. If he does not—if he cannot—do that, he will show again that the Opposition do not have the backbone to deal with these matters. Until they recover it, they will not be taken seriously as an alternative Government.

In the previous debates, the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook has tried to cover himself by two lines of argument. The Opposition argue — this is a serious argument — that the Act should be scrapped as ineffective because terrorist incidents still happen; but that argument could be used about the whole of the criminal law. Their second point is that by skilful use of other pieces of legislation — this is the right hon. Gentleman's particular point — such as the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 or the Immigration Act 1971, we could achieve the same ends. That is simply not true, as Lord Colville's report on the operation of the Act in 1987 amply showed.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): We have heard a great deal of assertion tonight about the PTA—and a fair bit of divergence, too. When will the right hon. Gentleman give us some evidence about activity under the PTA, rather than diversionary tactics?

Mr. Hurd: Exactly now. It was a mistake to give way to the hon. Gentleman. He asks whether the PTA helps to prevent acts of terrorism and bring terrorists to justice. Let us look at the figures in Lord Colville's report. Anyone who doubts that we need the Act should be convinced by 27 charges of murder in Northern Ireland last year alone, some connected with the deaths of members of the security forces. But I agree with the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) that figures, however convincing, do not convey the complete picture. I can give the House some details which are no longer subject to the restraint of prejudicing court procedures.

The conviction late last year of a leading member of the International Sikh Youth Federation, who had organised some shooting of prominent moderate Sikhs in Great Britain, shows the extent of the threat against the Sikh community in this country and the value of the prevention of terrorism legislation. That man—that murderer—had been detained under section 12 of the Act after his fingerprints had been found in a car thought to have been used in the attacks, on a plastic bag used to contain a shotgun used in one of the attacks. Without the length of detention possible under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and the opportunities that that gave for further inquiries, examination of his correspondence, and further questioning, it might well have not been possible to bring that man to justice.

Ms. Short: The Secretary of State's argument does not stand. He tells us that the man's fingerprints were found in the car. Therefore, he could have been incriminated under existing criminal law. The Secretary of State uses a case badly to make his argument. That man could have been arrested and charged under existing criminal law, and the PTA was not needed.

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Lady is wrong. In that particular case I allowed detention, after careful examination, for up to six days under the powers of the PTA. Under ordinary law, I would have been unable to do so and, in all probability, that terrorist would not have been brought to justice. *[Interruption.]* I appreciate that right hon. and hon. Members do not like it when anecdotes are produced to demonstrate the crucial value of the powers of the PTA.

Lord Colville described in his report the long and complex investigation in Scotland regarding firearms and explosives apparently destined for use by a Loyalist paramilitary group in Northern Ireland, which culminated in the conviction of six men on firearms charges. Those men were arrested under the PTA during 1986, but their trial took place in 1987. The simultaneous investigations required by the police in several other areas could not have not taken place successfully unless the powers in the PTA had been used. That is another example to demonstrate that those exceptional powers are necessary to bring would-be terrorists to justice.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West) *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: No, I have given way sufficiently. I have been asked for evidence and I have given evidence.

It is impossible to test the value of the Act simply by the changes brought. Last year, I noted how the Act had been used in 1986 to forestall—that is the key word—terrorism by a group of the Abu Nidhal gang, whom I deported. This year, a man suspected of working for the Libyan Government as an intelligence officer was likewise deported. Without the powers in the Act, it would have been impossible to arrest and deport that man.

If Opposition Members are arguing that we should wait until a crime has been committed and there are corpses on the streets—*[Interruption.]* That is what is at issue. We are discussing a preventive measure, and what it does is prevent terrorism and save lives.

To save lives and protect our citizens, I ask the House to give its wholehearted support to the continuation of the

powers in the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The reports by Lord Colville should be a reassurance that those powers are not abused or over-used. They are exercised carefully and conscientiously, with regard to the impact on the liberty and rights of the individual. We are clear that those powers must continue to remain throughout the United Kingdom if we are to conduct and succeed in a serious and sustained fight against terrorism.

I commend the draft order to the House.

10.48 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): As a result of events yesterday and this morning, the debate is bound to be dominated by a discussion of the Home Secretary's proposals for permanent legislation.

In this 90 minutes we should be discussing the application of the PTA over the next year. Future plans should have been announced to the House at half past 3 one afternoon. They should not have been, first, incompetently leaked to the BBC yesterday and then described all morning to journalists by a spokesman from No. 10 Downing street. That task having been completed, the plans were actually reported to the House this evening.

The Home Secretary having reported to the House his intention to move to permanent legislation, it is worth our reminding him and the House about what he now proposes as a full-time, permanent feature of British law — a law which began, as *Hansard* will show, as a reaction to an immediate emergency, a crisis and a tragedy. It would not have been passed through the House if hon. Members had thought that it would ever become a permanent feature on the statute book.

The Home Secretary is recommending permanent legislation which would enable men and women to be held for up to seven days without charge, denied access to solicitors and to be subject to what Lord Colville, the Home Secretary's own choice of monitor of the Act, calls internal exile. It is worth noting from Lord Colville's report that the vast majority of men and women who were arrested without charge, held for seven days and denied the right of access to a solicitor were innocent under the law.

In 1987, a total of 113 men and women were detained on suspicion of what Lord Colville's report calls Northern Ireland terrorism. Only 10 of them were charged. We do not know how many of them were convicted, but let us assume that all 10 of them were convicted. The other 103 were arrested and imprisoned, but were guilty of no offence under the law.

If Conservative Members are no more able than the Home Secretary to recognise the enormity of the offence against those 103 people, I hope that at least they will be able to understand the bonus that such actions provides for terrorists who want to argue that the British Government in Westminster are callous about the way in which Irish people coming into Britain are treated, and are unconcerned about the real rule of law and the real protection of civil liberties.

Terrorism in Northern Ireland will be defeated only when the overwhelming law-abiding majority are convinced that they must repudiate, reject and expose the terrorists. The announcement today that the Act is to be permanent, the inept timing and the nature of the announcement and the extraordinary performance of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on television trying to suggest that there is to be no permanent legislation are bound to play into the hands of the IRA propaganda machine. It will also prejudice the resumption of the proper and necessary co-operation between London and Dublin.

This morning, Government spokesmen describing the Act, and correcting the errors of yesterday, have been saying that the changes are not as profound as they may appear to critics of the proposals. I am not surprised. Had the Government intended to prejudice Anglo-Irish relations during the past month, they would hardly have behaved differently.

It began with the Government's refusal to prosecute over the Stalker-Sampson inquiry. It continued with the Attorney-General's unwillingness or inability to provide the information necessary for extradition. Now there is the ineptitude of today's announcement, or yesterday's leak, about the PTA.

I shall make my position absolutely clear. As part of their briefing, Government spokesmen spoke about the Opposition being soft on terrorism. I am not prepared to take that from a Government who gave a safe passage out of this country to the murderers of WPC Fletcher rather than have a row with Libya.

The truth about the Opposition's attitude to terrorism was described with a good deal more grace by the Home Secretary last year in a similar debate. He said:

"No one in this House disagrees about the distinctive evil of terrorism"

That is indisputably true. He went on:

"The argument in the House begins when we consider whether special powers are needed by the police and the Government in dealing with terrorism."—[*Official Report*, 10 February 1987; Vol. 110, c. 263.]

But it is only the beginning of the truth, for our contention is not merely that the powers of the PTA are unnecessary or even inappropriate to a free society, true though that contention is. We insist that the operation, perhaps even the existence, of the PTA is a hindrance and a handicap in the fight against terrorism, certainly in relation to Northern Ireland.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford) *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: I will give way on this one occasion because this is a 90-minute debate, the Home Secretary took 25 minutes and I want to be brief.

Mr. Cash: Will the right hon. Gentleman explain why, when Labour Members were in power, they managed to detain 4,524 people in five years under this Act whereas in the eight years during which we have been dealing with these matters the number has been only 1,947? That makes clear the reality of the situation and totally contradicts the right hon. Gentleman's position.

Mr. Hattersley: That does not even touch on the effects that the PTA is having on everything the Home Secretary claims he want to do. The Act must be judged by its effects on terrorism in Northern Ireland and our success in combating it. The Home Secretary now wants to broaden its scope and tries to defend that action by saying that we live in an age of international terrorism. But everybody knows that this measure was introduced to deal explicity with the Northern Ireland situation as an immediate and temporary expedient and necessity. Without the tragedy of Northern Ireland—indeed, without the specific tragedy of the Birmingham pub bombings—the Act would never have been passed.

[Mr. Hattersley]

The PTA stands or falls by the success it provides in combating, or helping to combat, terrorism in Northern Ireland. It falls, in our view, because of the effect it has on Irish opinion, and the main area where Irish opinion is now being prejudiced are exclusion orders.

It is no good the Home Secretary offering his thanks to Lord Colville, saying how full of wisdom his report is and then, in some cavalier fashion — unsubstantiated and unjustified — dismissing what Lord Colville says about exclusion orders. And it is not only Lord Colville. Sir Cyril Philips, who did the monitoring operation the year before, also—both men working from different bases—came to the same conclusion that exclusion orders should be ended in one form or another.

Exclusion orders prejudice opinion in Northern Ireland and are clearly intended to deal with Northern Ireland alone. The idea that terrorists can be excluded from the mainland and required to live in the six counties is a view of Northern Ireland which is wholly inconsistent with the principle that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom and must be treated in exactly the same way as the United Kingdom. We do not send terrorists on exclusion orders to Chelmsford, Cardiff, Glasgow or Guildford. If we are to treat Northern Ireland as the repository for terrorists, we must be encouraging terrorism there and the IRA propaganda machine.

Our main objection, in principle and in practice, is to what the Act provides by way of power of detention. The Home Secretary argued last year, and he argued again tonight, that it was necessary to have the power to prevent horrors before they happened — the pre-emption argument. The first example he gave to justify that seemed extraordinary. The crime had already been committed. I refer to the Sikh bombing and murder. The Home Secretary mentioned a motor car which the police had taken into their care, which they knew had been used when the murder had been committed, and on which were found fingerprints of the man who was eventually convicted.

Is the Home Secretary really saying that that man could not have been arrested and prosecuted without the existence of this Act? I will give way at once to the right hon. Gentleman if he wishes to answer my next question. What happens when cars are used in the commission of murders which are not associated with terrorism and when fingerprints are found on those cars? Do we never catch and convict the criminals in such cases? Of course, in that circumstance the normal law and the normal powers could be used. We must therefore ask the question that is constantly asked by Opposition Members but is never answered: what is the real purpose of, and what is the real evidence that warrants, this form of detention?

I ask the Home Secretary questions which are not intended to be rhetorical. Could not the men found in the garden of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland have been arrested under normal criminal law? Could not the retired doctor from my constituency who was held under the PTA and eventually charged and acquitted on suspicion of explosives offences have been held under criminal law? The police told me when I asked them that the PTA was more convenient. It does not seem to me that convenience justifies abandonment of the rules of arrest and detention which are expected in a free society.

The Home Secretary's excuse can hardly apply to the extension of detention orders, as he seemed to argue. Let me read to him a passage from Lord Colville's report. Paragraph 36 says:

"the reasons adduced by the police for an extension included a few alibi enquiries, some requests for an identity parade and a substantial number of forensic investigations. Broadly, however, the application was based on suspicion of involvement in a particular crime."

All that is the stuff of which normal criminal charges and investigations are made, and all that should have been dealt with in the normal way, not least because 103 of the 110 men and women who were treated in this draconian fashion — the word used by the Home Secretary who introduced the Act when it first came on the statute book —were subsequently found to be innocent.

We are left with the irresistible suspicion that the purpose of detention is to hold for 48 hours or seven days men and women who have committed no offence, but are thought to possess information of value to the police. That suspicion is intensified by the Government's refusal to accept Lord Colville's proposal that extensions of detention should be determined not by the Home Secretary but by the courts, for were the extension of detention to be determined by the courts much better reasons would have to be brought forward. They would certainly have to be better than those that the Home Secretary has provided to the House.

Detention allows a man or woman to be held without the normal safeguards of full custody sheets and access to a solicitor within 36 hours. That may be a reason for detention, but it is a thoroughly bad reason to be brought forward in a free society — so bad that the Home Secretary does not even advance it when he attempts to defend his proposition.

The way in which the Home Secretary has advanced his proposition is not calculated to encourage all-party support for the campaign in Northern Ireland. Indeed, apart from the moments of cheap abuse, the Home Secretary defended his views simply by assertion — not by justification, not by evidence, but just by assertion. He announced that it was not the right time to end exclusion. He announced that he was not convinced that changes were necessary. He announced that we were nevertheless required to maintain these powers, just as if the Home Secretary's word on these matters was enough. It is indeed a docile, supine, craven House of Commons that is prepared to accept such a curtailment and reduction of civil liberties on the unsubstantiated word of a Minister alone.

I am not prepared to do it, and that is why I shall vote against the order.

11.4 pm

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): Because this is a brief debate, I intend to be extremely brief. I rise because last Sunday I had the privilege of being present in St. Anne's cathederal, Belfast, when the Royal Ulster Constabulary dedicated a window to the memory of some 252 police officers who had been murdered over the past 10 years in that part of the United Kingdom. At the end of the service, at which clergymen of all denominations spoke, I walked out in the company of more than 800 widows and children of those officers. No one who could mingle with the widows and children of those police officers could be in any doubt about the terrible carnage

that is wreaked upon the innocent by terrorists in Northern Ireland. As I met those widows and children, I felt immensely humble.

It was quite clear, as I discussed the debate that would take place in the House tonight, that the overwhelming majority of those who suffer from the scourge of terrorism in Northern Ireland would not forgive us if we did not provide to the police service in Northern Ireland and in this country every means that we can to prevent such horrors from taking place. It is against that background that I make my judgment of whether the legislation introduced by a Labour Government and continued by successive Governments should or should not remain a part of our law.

Lord Colville, like many other independent persons, came to the conclusion—

Mr. Canavan: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it right for the hon. Gentleman to imply that policemen always seem to be the victims rather than the perpetrators of crimes of terrorism? Should the hon. Gentleman not declare his interest before he starts, and declare himself as a paid servant of the police?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): The hon. Member should declare his interest, but a breach of order has not been committed so far.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: If it is necessary for me to declare my interest, I do so with pride, but there can be few hon. Members who have any doubt about it. The issue is very simple: does the House owe to the security services and the police the provision of legislation to help them to defend the innocent?

Mr. Allen: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. If the hon. Member wishes to talk about the police and the valuable role that they perform in Northern Ireland, would he not be better advised to book a Committee Room when we are talking about the Prevention of Terrorism Act?

Madam Deputy Speaker: This is a very short debate and there is no point in wasting time by raising bogus points of order.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: The police service is in no doubt that it could not effectively safeguard the people of the country against the very substantial increase in terrorism that may take place if the Act were not available to them. I believe that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has some experience as a Home Office Minister——

Mr. Hattersley *indicated dissent*

Sir Eldon Griffiths: In that case, the right hon. Gentleman confirms what I was about to say which is that, lacking experience as a Home Office Minister, it is all the more egregious that he should regard his judgment as superior to that of those who have to risk their lives to undertake our protection. The Act has been crucial in the fight against terrorism. In June 1985 the Act enabled the police to prevent an IRA bombing campaign of British resorts and to bring charges in connection with the Brighton bombing of 1984. In June 1986 the leaders of the Provisional IRA murder gang involved in that atrocity were sent to prison for life, and that could not have happened without the legislation.

I believe that the Home Secretary is absolutely right to say that we need legislation that will assist the police and the security services, not simply in investigating terrorism, but in preventing it. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is entirely right to commend the order to the House, and it will be disgraceful if the Opposition divide against it.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths) has just misled the House. I say so in all seriousness——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman come to his point of order? Time is passing and this is an important debate.

Mr. Bermingham: If the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds wants to quote anything about the Brighton bombing case and the summer bombing campaign, the least he could do is to read the papers.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a point of argument and not a point of order.

11.12 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Having read the report of Lord Colville, I reluctantly conclude that we are justified in continuing the exceptional response to the grave problem of terrorism for another year, but I say that with great misgivings.

I hope that hon. Members will listen to those misgivings because they might well agree with them. First, as the Home Secretary will no doubt recognise, the legislation is contrary to the European convention on human rights. Secondly, the continuation of exclusion orders, in the face of the views of Lord Colville and Sir Cyril Philips, serves no useful purpose except to fuel the IRA propaganda machine in future. Thirdly, it is regretable that we should be considering the continuation of the Act against the continuing background of the Diplock courts, without any announcement from the Home Secretary of any modification of the arrangements in those courts. Press speculation, no doubt fuelled by the Government, led us to believe that we might hear something about that tonight.

Fourthly, it is regrettable that we have not yet heard fom the Government that some simple measures recommended by Lord Colville, which would further ensure the fair treatment of prisoners in police stations, have not yet been brought into effect.

The way in which the future of the Act has been dealt with tonight is astonishing. It is part of a chapter of lamentable clumsiness which had led to a total breakdown of understanding between the United Kingdom Government and the Government of the Republic of Ireland. The announcement of the introduction of permanent legislation next year has probably done more to worsen Anglo-Irish relations than any other declarations or activities of the past few weeks. It is piled upon what happened, or, rather, did not happen, to the Stalker-Sampson report; and upon a regrettable refusal so far by the Government to provide a proper opportunity to debate relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. The Dail is to have that opportunity tomorrow, but we are to be deprived of such an opportunity, apparently for some time to come.

The announcement tonight of permanent legislation will have a regrettable effect on the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It will affect, within our own jurisdiction, law,

[Mr. Alex Carlile]

justice and security. It will affect the operation of extradition and the security of the realm. The Government's proposal is a constitutional nightmare. It is politically foolish and, further to the decisions not to prosecute in the shoot-to-kill cases or to insist upon a change of chief officer in the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and the smothering of the Stalker-Sampson affair, must sadden our friends in Ireland as much as it delights our common enemies—the gunmen and the terrorists.

We must not tolerate a permanent and exceptional removal of civil liberties. No democratic British Government should countenance that. It is the rights and freedoms of the citizen which should be permanent. Any derogation from them should be only temporary. The European convention on human rights, to which we are a signatory, makes it clear that suspension of civil rights for reasons of the state can be only by exception. The rule must be personal freedom.

Anti-terrorist legislation is, unfortunately, needed in the short term, but we believe that the time has come to develop it within the framework of the Anglo-Irish Agreement — not outside the framework of that agreement and in what appears to be a clumsy, though not deliberate, attempt to destroy it.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlile: I have nearly finished my speech, so I shall not give way. Many other hon. Members wish to speak.

We believe that there should be joint and simultaneous enactment by the Dail and this Parliament of new anti-terrorist legislation. That is the constructive way forward, that is the way in which anti-terrorist legislation can be made to stick and that is the way in which terrorism can be defeated.

11.15 pm

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): When the principal Bill was first in Committee it was known as the Prevention of Terrorism Bill, but several Opposition Members, together with some of my hon. Friends and I, insisted that the words "(Temporary Provisions)" should be inserted in the title. I remember well the reasons for the inclusion of those words.

The Act provides the police with exceptional powers. No state should normally take the powers that have been amply set out in this debate. They include the power to detain for seven days. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 provides for detention for only four days. Many hon. Members were very concerned about that power to detain, but under this Act a person can be detained for a further three days.

The Act includes the power to hold and interrogate and to hold simply for the purpose of gathering information. The Act also includes the power to detain people in Northern Ireland, thereby preventing them from travelling to the mainland. They are exceptional powers. Therefore, it was necessary to include the words "(Temporary Provisions)" in the title of the Act.

I welcome an annual opportunity to debate such exceptional powers. It is necessary to examine every year the effect of the Act, what is happening in Northern Ireland and whether the Act ought to be renewed. Its renewal should never be automatic. As parliamentary time is limited, there cannot be a requirement to renew the Act every five years, but there must be an order every year, thus providing an opportunity for debate. Therefore, I welcome the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

For the reasons that were given by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), I believe that it is right to renew the order. However, I say that only after a careful examination of the current situation. I give notice that next year I shall not automatically vote for the renewal of the Act. I shall consider its effect very carefully. Only after the most careful consideration shall I be prepared to vote for its renewal, because of the exceptional powers that it contains.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) has given figures that prove that the Act has been successful, but the fight against terrorism has much further to go. Nevertheless, I believe that the Act cannot remain on the statute book for ever and I look forward to the end of it.

11.24 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): It is tragic that the debate is taking place in the shadow of the events of the past three weeks. Ringing in all our ears must be those prophetic words of Sir John Hermon, at his first meeting with John Stalker, when he said, "You are in a jungle now." The jungle state has been contributed to, not just by the situation in Northern Ireland, but by the decision announced on the Floor of the House, which will allow those charged with enforcing the law to undermine the law and which has debased the integrity of the whole process of justice in Northern Ireland in the eyes of the people who have had to watch various incidents.

The Government have played by the ground rules which were laid down by Sir John Hermon or the intelligence services. Translated into graffiti, with all the legal niceties stripped away, the decision could be written on a wall as, "Jungle rule, OK." It is against that background that we must examine the two crucial issues. I shall not deal with the timing of the announcement, except to say that it was grossly insensitive, to put it mildly.

The proposed permanency is something that I find abhorrent, like most of what is in the legislation. To understand the context, we must consider the rake's progress in trying to get a solution to the Northern Irish problem. A security solution has been tried in all shapes and forms for 20 years. A new brigade has just been formed, and there is a new border zone. Some people have compared it to the Gaza strip. I live in it, so I will not make that comparison. In their thinking the Government seem to be moving inexorably towards a futile military solution, but there is no such solution.

The question must be asked: what is the objective? Is it to defeat terrorism, or is it to bring peace? The Government have to address that question. What is the priority? Is it to bring peace to Northern Ireland or to Ireland, or is it to try to gain a futile victory? Let there be no mistake about it. The present position can go on for another 20 years, with the military approach by the Government and by all the paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland.

The second fundamental question is: can amending or bending the law lead to a solution? Let us look at the rake's progress on that. We have had internment without trial, the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978,

the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984, the Diplock courts, the brutal interrogation techniques verified by Lord Justice Bennett and super-grass trials. We have had all these abuses of the law, but, 20 years on, none of them has ended terrorism. This legislation, whether permanent or temporary, will not end violence.

Everything has been tried militarily and legally. The one solution that has not yet been tried is that of giving the people of Northern Ireland a proper system of justice that every person can identify with, have confidence in and defend if the need arises. That is the way to prevent terrorism and end violence. That is the way to create peace.

I refer hon. Members to the informed view expressed by the hon. Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott), when he was a Minister in the Northern Ireland Office. In a speech in Munich he said that oppressive policies, without regard to moderation, civilisation and restraint, could feed terrorism. That is what is happening because of the emergency provisions legislation. Paramilitarists can live with repression. Indeed, they promote and welcome it. They cannot live with the highest standards of justice, because that is what they fear most. Since 1974, they have never been faced with that prospect from a Government operating from this House.

Once the order becomes permanent, it will be a vote of no confidence in the prospect of obtaining stability, a proper system of justice or prospects for peace in Northern Ireland. It is saying that there is no chance of stability proper justice or peace.

When Lord Jenkins, as he now is, was Secretary of State for the Home Department and he introduced this legislation, he said that it was unprecedented in peacetime. It is draconian legislation. To have it as a temporary provision is bad enough, but to enshrine it permanently is a monstrous act for the people of Britain, and especially for the people in Northern Ireland.

Powers of detention could be rewritten. The legislation is already used as a trawl for intelligence information. The detention figures, not confining their application to Britain, and the application of sections 11 and 13 in Northern Ireland, are astounding. Is anyone telling me, or anyone who lives in Northern Ireland, that this legislation is not used to trawl for intelligence?

Let me give as an example an incident that occurred three weeks ago A lady in my constituency, who was six months pregnant, was taken from her home by helicopter at 6.30 in the morning to a holding centre and questioned for a day and a half. The questioning was not about herself and her involvement, but about people with whom she might have had contact.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): My hon. Friend will be aware that over many years thousands of men and women have had their fingerprints taken, and although they are not found guilty of any terrorism, their fingerprints are still kept on file. Is that not disgraceful, and should not those fingerprints be destroyed?

Mr. Mallon: That may cause considerable concern in Britain, but I can assure my hon. Friend that in my constituency it would be the least of people's worries.

I have two further points to make. Unless precautions are taken when people are held in detention, there will be a repeat of the situation where a Mr. Gillan from Belfast was released from custody on the direction of the court because of his maltreatment in detention. Video cameras and tape recorders were introduced to put a stop to that, but they have not done so. This matter must be considered most carefully.

There is no statutory provison to cover the use of force by members of the security forces in Northern Ireland, apart from a provision in the Criminal Law Act 1967. There is nothing that the public have a right to know about, apart from that provision. Is that important? I suggest that it is very important when we realise that, between 1969 and 1986, 166 people were killed by members of the security forces. None of those people was involved in violence or paramilitary groupings. That is a remarkable omission from any form of legislation.

Until a uniform code of conduct and a set of rules are enshrined in legislation for both the police and the Army, there will be more Stalker affairs, and more people will be killed in dubious circumstances. This kind of incident will poison relationships, not just between the parties in the House, but between people in Northern Ireland, between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and between the Republic and Britain.

It may seen strange to quote the words of Lord Denning after these past three weeks, but I shall risk it. I ask that the Government remember these words at all times. He said: "Be you ever so high, the law is above you."

11.29 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): The fight against terrorism is an extraordinary business, and extraordinary solutions are required to deal with it. No Conservative Member would welcome the use of powers of this kind unless it was necessary, but necessary it is. Let me say to my right hon. Friend that one of the primary duties of a Government is to protect the citizens of this country. That is what he must do, and in doing so he takes on these necessary powers.

The lives of British people, not only in Northern Irleland but on the mainland, are in the hands of the police and the Home Office. It is their responsibility to ensure that our streets are safe and our people properly protected. We are dealing not only with international terrorism, or only with domestic terrorism, but with a mixture: the IRA, the Libyans, the Iranians—all kinds of terrorists who come to this country bearing its people no good will. Those are the people whom we must exclude, and this Bill will exclude them.

Let me say to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) that it is much better for 103 people to spend a week in custody than for hundreds of British people to die on our streets because we do not look into things properly. I am sure that many of my hon. Friends will agree with that. It does not do for the right hon. Gentleman to go on about the police in the way that he has done. That is at the root of it—the Opposition's paranoia about the powers granted to the police in this country. The police are the defenders of our society. I have sat in the House for four years and listened, and there is no doubt that the Opposition are paranoid about the powers of the police, and about giving them any further powers.

Ms. Short: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hind: I will not give way.

[Mr. Hind]

No one who has been in the House for the last few years and who has seen the incident at Heathrow over the El-Al jet, the Brighton bombing, Enniskillen, the Eksund incident and the recent uncovering of arms caches in Northern Ireland could believe that this measure is inappropriate. It is an essential tool of preventive policing, and an essential tool in the fight against terrorism.

Mr. Bermingham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hind: No, I shall not give way.

I say to the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook that I am surprised at him in particular. I say to the House that the public will not understand, if the Opposition vote against the order, their cavalier attitude towards the safety of the people of this country, of which they ought to be thoroughly ashamed.

11.32 pm

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The melancholy annual renewal of this legislation suggests that the Conservative party has exactly the same attitude as it did when the Act was first made law. Some of us fought against it on that day, and have continued to do so. It caused us much personal misery and trouble, but we did it for two reasons: because we were convinced that it would not work, and because we were convinced that it was profoundly unjust and would not do what it was intended to do. We are renewing it now against the background of a series of events which have been enumerated during the debate, and which, tied together, almost look like a provocation of the Irish people and the Irish Government.

We know that Sir John Hermon and the Government together have prevented justice from being done to the people who carried out those shootings. It is no good the Government hiding behind the Director of Public Prosecutions: it is the Government who are intervening in the law.*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths) should shut up. He never came here for debates about Ireland until he was paid for it. He was not here when we were fighting the struggle a long time ago, and he would not be now——

Sir Eldon Griffiths *rose*——

Mr. Flannery: I shall not give way.

Sir Eldon Griffiths *rose*——

Mr. Flannery: The hon. Gentleman is normally called first on such matters and he usually takes about half an hour out of a one-and-a-half-hour debate. The fact that he was told off means that we have been subjected to less than usual.

In 1974 the Act was passed against a background of fear and terror among our people. Many went along with it. Enniskillen is at the back of the order. Fear is causing a kind of semi-lynch law approach. People know that the Act is not working. Thousands of innocent people who have been fingerprinted are on the list.*[Interruption.]* I am told that it is much viler than that over there. People here should realise what the people in Northern Ireland and in the Republic are going through.

The Act's main provisions are draconian in the extreme. They include proscription of organisations that appear to be involved in political violence relating to Northern Ireland; exclusion from Britain — what a terrible thing it is when the entire family is worried about people who have never been tried because there is no trial; arrest and detention for up to seven days without charge. The Home Secretary said that he needed that provision to keep somebody in for six days. He could keep somebody in for six days because some people are in gaol for six months, never mind six days. The right hon. Gentleman knows that as well as I do.

The Act also includes exclusion—people are not even told the evidence against them or who is giving the evidence. There is no right of silence—people are forced to answer questions about other individuals. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said, one reason for the Act is to collect knowledge and intelligence and to force people to answer. They do not have the right to silence or any opportunity to cross-examine their accusers and there is no form of trial or appeal.

It is a disgraceful Act and should be taken off the statute book altogether. It is impossible for anyone to make representations on behalf of the accused, as no form of charges has ever been laid. The Act is draconian and creates terrorism. It is a "production of terrorism" Act. If Conservative Members do not know that, they should ask themselves a simple question. When anybody is unjustly treated by the Act—the Irish people have millions of relatives in the United States—do those Conservative Members not realise that NorAid is immediately strengthened to get funds for the IRA? Among other things, that is one result of the Act.

The Act has not stopped the bombings and the shootings; they still go on. Therefore, the Act aggravates a difficult situation, produces misery, and violates the conscience of any honourable individual. The Conservative party should be ashamed of the sickening unanimity on the Government Benches. Conservative Members uphold the Act year after year when innocent people are being terrorised. People who have never bothered to go to Ireland in their lives go there with the cameras on them, as the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds did yesterday, as we all saw. What does he know about it? He only comes here to defend the police.

The Irish community in this country and in Northern Ireland are frightened of the Act. They all have relatives who have been affected by it. They know that something wrong is being done and have to explain why somebody has suddenly gone missing when they do not know why that person has gone missing.

Added to the Diplock courts, the Act is an outrage against the people in our country who are of Irish background. Tonight we should withdraw this vile Act instead of renewing it in this melancholy and sickening way as we do annually—and as, at one time, we did every six months. Those of us who have continually fought against it are happy and proud that we have done so, because it is a sickening wrong against innocent people, and it should go.

11.38 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) began his speech by saying that the order would not end violence. He knows that I am a strong supporter of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, but the reality is that it does and can prevent violence and terrorism.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) said that innocent people are being terrorised in this country as a result of the Act and the orders. In reality, we can help to prevent the people of this country from being terrorised only by provisions such as this. That is why I support the Act and the order.

It is always difficult to strike a balance when one is dealing with fundamental liberties. It is always difficult to determine on which side of the equation to come down in deciding whether to introduce or continue powers such as these. As I pointed out in an intervention in the speech of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), when the Labour Government were faced with having to deal with the problem, they detained many thousands more people than have been detained by this Government under the provisions of the same Act. As T. S. Eliot once said, humankind cannot bear very much in the way of reality, and the hon. Member for Hillsborough illustrates that point very clearly. The provisions are needed to protect the citizens of this country, of Northern Ireland, and, if I may say so, of southern Ireland. Terrorism breeds terrorism and terrorism breeds violence and unless one prevents it, it feeds like a canker upon itself. That is precisely why these powers are needed.

Mr. Mallon: They have not prevented terrorism for 20 years.

Mr. Cash: The hon. Gentleman says that the provisions have not prevented the violence from escalating for 20 years. The hon. Gentleman and I have discussed Irish questions on many occasions. He knows that this position has pertained not for 20 or even for 40 years but for 400 years. I support the Anglo-Irish Agreement because its provisions are necessary, as are the powers in the Act. Only by these powers can we maintain the necessary degree of prevention.

Mr. Bermingham: The hon. Gentleman is a lawyer too. Does he not understand that the provisions of the Act apply only after arrest? The Act does nothing before a person has been arrested; it negates the normal criminal law powers after arrest. Will the hon. Gentleman please explain to the House how that helps to prevent terrorism?

Mr. Cash: As usual, the hon. Gentleman takes the nice legal point when we are dealing with something fundamental to the prevention of terrorism in this country. The fundamental reason why the Act and the orders are required is that they prevent terrorism.

Mr. Bermingham: How?

Mr. Cash: The hon. Gentleman is making absolutely no impact on the argument. The Act and the orders made under it must be maintained at all costs.

11.43 pm

Mr. Hattersley: I have only two points to make before I leave to the Under-Secretary the time that remains in this brief debate. It seems to me that the error committed by the Government, which tonight is more intellectual than political, was most eloquently demonstrated by the hon. Members for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) and for Stafford (Mr. Cash). They seem to believe that by merely reiterating the fact that terrorism exists they can justify the existence of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act. They do not seem to realise that to justify such draconian powers they have to relate the Act to terrorism and begin to show that it is in some way a deterrent.

My second point concerns the way in which the debate has been conducted. I think that the whole House will agree that to debate this matter of fundamental civil liberties for an hour and a half late at night is wholly unsatisfactory. It is not simply the continuation of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act: it is more the permanence of that Act in future, the underlying concern expressed on both sides of the House about the state of affairs in Northern Ireland, the Stalker-Sampson report and the necessity for an inquiry, and the state of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which we tried to support when the Prime Minister announced it in the first place. Those matters must be debated soon in the House. That is clearly the underlying feeling of almost every hon. Member who has spoken in the debate.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): Before the right hon. Gentleman finishes his speech, will he give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I think that the right hon. Gentleman has already finished.

11.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hogg): As one would expect, this has been a vigorous debate. When deciding what weight to give to the criticism that has been voiced by Labour Members, it is as well to keep in mind the fact that the powers that we are discussing were first introduced by the Labour party in 1974. They were re-enacted in 1976 by the Labour party, which was two years after the Birmingham bombing. I assume that that was then its mature policy.

It is desirable to keep in mind the fact that the powers that we are describing were described by the then Labour Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees). He said:

> "Unpleasant as are the powers contained in the Act, they are, in my view, necessary in order to prevent the far more serious consequences of terrorist violence." — [*Official Report*, 21 March 1979; Vol. 964, c. 1520.]

That was the considered view of the then Labour Home Secretary.

Interestingly, there has been a debate in another place tonight and support for the renewal of this Act was voiced by two former Labour Ministers who have played an important part in these matters — the right hon. and noble Lord Mason, who is a former Secretary of State for Defence and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and the noble Lord Harris, who is a former Minister of State, Home Office.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Minister to quote from a debate in another place?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Minister is not quoting directly; no breach of order has been committed.

Mr. Hogg: Almost every person who has had responsibility for dealing with these matters supports the implementation and renewal of these provisions. Essentially, it is only those who have never had personal responsibility for the implementation of these matters who have sought to criticise them.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hogg: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman under any circumstances.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hogg: No.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hogg: No. I have made the position plain.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister has made it clear that he is not giving way.

Mr. Hogg: The next question that we must ask——

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hogg: No.

Mr. Corbyn *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not persist. The Minister has made it clear that at the moment he is not giving way.

Mr. Hogg: The next question that we must ask is what these provisions are about and what kind of conduct the Labour party is proposing to make lawful. We should also ask what safeguards and defences the Labour party proposes that we should discard.

Let us first look at sections 1 and 2. They are designed to render unlawful — to make a criminal offence — membership of or active support for either the IRA or the INLA. One matter on which we can all agree is that the IRA and the INLA are organisations whose avowed policies necessarily involve and include the killing and wounding of countless individuals. Membership of those organisations should be an offence. Active support for those organisations should be an offence. What is the Labour party's position? The Opposition render lawful membership of the IRA and the INLA in this country. They also propose to render lawful the giving of money to those two organisations. That is the inevitable and, I expect, the intended consequence of their policy as enunciated today. We need to be plain about this, because the country will want to know that the Labour party proposes to make lawful activities that most people regard as wholly deplorable.

I come now to part II of the Act, which is concerned with exclusion orders.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Minister is saying that the Labour party is attempting and wants to make the IRA legal. I have never heard that uttered at any time or in any place. If the Minister——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. It is not a point of order; it is a point of debate. He must therefore seek to intervene to correct the position.

Mr. Bermingham: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Gentleman putting a new point of order?

Mr. Bermingham: Is it in order for comments to be made in the House that clearly have no basis in truth, and then for hon. Members to be ruled out of order——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Gentlemen are raising points of debate, not points of order.

Mr. Hogg: It is emerging either that the Labour party is extremely uncomfortable with its policy, or that it does not understand it.

Let me make plain what all this is about. Sections 1 and 2 of the Act have the effect of making it unlawful to be a member of the IRA or the INLA. They also make it unlawful to subscribe to those organisations. The Labour party proposes to repeal the two sections. That means it is proposing to make lawful membership of, and financial subscriptions to, the IRA and INLA, whose policy is murder and treason. That is the Labour party's policy, and the Opposition are not in a position to deny it, although they may find it extremely uncomfortable.

Let us now examine the exclusion orders. I fancy that the Opposition will find the debate on them as uncomfortable as they found the debate on sections 1 and 2 of the Act. If the exclusion orders were right in principle between 1974 and 1979, it is extremely difficult to see why they can be wrong in principle today. Practical criticism is one thing; practical objection is another. But to denounce in principle the policies to which the Labour party committed itself for six or seven years is a bizarre proposition that appeals to no one but the Labour party. So the question is twofold——

Mr. Hattersley *rose*——

Mr. Hogg: I do not propose to give way. The Labour party will have to face up to its policies and the right hon. Gentleman is not going to divert me by getting to his feet.

There are two questions. First, is the exclusion order——

Mr. Hattersley *rose*——

Mr. Hogg: No. I have two minutes more and I propose to proceed.

Is the exclusion order necessary and in the public interest? Secondly, is the exclusion order, if used, used in a fair and reasonable manner? On the latter point Lord Colville made it plain that he thought that the powers were being used in a fair and reasonable manner. He wanted to stop the use of those powers—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Yes, he did, but he also explained the powerful arguments in favour of keeping them. Those arguments are to be found in his report. The first is that the police service strongly supports the continued existence of the powers. Secondly, Lord Colville expressly states that the police do not have the power to mount surveillance on terrorists who come into the country. Thirdly, he states that the powers are extremely useful in disrupting terrorist lines of communications and disrupting their supply of arms, ammunition and explosives. Those are the positive conclusions of the report.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Does not "Erskine May" state that when someone goes mad at the Dispatch Box that person is out of order?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am quite familiar with "Erskine May".

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business).*

The House divided: Ayes 261, Noes 162.

Division No. 184] **[11.56 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Robert
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kenneth Carlisle and
Mr. Stephen Dorrell.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*

Fatchett, Derek
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hume, John
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen Adams.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 25th January, be approved.

Dr. Frank Skuse

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Maclean].*

12.7 am

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): This is the first of what I hope will be a series of Adjournment debates on different aspects of the case against the six innocent men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings. During these debates, I shall take the opportunity to explore areas that were not touched on in the recent hearing before the Court of Appeal and I hope that in due course this material may be used as the basis for reopening the case.

Tonight I will deal with Dr. Frank Skuse, the forensic scientist whose evidence above all helped to convict these unfortunate men. It is already a matter of record that Dr. Skuse was an incompetent scientist. Indeed, that is why in October 1985 the Home Office ordered his compulsory retirement at the grand old age of 51. The evidence he gave at the original trial has been utterly discredited, so much so that the judges at the recent Court of Appeal were obliged to set aside his evidence, even though they upheld the convictions.

I shall not dwell on Dr. Skuse's incompetence as a scientist. I go further and allege that Dr. Skuse also conspired with police officers to pervert the course of justice, and I shall provide the factual basis for that assertion.

At the time of the Birmingham pub bombings, Dr. Skuse was a scientific officer based at the Home Office forensic laboratory at Chorley in Lancashire. Five of the six convicted men were arrested at the port of Heysham a few hours after the bombs exploded. They were taken to Morecambe police station. Dr. Skuse was telephoned at his home in Wigan shortly after midnight and asked to come as quickly as possible to Morecambe to test the men's hands for explosives.

He was called by Sergeant Ray Paton, the police liaison officer at the Chorley laboratory. Sergeant Paton drove to Wigan to collect Dr. Skuse, and together they returned to the laboratory at Chorley, where Skuse collected his hand-swabbing kit, which was already packed, and they then went on to Morecambe, a total journey of just over 40 miles on roads with little traffic.

According to Dr. Skuse, they arrived at around 3.30 in the morning. It is puzzling why this journey should have taken the best part of three hours, since in the same statement Dr. Skuse estimates that the return journey from Morecambe to Chorley, made in daytime traffic, took only 45 minutes.

At about the same time as Dr. Skuse alleges he arrived, a party of west midlands detectives led by Superintendent George Reade reached Morecambe. Dr. Skuse and Mr. Reade had never met before that night. They have, however, since formed a close relationship which has endured for 13 years—a subject to which I shall return. Dr. Skuse invites us to believe that, having arrived at Morecambe, he did not commence his tests until 5·50 am. Just how he filled in the intervening 2 hours and 20 minutes is unclear. It is unclear also how there could be any possible reason for the delay, since the police were extremely anxious to know the results of Dr. Skuse's tests.

Dr. Skuse and Sergeant Paton installed themselves in the medical room in the cell block of Morecambe police station. The west midlands detectives were, initially at

least, confined to the CID offices on the first floor. They were, understandably perhaps, in view of what had happened in Birmingham, in a state of great agitation. They at first insisted on immediate access to the prisoners. Very properly, this was refused by Chief Superintendent Ibison, the senior Lancashire detective. I am told by an officer who was present that this led to a blazing row between Reade and Ibison, but to begin with at least Mr. Ibison held his ground.

Dr. Skuse says that he commenced testing the hands of the five men at 5.50 am. At their trial the men testified that they believed that the tests had commenced much earlier, at around 3 or 4 in the morning. This was necessarily only an estimate since they had no watches, but, as we shall see, there were a number of people who did have watches and who support their evidence.

According to his timings, Dr. Skuse obtained his first positive test from the hand of Billy Power at around 7 o'clock in the morning. He obtained another positive from Paddy Hill by around 7.30. There then occurs a lengthy gap in the times offered by Dr. Skuse, who claims that he did not see the next prisoner, Johnny Walker, until 8.55 and that he carried out a further test on Paddy Hill after 9 am. At the recent appeal hearing, Dr. Skuse explained the gap by saying that he ran out of ether and had to send out for more from a local chemist, Mr. John Rayner. Mr. Rayner, he said, had arrived at between 8.15 and 8.30 am. Mr. Rayner, however, told the court that he delivered the ether to Morecambe police station at between 5 and 6 in the morning. He was quite definite about this. The Appeal Court judges chose to explain this difference away as a lapse of memory on Mr. Rayner's part, but Mr. Rayner is not alone in his recollection.

What is not disputed, even on Dr. Skuse's controversial timings, is that by around 7 in the morning word of Dr. Skuse's positive findings had reached the west midlands detectives, who were anxiously pacing up and down on the first floor. From that moment onwards, they honestly believed that the men downstairs were the Birmingham pub bombers. Although he had no business to be so, Dr. Skuse was absolute in his certainty. There was, he testified later, a 99 per cent. chance that those men had recently handled nitro-glycerine.

At around 7 am or earlier, the Lancashire police surrendered control over the cell block in Morecambe police station to Superintendent Reade and his men, who commenced a series of fantastic assaults in an effort, which was successful, to extract confessions from the men who they sincerely believed, on the basis of what Dr. Skuse had told them, had recently handled nitro-glycerine.

I do not suggest that Dr. Skuse or Sergeant Paton witnessed or overheard these assaults. I do, however, say that, whether or not Dr. Skuse knew of the violence, he is a party to the elaborate web of fraud and perjury to which Superintendent Reade and his men had to resort in order to cover up the assaults.

The official story is that the Lancashire police, under Superintendent Ibison, conducted an orderly handover of the prisoners at 9.30 am. Patently, that is nonsense. Sergeant Ronald Buckley, the officer in charge of the cells at Morecambe, almost let the cat out of the bag at the original trial. He testified that west midlands detectives were already interviewing the prisoners in the cell block when he came on duty at around 7 am. It was not just a slip of the tongue; his evidence on this point covered a whole page of the transcript and lasted several minutes. He only climbed back on board the official version of the events when the judge, Lord Bridge, came, as he so often did, to the aid of the prosecution and hinted to Sergeant Buckley that his memory might be faulty. However, 13 years later Mr. Buckley still sticks by his story. Interviewed by the Devon and Cornwall police on 13 May last year, he again insisted that west midlands detectives were interviewing the prisoners when he came on duty at about 7 o'clock. He repeated this knowing the implication and knowing — indeed, it was put to him — that Superintendent Ibison, his superior officer at the time, was still saying something quite different.

Inspector Ken Brown was another Lancashire officer on duty that night. He was on duty until 6 am. When I contacted him two years ago, he told me: "My recollection is that Skuse had a positive by the time I went home, although I wouldn't swear to it." If Inspector Brown's recollection is correct, Dr. Skuse must have commenced his tests at least an hour earlier than the time to which he admits.

Sergeant Paton, who drove Dr. Skuse to and from Morecambe police station, can also assist with inquiries. He was not called to give evidence, either at the original trial or at the recent appeal. If the times have been rejigged, he must know. When Sergeant Paton was interviewed last year at his home in Preston by detectives from the Devon and Cornwall police force, he gave two statements. The first, dated 26 March, said that he and Dr. Skuse had arrived at Morecambe at around 1.30 am, two hours earlier than Dr. Skuse claimed.

The Devon and Cornwall police, having taken the statement from Sergeant Paton, went to see Dr. Skuse, who gave them the official version of events, flatly contradicting his driver, Sergeant Paton. So the Devon and Cornwall police went to see Sergeant Paton again and refreshed his memory. His memory suitably refreshed, Sergeant Paton clambered back on board. He signed a second statement, agreeing that he had arrived at 3.30 and not, as he said originally, 1.30. The Devon and Cornwall police were kind enough not to pursue how he came to be so far adrift, nor indeed how he had managed to spin out a 45-minute journey to the best part of three hours.

I come now to Dr. Skuse. It is now established beyond doubt that he was an incompetent scientist. Even the Home Office now accepts that. He was sacked on the grounds of what the Home Office coyly call "limited efficiency". It is also established beyond doubt, although the Home Office has yet to own up to this, that Dr. Skuse's limited efficiency dates back to at least 1975, the year he gave his now discredited evidence at the original trial.

What I am suggesting today is something rather more serious than incompetence, and has nothing to do with Dr. Skuse's credibility as a scientist. I say that Dr. Skuse has conspired over a long period with Superintendent George Reade to rearrange the timing of events in Morecambe police station to cover up the fact that west midlands detectives had access to the prisoners several hours earlier than has so far been admitted and that, during that time, they commenced a ferocious programme of violence which led to the extraction of false confessions.

That is why Dr. Skuse and Mr. Reade, who had never met before that night and who live 80 miles from each other, are still so closely in touch after 13 years. That is why they liaised with particular care during the recent appeal and that is why Mr. Reade has stoutly championed Dr. Skuse's claim that he has been unfairly dismissed by

[Mr. Chris Mullin]

the Home Office. Reade needs Skuse's silence if what happened to those men in police custody is to continue to be concealed.

The four days which Dr. Skuse spent in the witness box at the Old Bailey in November must have been particularly nerve-wracking for George Reade. If Skuse had been caught out on timing—he was caught out many times on scientific matters—Reade would have been in deep trouble. If Sergeant Paton had broken ranks and testified along the lines of his first statement, the game also would have been up.

At the recent appeal hearing, it emerged that Dr. Skuse kept no contemporaneous note of the times at which he carried out the tests. Indeed, he kept very few notes of any kind. He did not even record the chemical formula he had used. It emerged also that Dr. Skuse had taken it upon himself to alter the times noted by Sergeant Paton by 10 or 15 minutes. He had done this without telling Sergeant Paton. He did it, he said, at the suggestion of Superintendent Ibison. He denied that he had done it at the suggestion of Superintendent Reade, even though it was pointed out that the new times matched Reade's not Ibison's.

While an alteration of 10 or 15 minutes is not directly relevant to the charge I am making—that the times were adjusted by several hours—it establishes that Dr. Skuse, far from being an impartial scientist, was prepared to change his evidence at the suggestion of a police officer. I do not dwell on this.

Central to the allegation I am making is the relationship that has developed between George Reade and Frank Skuse over the past 13 years. When I and a colleague from Granada Television called unannounced at George Reade's home in Rugeley, Staffordshire, two years ago, he said:

"I know you lads were about. Frank Skuse told me."

That was before any of the recent controversy became public. Dr. Skuse had not telephoned to alert Mr. Reade to our investigation. He had taken the trouble to drive 80 miles to Rugeley to alert Mr. Reade in person.

Over the following 18 months, as Dr. Skuse's difficulties with the Home Office increased, George Reade became a champion of Skuse's cause. He took Skuse to see his Member of Parliament, the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), whom I hold in the highest regard. Reade even wrote on Dr. Skuse's behalf to the permanent secretary at the Home Office, Sir Brian Cubbon. I submit that George Reade did not do this out of the kindness of his heart. He did it because he needed Skuse's silence and he was worried that an embittered Dr. Skuse might blurt out the truth.

At the recent appeal hearing, Frank Skuse and George Reade were both important witnesses. Skuse was in the witness box for more than four days. Witnesses are not supposed to discuss their evidence with each other or anyone else while the case is proceeding. Indeed, that very point was made to Dr. Skuse by the Lord Chief Justice.

I am reliably informed that Dr. Skuse, on more than one occasion, while the case was proceeding, telephoned former Sergeant Ray Paton in Preston and discussed the case with him at length. Mr. Paton was the man who drove Dr. Skuse to Morecambe. His silence is also needed to corroborate Dr. Skuse's unlikely time schedule.

I further believe—and I challenge Dr. Skuse to deny—that, while the appeal was proceeding, Frank Skuse was regularly in touch by telephone with George Reade, the other principal Crown witness.

I go further. On Sunday 29 November, shortly after Skuse and Reade had completed their evidence, but while the case was still being heard and they were both technically witnesses, liable to be recalled at any time, an ITN journalist, Mr. Chris Jameson, called unannounced at Reade's house. Who should open the door? It was none other than Frank Skuse. Frank Skuse was there, in George Reade's house, while the appeal was still being heard.

Skuse and Reade are the villains of this terrible affair. Dr. Skuse, unwittingly perhaps, provided the false scientific evidence. Mr. Reade provided the confessions and they have conspired together ever since.

Giving judgment in the Appeal Court on 28 January, Lord Justice Lane said:

"It is inevitable that the allegations made on behalf of the appellants would necessitate the active collaboration of Dr. Skuse."

That is exactly what I am alleging.

12.22 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): The allegations made by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) appear to have been made with no evidence at all, for no evidence has been produced. They appear to represent a distortion both of any role that any of the people whom he has named under the cloak of parliamentary privilege might have had and of the Court of Appeal's judgment in the Birmingham pub bombings case. The hon. Gentleman's attack on a member of the judiciary was totally inappropriate and wrong.

The defence had the opportunity to put before the court any evidence that it wished. The court gave the case careful consideration. It is not clear to me, nor to my hon. Friends, exactly what purpose the hon. Genetleman seeks to serve by using the cloak of parliamentary privilege to make entirely unsubstantiated allegations based on nothing more than his personal interpretation of some of the facts for which he has produced no evidence, even when he has been challenged. His attack on a member of the judiciary is entirely inappropriate for an hon. Member following the conventions of the House.

The hon. Gentleman has clearly not read the judgment of the Court of Appeal in the case. He has distorted Dr. Skuse's role in the prosecution and chosen to ignore the corroboration that his evidence received at crucial points. The speech that the hon. Gentleman read at great speed, presumably as a trailer for a future book or television programme, was one of the worst and most wretched performances that I have ever heard in the House of Commons.

I shall give a few facts about the retirement of Dr. Frank Skuse, who, along with members of the judiciary and others, has been subjected to attack by the hon. Gentleman under the cloak of parliamentary privilege.

Dr. Skuse joined the Home Office forensic science service in 1963 at the age of 28. After six years service he was promoted in 1969 to the next grade of principal scientific officer. It was in that grade that he passed the remainder of his career in the forensic science service. Over these years he developed a particular interest in arson and explosives. Throughout the 1970s Dr. Skuse's career followed a normal pattern, with him gaining experience in

the matters in which he had developed his particular interests. It is unremarkable, therefore, that among the cases he handled was one that later became known as that of the Birmingham bombers. Dr. Skuse's career continued on these lines until the early 1980s, when his managers noted some falling off in his performance as a principal scientific officer.

It was that deterioration in performance, noted in a number of staff reports—*[Interruption.]* I am giving the facts and the evidence. I am not making unsubstantiated and wild allegations. That deterioration in performance led to an invitation to Dr. Skuse to consider early retirement. At the same time, it was made clear to Dr. Skuse that in view of his current performance the Department was bound to make moves to secure his compulsory retirement on grounds of limited efficiency. "Grounds of limited efficiency" is a perfectly ordinary term of art that is used in the Civil Service across all Departments. It is not something to be sneered at.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: No, I shall certainly not give way.

In the event, in June 1985 Dr. Skuse agreed to take voluntary retirement. That is a fact rather than an allegation or an unsubstantiated, wild statement, such as we have heard from the hon. Member for Sunderland, South. There was some discussion with Dr. Skuse about whether he should retire at the end of October or early in November. That also is a fact. In a letter dated 23 July 1985 he was told that his last day of service would be 31 October 1985.

The chronological sequence that I have just described makes it absolutely clear that the question of limited efficiency that led to the retirement of Dr. Skuse related to his performance in the period to his retirement in 1985, and certainly not to the work that he had done as long ago as 1975.

It has been demonstrated, therefore, that there was no connection between Dr. Skuse's retirement and the case of the Birmingham bombings. However, the Department, as a matter of prudence, has reviewed Dr. Skuse's earlier work on a number of occasions. The most comprehensive review was one made by the then director of the Chorley forensic science laboratory, Mr. George Walker, in 1984 and 1985, at the request of the controller of the forensic science service. Mr. Walker used all the available records at the laboratory. These covered Dr. Skuse's written evidence in some 350 cases, dating back not just to 1975, but to 1966. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members do not seem to be interested in the facts and in the evidence. They are interested only in wild and unsubstantiated allegations.

Mr. Walker concluded that his investigations had not brought to light any case where Dr. Skuse had misreported facts, had been biased in his reports, or had been negligent in his work. On the basis of his investigations, Mr. Walker did not consider that he had any grounds for suspecting that Dr. Skuse's work had led to any miscarriage of justice. Leaving on one side the case of the Birmingham bombers, nothing emerged from these reviews that called into serious doubt convictions reached in cases where Dr. Skuse gave evidence.

I should make it absolutely clear that, following the normal conventions of the House, neither I nor my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department consider it right to comment in any way on the evidence given at the appeal hearing or on the judgment handed down by the court. What I can say is that the Court of Appeal had laid before it the facts and arguments about Dr. Skuse's evidence. It went over ground raised at the trial.

At the appeal hearing, seven says were spent on the issue. The hon. Gentleman said that Dr. Skuse gave evidence for four days. It was about the only fact that the hon. Gentleman referred to in his speech and even that was wrong. Dr. Skuse gave evidence, not for four days, but for three and a half days. If the hon. Gentleman wants to report facts to the House, he should at least take the trouble to make sure that he has got them right. *[Interruption.]* I thought that the hon. Gentleman cared about facts. Clearly he does not. He undermines the basis of his own arguments by his cavalier attitude to facts and his reliance on allegations and suppositions. There has been a clear opportunity for any issues or arguments about the scientific evidence in the Birmingham bombings case to be raised. After long and careful deliberation the Court of Appeal gave its judgment. As my right hon. Friend has made plain, he cannot now, in the absence of any indications from the court that he should do so, intervene in these convictions. It is not for him to seek to pass further judgment, quite rightly. He is not a court of law; nor am I; nor, in the strict sense, if I may say so, is the House.

What about the issue of further reviews of Dr. Skuse's cases? We have, of course, looked at what the court had to say in its judgment. Our understanding is that the judgment has not shown any grounds for casting doubt on Dr. Skuse's scientific work in general or in other specific cases. The position in cases in which Dr. Skuse gave evidence is the same as in any other contested criminal case that resulted in a conviction. If any new evidence or any new consideration—I emphasise the word "new"—is brought to our attention that casts doubt on the accuracy of the evidence—whether that of Dr. Skuse or any other witness—or on the safety of the conviction, we would think it right to review the case, and that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department has shown himself very ready to do.

As with the Birmingham case, the decision for my right hon. Friend would be whether or not he found that there were grounds that would justify his referring the case to the Court of Appeal. We therefore have no present plans to subject criminal cases on which Dr. Skuse worked to further review. As I have said, however, we would clearly be ready to consider reviewing and intervening in any particular case where some new evidence or new consideration of substance that cast doubt on the safety of the conviction came to light.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield) *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way, as I have only two minutes in which to conclude my remarks on the case.

Mr. Benn: This is an important point.

Mr. Patten: I can see no justification for giving way to the right hon. Gentleman. I must return to the starting point of the Adjournment rather than deal with a number of allegations for which no evidence has been produced.

I believe that I have shown conclusively that the circumstances of the Birmingham bombings, and therefore

[Mr. Patten]

the issue of Dr. Skuse's retirement, have been fully addressed in my remarks to the House tonight in reply to the hon. Gentleman's Adjournment motion.

Mr. Benn: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, if there is a moment. I have listened to the Minister with interest. He has totally failed to meet the points made by my hon. Friend about established collusion between two witnesses appearing before the court. I ask him, before the debate ends, to say that he will investigate the points made by my hon. Friend, who has devoted a lot of effort to proving what most people now believe to be the case, namely, that the Birmingham six are innocent and that the only reason that their appeal was turned down was that if it had been upheld the British judiciary at a very high level, and the police, would have been brought into disrepute.

The Minister, in replying to my hon. Friend, has totally failed to address some of the most serious allegations that I have heard made in the House. Those reading the report of this debate in *Hansard* will draw the conclusion that the Minister, too, is covering up for the judiciary and the police.

Mr. Patten *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I must ask the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) to withdraw those last remarks. They are totally unparliamentary and unacceptable.

Mr. Benn: Madam Deputy Speaker, I said that those reading the report of the debate in *Hansard* would be driven to the conclusion that the Minister was covering up for decisions that had been taken elsewhere.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is those remarks that I ask the right hon. Member to withdraw. I plead with him. They are totally unacceptable to me in the Chair tonight, and unacceptable to the House. I ask him to consider and to withdraw them now.

Mr. Benn: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am an old Member of the House and I ask you what is unparliamentary about accusing the Government of covering up, because that is precisely the charge.

Mr. Patten: Withdraw!

Mr. Benn: "Covering up" is a charge that I have heard used regularly in many years of debates in the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand when the right hon. Gentleman says that he is a long-standing Member of the House, but he is making a personal attack on the Minister tonight, which I believe is totally unjustified, and I ask him to withdraw those remarks at this stage.

Mr. Benn: Madam Deputy Speaker, I will bow to your ruling, but I must say that if the charge is objectionable because it relates to the Minister, I must claim that the Government, who are responsible to the House, are covering up for what happened in the police and the judiciary.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Those remarks I can accept, but there must be no aspersions in the House against a Minister. Criticism of the Government is perfectly justified in the House, but it must not be made against any individual Minister.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wedesday 17 February 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Nature Reserves

1. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to be in a position to state his policy towards the transfer of the management of state-owned national nature reserves to voluntary bodies or the private sector.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): The Nature Conservancy Council is conducting a review of its national nature reserve policy, which is due to be completed later this year. I would also refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave on 13 January, in which the Government's policy towards the ownership of land by non-departmental public bodies, including the NCC, was set out.

Mr. Lamond: As the NCC is funded by the Secretary of State, through the Treasury, is it not more likely to bend to his will, even though no voluntary organisations could possibly buy land from it? Is the Secretary of State not concerned that, last year alone, over 200 privately owned sites of special scientific interest were destroyed? Why does the Secretary of State not drop the daftest idea that he has yet had?

Mr. Ridley: I hope that, as the NCC is funded by the taxpayer, it will bend to the will of the taxpayer, as the hon. Gentleman suggested. The loophole to which he referred was closed by legislation, as he should know.

Sir John Farr: Whether or not such rights are eventually transferred from the state to some other body, will my right hon. Friend make absolutely sure that public rights of access that already exist are preserved in future?

Mr. Ridley: Yes. A year ago, of the 160,000 hectares of national nature reserves only 43,000 were publicly owned. It is important that public rights of access should be preserved, and they are preserved under many different statutes.

Dr. Cunningham: The Secretary of State must be aware that important bodies, such as the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and others, have expressed grave reservations about the wisdom of the proposal to dispose of national sites and parts of our national heritage. If he is to ask such bodies — many of which manage such sites efficiently and have a proven track record — to take responsibility for more of our national heritage, will he clearly and unequivocally provide the necessary funding for them to do so? If he does not do so, their job will simply be beyond them.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to have quite got it right. Three quarters of the sites are in private ownership and are well looked after by private individuals at their own expense. If there is to be a supplement from public funds to the management of nature reserves, it can be done through the SSSI management agreements. That system is proceeding satisfactorily. However, I do not believe that the Nature Conservancy Council should be a way of achieving the nationalisation of land.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the state has no particular flair for managing nature reserves, any more than it has any particular gift for making motor cars? Will he not get better value for money out of genuine enthusiasts, anyway?

Mr. Ridley: I tend to agree with my hon. Friend's sentiments. All that I have asked the NCC to do is to review its holdings to see whether, perhaps, some should be added to or substracted from them.

Rating Reform

2. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many letters he has received from members of the public *(a)* in support of the community charge and *(b)* opposed to the community charge.

Mr. Ridley: A summary of the 1,271 responses received by 31 October 1986, when the consultation period on the Green Paper ended, was placed in the Library on 15 December 1986. Since then my Department has received a large number of letters commenting on specific aspects of our proposals and requesting further information.

Mrs. Mahon: I am disappointed that the Secretary of State did not answer the question. I believe that there is unanimous opposition from the whole spectrum of political thought in this country. In my constituency, the totally unjust tax will mean that an average household of three adults will pay £770 as against £322 now. How will low-income families find that extra £450?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Lady should put that question to Calderdale, because that council is currently spending about £83 per adult over the average for the country. It has time to reduce its costs and charges, because we have instituted a safety net that will limit the impact on Calderdale. The only opponent is the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), who does not think that Birmingham should contribute to Calderdale.

Mr. Latham: Will my hon. Friend inform the House how many of those letters said, "Can we please keep the rating system and, while we are about it, can we have the rating revaluation that would otherwise be necessary?"

Mr. Ridley: In the original consultation exercise the responses favouring abolition of domestic rates outnumbered those favouring retention by two to one. We have not analysed the letters after that, because they do not express clear opinions, but make limited points or ask questions.

Mr. Rees: Have any of the Secretary of State's correspondents asked whether it would be in order for the voters' list to be checked against the poll tax list in order to aid prosecution?

Mr. Ridley: Those matters have been discussed extensively upstairs. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the voters' list is a public document, and I have no doubt that community charge registration officers will see it just as they see many other bits of evidence in arriving at registrations.

Mr. Marlow: With the greatest respect, was that not a rather silly and stupid question? Is not the weight of correspondence dependent on the activity of the lobbies? Is not the Government's responsibility to introduce policies that are effective and will be popular, not what people might think according to some biased question put in an opinion poll before a policy is introduced?

Mr. Ridley: We have received about 5,000 letters on this subject, and 35 million people will be liable to pay the community charge. The statisticians in the House will recognise that that is an insignificant proportion.

Mr. Rooker: Would it be a good idea if, even after the legislation has passed through the House on the conveyor belt after the guillotine, the Government put this issue to the people again, because of its substantial constitutional importance, to determine whether they would prefer the tax to be based in the way in which the Prime Minister originally said it would be on people's ability to pay?

Mr. Ridley: We put that issue to the people in June last year, and the hon. Gentleman was lucky to retain his seat.

Planning Policy

3. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans his Department has to reduce planning restrictions in towns and inner cities.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. David Trippier): We have a substantial programme of work to simplify and improve the planning system. In particular, we have introduced provisions for simplified planning zones by which general permission can be given for specified types of development in an area.

Six urban development corporations have been established in England to adopt a single-minded approach to regeneration of inner-city areas. Three more have been announced. All have development control powers.

Mr. Riddick: I am grateful for that reply, which clearly recognises the need to reduce planning restrictions in UDCs and special planning zones. Does my hon. Friend agree that the relaxation of planning restrictions should also be extended to towns and cities, such as Colne Valley and Huddersfield, which have no special status and where the planning restrictions do more than anything else to restrict and stifle the growth and prosperity of small businesses?

Mr. Trippier: That is why we have introduced 16 planning measures since the publication of the first White Paper, "Lifting the Burden", which contained a form of deregulation that will benefit the smaller firms to which my hon. Friend referred. The most notable of those measures is the extension to the general development order to promote exemptions from specific planning permission and the modernisation of the use classes order. There is no lack of recognition in the DOE of the fact that the planning constraints that affect the growth and enterprise of small businesses obviously apply outside the inner-city areas and in Colne Valley also. The 16 measures that we have introduced will help that process.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Did not the report "Faith in the City" detail most objectively with the polarisation, poverty and decline in physical conditions in the inner cities? Is not the embarrassing nature of that report one reason why the country is having to put up with the vindictive and malicious attacks on the Church of England from the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food?

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman will not expect me to comment on that specific detail. I clearly remember reading "Faith in the City". We recognise some of the problems that the report has identified, and it is relatively easy for people to agree about the nature of the problems. However, the solutions suggested in the document were, in the main, unacceptable to the Government. The Government clearly recognise the problems of the inner cities. Our policy on that point has already been outlined by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and it will be developed further. That policy reveals our concern for the inner cities, and we will develop the policy to regenerate them.

Mr. Thurnham: While removing unnecessary restrictions on businesses, will my hon. Friend pay close attention to the existence of historic covenants and the strength of public opinion that supports them?

Mr. Trippier: Yes, Sir.

Dr. Cunningham: One of the most controversial proposals for inner-city redevelopment at the moment relates to the Chelsea football ground at Stamford Bridge. What has been happening about that? Clearly something very odd, funny and questionable has been happening in the Department about the proposal. On 20 November the Minister for Housing and Planning, in a written answer, said that it "would not be justified" to call in the application. Although the council has followed the proper procedures by notifying the changes to the local plan in public notices, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier), as recently as 11 February said that the Department had changed its mind and was calling the planning proposal in—*[Interruption.]* Yes, this is a very important matter and I intend to get it on the record.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Very long questions deprive Back Benchers of time.

Dr. Cunningham: Something very odd is going on in the Department of the Environment. There is a very nasty smell about it. The public, the people of Hammersmith and Fulham and the people at Chelsea football club and its supporters are entitled to know what is happening.

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman has made some disgraceful allegations and he deserves to be reprimanded for making them. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear to the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) on 11 February that the planning application was notified to him as a departure from the Greater London development plan on 8 January.

Dr. Cunningham: That is not true.

Mr. Trippier: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will consider withdrawing that remark later.

I was obliged to consider the proposals afresh in the light of the council's view and the considerable number of representations received. In the light of the new information, my right hon. Friend concluded that the planning application should be called in for his decision following a local public inquiry. Obviously he cannot comment further at this stage, lest he prejudice his quasi-judicial function.

Mr. Redwood: Does my hon. Friend agree that public land hoarding, planning restrictions and the attitude of some local councils are still unduly restricting development in towns and cities where it is much needed? Does he agree that, as he tries to find ways through the red tape, he and the Department should reduce the over-rapid rate of growth in places such as Berkshire, which is picking up the tab for the failure in the cities?

Mr. Trippier: We have to try to achieve a balance in the Department of the Environment. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear earlier about development in the southern regions, which has certainly been higher than was previously expected, the Department must consider these matters with the planning authorities in reviewing development plans. However, I understand my hon. Friend's points.

Housing Mobility

4. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals to increase housing mobility amongst owner-occupiers; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Mr. William Waldegrave): There have been a number of welcome changes which make it easier and cheaper for people to buy their own homes. These have included reductions in stamp duty, increased competition in conveyancing—which has led to a drop in charges—moves to speed up local authority searches, and an end to mortgage queues.

Mr. Lloyd: I am surprised at the Minister's response. Does he not recognise that, because the Government have allowed over-development to continue apace in the south-east, a terraced house there costs about three times as much as one in the north? That means that there is no possibility of mobility between the regions amongst owner-occupiers, as there is no real possibility of the south-east housing its own population.

Mr. Waldegrave: The argument is usually put the other way by northern Members—that they do not want a relaxation of planning controls in the south to bring down prices against the north. One of the comparative advantages of the north is its much cheaper prices. I remind the hon. Gentleman that last year there were a record number of first-time buyers—just under 700,000—and many more first-time buyers even in the south than in 1979.

Mr. McCrindle: Has my hon. Friend's attention been drawn to the limitations on mobility applying to those who have engaged in the otherwise very desirable plans of part renting and part ownership? Has he any thoughts on how such people who may wish to move to another part of the country can be helped to do so?

Mr. Waldegrave: We certainly support such schemes, both in the commercial sector and when subsidised by the Housing Corporation. There has been an increase in such schemes, and we welcome it.

Mr. Soley: That is an incredibly complacent response. Does the Minister realise that people are having problems buying for the first time and in trading up and renting, all because of the mess into which the Government have got themselves over housing finance? When will the Government respond to the very sensible request from the Duke of Edinburgh's committee, the Church's report and every housing expert in the country? The Government must grasp the nettle of housing finance and introduce a sensible reform of the schemes for both renters and owners which makes it fairer for both groups within and between the two systems.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is rather extraordinary that the hon. Gentleman should say that, when he spent a considerable time trying to prevent us from increasing the private rented market, one of the benefits of which would be to increase mobility. I remind him that the shift in the house-price-to-earnings ratio in London and the south-east between 1979 and 1987 moved from only 4·66 times earnings to 4·80 times earnings. The catastrophe is not quite as great as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Hill: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the difficulties that many purchasers encounter is the increasing length of time that it is taking the Land Registry office to bring forward recognised plans so that conveyancing can take place? Is it possible for his Department to have a word with the Land Registry office to find out where the blockage is, and whether the problem is shortage of staff or of accommodation? This is one of the great handicaps in conveyancing.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend has made a good point, and I shall make the inquiries for which he has asked. Lord Templeman has recently introduced a Bill to open up the Land Registry, which is a sensible move and one that I believe will help.

Football (Membership Schemes)

5. **Mr. Pendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will next meet the president of the Football League to discuss the membership card scheme.

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for sport is in regular contact with the president of the Football League. They will meet next on 21 March.

Mr. Pendry: When the Minister with responsibility for sport eventually skates back from the winter Olympic Games at Calgary, will the Secretary of State concentrate his junior Minister's mind less on the problems of Eddie the eagle and more on the larger problems affecting our national game? In particular, will he tell him that membership card schemes are not working, that they are not the answer to the hooligan problem, and that more flexibility is needed at club level? Following the recent cup tie between West Ham United and Queen's Park Rangers, the chief superintendent of police said that the membership card scheme caused the club problems. Will the Secretary of State ask the Minister to reconvene meetings with the football authorities to ensure that a solution is based on common sense?

Mr. Ridley: I would not dream of telling my hon. Friend what he should think or do. He is far more expert in these matters than I am. Let me include the hon. Gentleman in this general protestation of ignorance, because I have to tell him that in connection with the match between Queen's Park Rangers and West Ham on 30 January, the Metropolitan police said that the membership scheme was at fault. However, it was an all-ticket match. The problem stemmed from the circulation of forged tickets to West Ham supporters.

Mr. David Evans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is up to the Football League and the Football Association to put their house in order and that that is not the responsibility of the Government? We are pleased to see the police carrying out dawn raids, arresting people and seizing crossbows, truncheons, guns, pistols, and so on. If the Football League and the Football Association are not prepared to put their house in order, does my right hon. Friend agree that it would then be the responsibility of the Government to ensure that people are able to conduct their business on a Saturday afternoon in the way that they wish? May I remind my right hon. Friend that there is a membership scheme at a well-known football club and that there have been no arrests for 18 months —apart from the day when we allowed away supporters back?

Mr. Ridley: I congratulate that football club on the success of its membership scheme. I commend that scheme to all clubs. Obviously, we would like the football authorities put their own house in order and continue to improve their record on crowd control, violence and hooliganism. If that does not happen, it will be very difficult for the Government not to take action. I hope that we shall very soon see the action that my hon. Friend mentioned and would like to see.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Will the Secretary of State convey to the Minister with responsibility for sport on his return from the winter Olympics the view that the best hope for professional football in Britain rests in the provision of attractive and comfortable facilities for spectators and, in particular, in the attraction once more of families as spectators? Will he suggest to the president of the Football League that football in general would benefit very much if clubs applied those policies, which are undoubtedly in the interests of the clubs and of the game itself?

Mr. Ridley: On his return, I shall certainly pass on to my hon. Friend what the hon. and learned Gentleman has said. I think that my hon. Friend and I entirely agree with the hon. and learned Gentleman. What we are talking about is how to achieve it.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, valuable as membership schemes are and could be, it would be even better if police and clubs did not admit to grounds anybody who was the worse for drink and if the clubs themselves did not sell drink to spectators? That would help enormously to overcome the very serious violence that continues at football matches.

Mr. Ridley: I am subject to correction, but I think that certain measures are already being taken in the direction that my hon. Friend suggests.

Housing Corporation

6. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the chairman of the Housing Corporation; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Waldegrave: I last met the chairman on 11 January, when we discussed the funding of housing co-operatives and the Housing Corporation's approved development programme for 1988-89.

Mr. Jones: When the hon. Gentleman next meets the chairman of the Housing Corporation, will he discuss with him the genuine concern of many housing associations about the implications of the Housing Bill? The Bill will mean that rents in the housing association sector will be raised to such levels that tenants will be paying half their incomes in rent. Will he also tell him that some low-paid tenants will be severely penalised and that some people will be deterred from working because of the substantial drop in income as a result of the loss of housing benefit?

Mr. Waldegrave: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is quite right about this matter. The new Housing Corporation for Wales, which no doubt he will welcome, like the Housing Corporation in England, will be able to have different percentages of grant alongside private money. That will increase output and maintain rents at reasonable levels.

Mr. Squire: Will my hon. Friend confirm that many of the excellent provisions of the Housing Bill will enhance the role of housing associations and give them a better opportunity to play their traditional role of housing people who are earning less than average wages?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. The purpose of the new mixed-funding arrangements is to enable housing associations to carry out more of their traditional functions, helping the people whom they need to help by bringing in private money alongside public money.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Does the Minister agree that that is not the view that all the housing association movement takes of the Secretary of State's legislation? The housing association movement, and everyone associated with housing associations, want a housing association tenancy established to protect the nature of the housing association movement—everyone except the Secretary of State and the person whom he appointed, his friend, Sir Hugh Cubitt, to run the Housing Corporation. Why will the Secretary of State not allow the Minister to accept what everybody wants—a housing association tenancy?

Mr. Waldegrave: Characteristically, the hon. Gentleman has not got his facts right. My right hon. Friend did not appoint Sir Hugh Cubitt, who is an admirable chairman of the Housing Corporation.

Mr. Roberts: A mere technicality.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman says that the facts are a mere technicality. I agree. The point about a housing association tenancy will be best met by the proposal for a chartered social housing sector, which we discussed exhaustively and exhaustingly in Committee.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Did the Minister discuss with the chairman the paradox of Government policy that the implication of the Housing Bill for the Housing Corporation, with all the approval of new landlords, the

approval of landlords after the establishment of housing action trusts, the mixed funding and additional housing association funding, is that there will be a large centralised quango, much larger than any housing authority? Would not the best solution be to devolve the Housing Corporation's responsibilities regionally in England, as has been done in Wales, and democratise the Housing Corporation?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman will know that there are effectively separate corporations in Scotland and Wales. I do not think that we would yet want to go down the route of dividing it up in England, but I hear what the hon. Gentleman says.

Property Services Agency

7. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people are directly employed by the Property Services Agency.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): A total of 22,235 non-industrial and industrial staff at 31 December 1987.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Would not those 22,000 people be better off in the private sector? If my hon. Friend has no plans to do that at an early date, will he comment on the more modest proposal to introduce commercial accounting and put the PSA on a trading fund basis? I believe that the PSA has had a report on this matter for about a year, so perhaps my hon. Friend is in a position to announce a conclusion?

Mr. Chope: Sadly, I am not in a position to announce a conclusion to the recommendation of the Deloitte report, to which my hon. Friend referred. I hope that we shall be able to put the PSA on a commercial footing with a trading fund.

Mr. Cryer: Will the Minister say what weight the PSA gives to local authority representations when they put forward projects such as building courthouses, as in the case of Bradford, where the local authority made representations to allow land for a rail link between two stations? That was refused on the arbitrary decision of the PSA. Does he think that the PSA should take into account the people who know best — the people in Bradford, who were elected to do the job?

Mr. Chope: In the court building programme, the PSA acts as the agent of the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Mr. Gow: Welcome though my hon. Friend's announcement is that the PSA will move on to the basis of a trading fund, will he understand that it does not go nearly far enough, and that the best service that could be rendered by his Department would be to bring the PSA, at the earliest possible moment, into the private sector?

Mr. Chope: I understand my hon. Friend's strong views, which are based on experience and knowledge of the PSA. For that reason, they are held in great respect.

Mr. Boyes: Is not the problem in the PSA the continuing reduction in staff — about 36 per cent. since 1979 — which has led to a growing backlog of £145 million worth of essential maintenance work? Because of low pay and conditions, particularly in London, there are problems of recruitment and retention of qualified staff to do that work, which has led to more expensive outside contractors and consultants being brought in. How much is that costing, and would it not be cheaper for the taxpayer to pay the existing staff a decent and appropriate wage?

Mr. Chope: The hon. Gentleman is right in saying that staff numbers have reduced significantly in the Property Services Agency. There were 35,223 in 1979 and only 22,235 at the end of last year. But 85 per cent. of the maintenance work already goes out to private contractors. There is an expanded budget for maintenance work in the next financial year.

Development Corporations

8. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many mini urban development corporations he proposes to set up to combat dereliction in inner-city areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend proposed four designations last December — three new urban development corporations in Bristol, Leeds and central Manchester, and the extension of the Black Country UDC area to parts of Wolverhampton.

Mr. Coombs: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government's success in bringing derelict land back into use, increasing employment and improving the environment, is also giving skills to inner-city residents? What further plans has the Minister to designate areas as urban development corporations?

Mr. Trippier: I welcome and agree with what my hon. Friend said in the early part of his question. We have plans to designate other areas as UDCs.

Mr. Tony Banks: Before the Minister decides to set up more urban development corporations, will he tell us exactly what is going on with regard to the National Audit Office report on the London Docklands Development Corporation? There are strong rumours that the chief executive resigned after a very short period because he was concerned about the speculation and indeed, the misuse of resources in the Docklands area. In other words, there is a lot of fiddling going on in the area. Will the Minister tell us when he expects to get the report of the National Audit Office? Can he assure us that no fiddling is going on in the LDDC area?

Mr. Trippier: I resent strongly the allegations that the hon. Gentleman has made in his question. There are two points. First, the NAO report can neither be speeded up nor delayed by the Department of the Environment. The NAO is a law unto itself, so I can give the hon. Gentleman the categorical assurance that there is no delay in that regard. It is nothing short of scurrilous that the hon. Gentleman should refer as he did to the resignation of the former chief executive of the LDDC, who resigned for purely personal and family reasons.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: My hon. Friend will know that some cities have responded to the Government's lead by setting up, in effect, their own development corporations. Will my hon. Friend join me in offering every good wish and welcome to Mr. Michael Neale — recently adviser to LDDC — to Manchester and to Merseyside, as chief executive of Nottingham development enterprise? Will he join me in welcoming the initiative by Nottingham's Conservative city council?

Mr. Trippier: I am delighted to have the opportunity to endorse all that my hon. Friend has said. It is usually through the initiative of Conservative councils or Members of Parliament that such proposals for economic development are made.

Mr. Rooker: What about Birmingham?

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) asks, "What about Birmingham?" He may choose to remember or not to remember as the case may be, that the initiative known as Birmingham Heartlands was the initiative of the chamber of commerce.

Mr. Heffer: The hon. Gentleman cannot say that about Liverpool, because the regenerated areas in my city were developed by Liverpool city council, which is elected by the people of Liverpool. The Government have not given the support that they should to those areas. We do not need mini development corporations. What we need is Government assistance to the elected representatives who are trying to deal with the serious problems of those areas. It would be good if the Government were prepared to do that. The hon. Gentleman has been to Liverpool and seen what the council has done for the people. Is it not important to give aid to the local authorities and not to outside bodies that do not represent the people?

Mr. Trippier: What I have seen in Liverpool is that the city council, to which the hon. Gentleman has referred, has plunged the city into enormous debt.

Mr. Heffer: The hon. Gentleman did.

Mr. Trippier: No. It seems miraculous to me and to my colleagues in the Department of the Environment that other Labour-controlled local authorities within Merseyside have managed successfully to balance their books. Furthermore, the major urban regeneration that has taken place in Liverpool, transforming the area and reducing unemployment, has been done principally by the Merseyside Development Corporation.

Out-of-town Shopping Centres

9. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for improving the procedures for conducting public inquiries into planning applications for out-of-town shopping centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are developing ways of grouping applications and staging inquiries into such schemes in Greater Manchester and elsewhere. New rules of procedure for inquiries and a code of practice for major inquiries produced in response to the Select Committee will both be relevant to large out-of-town schemes.

Mr. Sumberg: Is my hon. Friend aware that one of his inspectors is currently conducting an inquiry into a massive shopping development on the Prestwich hospital site in my constituency? Will he make it abundantly clear to that inspector that the plan is opposed by a vast number of my constituents both on environmental grounds and because it will have a terrible effect on existing shopping facilities?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend has made his own view very clear to the inquiry and the inspector and has made representations to the Department, which have, of course, been passed on to the inquiry. It would be wrong for me to comment on a proposal that is now the subject of a public inquiry.

Mr. Eastham: Is it not irresponsible for developers to build massive developments outside established cities and towns that destroy shopping inside the cities? Thousands of jobs will be lost as a consequence of the greed of those who build out-of-town shopping centres that are not required.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is not a matter of greed; it is a matter of the customers wanting them. The centres would not be built if there were not people who wanted to shop in them.

Mr. Sims: Is my hon. Friend aware that the council of the London borough of Bromley and a number of local organisations are involved in considerable expenditure and a great deal of work in preparing their case for the public hearing in June of an appeal against an application for the development of an enormous leisure and shopping centre right in the middle of the green belt at Hewitt's farm? It would quite out of the question to allow this application, which would run contrary to all the policies laid down by my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Would it not save a great deal of time and trouble if my hon. Friend were to make it clear straight away that such an application for a development in the green belt land is simply not admissible?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend will probably know that we recently re-issued our advice on large shopping developments, in green belt land and made it clear that it was very unlikely that any such applications would be approved.

Mr. Flannery: Is the Minister aware that at the very centre of my constituency, called the Hillsborough centre, we now have major developments, with large numbers of small shops standing empty? Some of them are being taken over not by shopkeepers but by building societies and the like and people are writing to me about it. Is is not a fact that that is happening in cities everywhere and causing dereliction, and that people who have shopped in the centres of cities all their lives are now having to go outside to do their shopping? Is that sensible? It is inhuman.

Mr. Waldegrave: I do not imagine that the building societies would be providing offices unless they were being used by customers. They must be serving someone. It is right that it is a material consideration in a planning inquiry or decision that the effects on local centres should be taken into account when new developments are being proposed.

Peak Park Planning Board

10. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to introduce direct elections to the Peak park planning board.

Mr. Ridley: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Knox: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Peak park is one of only two areas in the country in which planning decisions are finally reached by people other than directly elected representatives? Why should those of my constituents who live in the Peak park have to put up with this undemocratic treatment?

Mr. Ridley: I know well my hon. Friend's concern about the matter. In all the national parks, a sizeable proportion—about the same as that in the Peak district—of people who are not resident in the area serve on the parks committee. In my hon. Friend's case, of 34 members of the Peak board, 12 live in the park and a further six live within one mile of the boundary, including two councillors with electoral ward divisions lying partly within the park. I do not believe that it would be right to change the system of choosing national park authorities, because that would give rise to enormous complications in many areas.

Mr. McLoughlin: Does my right hon. Friend appreciate that a great percentage of the county appointees live well outside the area of the park? This is causing grave concern for people who live in the national parks. As my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox) said, there is only one other area in the country where a person cannot serve on the planning authority if he is a resident and has been elected. This is very unfair. Will my right hon. Friend at least consider issuing new guidelines to local authorities about appointing people who live within the area of the national parks and have to abide by national park restrictions?

Mr. Ridley: I understand my hon. Friends' concern about this matter, but people must understand how difficult it would be to change the system of those who are elected and then appointed to the board. We have already requested local authorities to ensure as far as possible that they appoint people who live in or near the area.

Local Authorities (Contract Compliance)

11. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek to amend the Local Government Bill to allow local authorities to use contract compliance to tackle sex discrimination and discrimination against people with disabilities.

Mr. Chope: No. Sir.

Mr. McAllion: The Minister has already conceded the principle of contract compliance in respect of racial discrimination because of the duties imposed on local authorities by section 71 of the Race Relations Act 1976 to promote equality of opportunity. I note that in an amendment made in the other place yesterday to the Local Government Bill the Minister has now been forced to accept the principle of contract compliance in respect of people with disabilities. Why, therefore, will he not accept the same principle in respect of discrimination on grounds of sex? Is the hon. Gentleman saying to the House that there is no discrimination against women in employment—if he is, he should look at the Benches around him—or is he saying that there is discrimination but Ministers do not care sufficiently about it to do anything?

Mr. Chope: We shall carefully consider the implications of the amendment approved yesterday in the other place. Local authorities are part of the enforcement processes only in relation to racial discrimination by virtue of section 71 of the Race Relations Act 1976. That is recognised in the Local Government Bill, and that is why that provision is dealt with differently from sex discrimination.

Mr. Marlow: Is my hon. Friend confident that the Government can devise a series of stock questions on racial discrimination which will not undermine the main purposes of the Bill, which is to prevent political interference by local authorities — Labour local authorities—in proper commercial activities? If my hon. Friend is confident, perhaps he could let us into the secret.

Mr. Chope: I am confident about that. Indeed, some questions have been prepared and are the subject of consultation at the moment.

Dr. Cunningham: Why do the Government not accept the representations of the Equal Opportunities Commission, which has made it clear that, in respect of discrimination against women in employment, it would like the Government to take exactly the same approach as they are taking under the Race Relations Act 1976? Should not the Government now accept the defeat in the House of Lords and make it clear that, in respect of people with disabilities, they will change the legislation accordingly?

Mr. Chope: Both this House and the other place have rejected the arguments of the Equal Opportunities Commission. If the commission decides, as a result of consultations on its document, to press my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary for changes to the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, which includes a section 71-type duty, the Government will give careful consideration to such a proposal.

Homelessness

12. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest estimate for the number of homeless people in Bristol; and how many are under 21 years.

Mr. Ridley: Bristol city council's latest return to my Department showed that 343 households were accepted as homeless under the Homeless Persons Act in the period July to September 1987. The ages of homeless people are not reported.

Ms. Primarolo: Is the Minister aware that in Bristol not only is there the problem of homeless young people but it is estimated that more than 20,000 people are effectively homeless, 14,000 of them forced to live in accommodation that is legally considered to be unfit for human habitation? The Government's Housing Bill refuses to place on housing action trusts a legal duty to deal with homelessness. Will the Minister therefore agree to discuss again with Bristol city council its allocation of funds under the housing investment programme, with a view to giving more money to Bristol so that it can effectively tackle the problem of homelessness in the city?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Lady is unnecessarily critical of Bristol city council, which has done rather well in this respect. Of the 343 households that are homeless—not the thousands that she mentioned—only 76 were in bed and breakfast on 30 September last year. Their average stay was only 27 days. That is a good record, on which I congratulate the council.

As the hon. Lady seemed to want a housing action trust to be placed in Bristol, I shall certainly look into that possibility.

Housing Co-ownership Schemes

13. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to encourage the growth of housing co-ownership schemes.

Mr. Waldegrave: Co-ownership schemes can normally proceed without direct Government assistance, although my right hon. Friend is responsible for granting co-ownership societies entitlement to various tax reliefs if their rules meet the requirements of section 341 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970.

Mr. Stern: I am grateful for that reply. Does my hon. Friend agree that co-ownership schemes often provide the only route by which young couples on low incomes can achieve their desired form of housing—house purchase—especially in areas such as Bristol, where house prices have recently risen sharply? Will he do all that he can to encourage the provision of those schemes so that young couples have a chance to buy their own homes?

Mr. Waldegrave: I quite agree with my hon. Friend. A problem to do with a company which promotes such schemes and which is based in my constituency in Bristol has recently emerged. It has written to me about a technical problem to do with tax and we are trying to sort that out as quickly as we can.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Minister consider amending the present proposals in the Housing Bill to ensure that before any private or other landlords can make a bid for council blocks, streets or estates, tenants are given the opportunity of setting up a co-operative organisation to buy those properties for themselves, or for themselves with others?

Mr. Waldegrave: It will be open to tenants to do that, and I suspect that in many cases tenants will want to bring forward such schemes. When the Bill is passed, and following the publicity about what the proposals mean, which we shall ensure is put out, I hope that many tenants will come forward with such proposals.

Rent Arrears

14. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is satisfied with the performance of local authorities in reducing the level of their rent arrears.

Mr. Waldegrave: No, Sir.

Mr. Shaw: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in the main, it is Labour local authorities which have large amounts of rent arrears, and which, by not collecting their rent arrears, often claim to the Government that they are short of money and are always asking the Government for more money? Would it not be better if they collected those rent arrears first and so had more money to spend?

Mr. Waldegrave: The facts speak for themselves. The 10 worst authorities, which account for a third of the total of nearly £200 million rent arrears, are Labour -controlled. Most of the top 20 are Labour. So I have to confirm what my hon. Friend has said.

There are, of course, many differences between Labour authorities. Why, for example, does Walsall, a Labour council, have rent arrears of about 13 per cent., whereas Bolton, also a Labour council, has 1·2 per cent.? The reason is that one is much better managed than the other.

Mr. James Lamond: Is the Minister aware that Oldham, a Labour council, was so fed up with trying to collect its arrears that it put the task out to private contractors on a commission basis? They soon gave up, because they could make no impression, either.

Mr. Waldegrave: I suspect that the position there, as in some of the London boroughs, had been out of control for so long that it was beyond anyone's capacity to put it right quickly.

Mr. Holt: Would my hon. Friend care to examine the records of the two local authorities in my constituency — Middlesbrough and Langbaurgh — and see how appalling Middlesbrough's record is compared with that of Langbaurgh? Middlesbrough is Labour-controlled and Langbaurgh has a hung council. Yet, in their turn, the Government treat Langbaurgh shabbily in the rate support grant and treat Middlesbrough as though they had too much money to give away. When the Government act in that way, how does it encourage local authorities to collect rents?

Mr. Waldegrave: There is no direct relationship between outstanding rents and rate support grant. Arrears of rent are, however, a consideration in HIP allocations.

Mr. Bell: I wish to correct the statement made by the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) concerning Middlesbrough council. Will the Minister accept that Middlesbrough council runs services to its community, has rates and rent in proportion to those services and has a record second to none throughout the country, let alone the north-east?

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall not get involved in a civil war at Langbaurgh, if I can help it. The House should agree that it is scandalous that there are authorities that have up to 38 per cent. of their collectable rent outstanding. That is evidence of incredibly bad management.

Mr. John Marshall: Is it not the duty of local authorities not to curry favour with a small minority of non-rent paying tenants, but rather to carry out their duties to all ratepayers and to the vast majority of tenants who pay their rents?

Mr. Waldegrave: I agree with my hon. Friend. Rent arrears are only one sign of bad management. Where there are rent arrears there are other symptoms of bad management, such as too many squatted properties and too many voids.

Mr. Soley: Creative statistics will not get the Minister out of this one. His Government have cut housing benefit, as he knows, seven times and will do so again in April. That means that a nurse will pay about 40 per cent. of her net salary before being entitled to housing benefit. They raised rents again by £1·60 yesterday. They have taken away all the benefits to the rented sector and wonder why it is collapsing. What right has the Minister to talk about choice for tenants in those circumstances? Why does he not tell the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), who is so concerned about this, that his council is busy selling off an estate over the heads of the tenants, when they do not want their estate to be sold off? What sort of choice is that?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman wisely changes the subject as much as he has done because he is on weak ground on rents. He has not addressed himself to the question to which I would be interested to know the

answer. Why does Walsall do so much worse than Bolton? I do not believe that there is any difference in housing benefit between Walsall and Bolton. There are some badly managed councils, and, as the figures show, the great majority are Labour-controlled.

Rating Reform

16. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the number of people who will pay the poll tax.

Mr. Chope: We expect that 35 million adults in England will be subject to the personal community charge.

Mr. Canavan: Does that figure take account of the number of people who will not register and the number of people who are either unwilling or unable to pay the poll tax? In view of the statement on Monday by Mr. James Thomson, the regional assessor for Fife, that if a sufficient number of people refuse to register it would "choke up the works", and the helpful statement yesterday by the Prime Minister, who said that failure to register on the poll tax register will not in any way affect one's right to vote, does the Minister realise that many people, including myself, will initially refuse to register and pay, and will encourage as many people as possible to do likewise, so that we can scrap these vicious poll tax proposals?

Mr. Chope: The hon. Gentleman should have a word with the Leader of the Opposition if his last remarks are to be taken seriously. Most people will register, and if they do not they will be subject to penalties, so it will not be worth their while not to register.

Mr. Forth: Is it not patently fair that people who are entitled to vote on the one hand, and to the services provided by the local authority on the other, should expect to pay a fair and reasonable share of the costs of these services? Where a tax is the law of the land, is it not reasonable to expect people to pay that tax, and to face the penalties if they do not pay?

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend is right. We are talking about a community charge that will meet only one quarter of the total cost of local government expenditure. The remainder will be funded by business and by national taxpayers, and the one quarter that will be met by the community charge will not be met by an equal community charge paid by everybody. About 7 million people will be entitled to a rebate, so they will not have to pay the full community charge.

17. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received over the poll tax.

Mr. Ridley: I refer to the reply that I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon).

Mr. Winnick: Is the Secretary of State aware that I am in a genuine dilemma, in that I oppose this wholly unfair poll tax, yet realise that this crazy scheme will undoubtedly be one of the factors that will help to remove his Administration from office?

Mr. Ridley: I thought that the hon. Gentleman's dilemma was that the Labour co-ordinating committee has stated:

> "When the local council wants to carry out a programme of service expansion local people will no longer be cushioned by increasing business rates and rate support grant. They will want to know that increased expenditure is well spent."

That is the view of the Labour party.

Mr. Dykes: Is it completely wise to be the only country in the world giving up some sort of property charge?

Mr. Ridley: I would never claim a monopoly of wisdom, and I am always interested in my hon. Friend's views.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Tom King): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on matters within my area of responsibility arising from the investigations carried out by Mr. Stalker and Mr. Sampson.

In his statement to the House of 25 January, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General said that the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland had concluded that, having considered all the facts and information ascertained and reported by Mr. Stalker and Mr. Sampson, and having re-examined the original Royal Ulster Constabulary investigation files, the evidence did not warrant any further prosecutions in the two incidents in which charges of murder have already been brought, nor in the third incident at Ballynerry. He did, however, conclude that there was evidence of the commission of offences relating to perverting the course of justice, but further concluded, on grounds of public interest, that it would not be proper to institute any criminal proceedings. The question of further action therefore falls to be considered in the context of the question of disciplinary proceedings.

The Director of Public Prosecutions has advised the Chief Constable of the RUC of those offences in respect of which he concluded there was evidence. The Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary has today announced that he has invited the chief constable of Staffordshire, Mr. Charles Kelly, to consider whether disciplinary charges should be brought in the case of RUC officers of chief superintendent rank and below, and if so what charges would be appropriate. *[Interruption.]* Mr. Kelly has appointed one of his assistant chief constables to help him in this task. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House has been pressing for this statement for a long time.

Mr. King: The work has already started. The Chief Constable of the RUC has told me of his concern that it should be completed without delay in the interests of all concerned. The Chief Constable has also confirmed to me that he considers that any charges brought should be heard by a chief constable of another force. I have made clear to him my concern for these disciplinary issues to be resolved as soon as possible.

Mr. Sampson also made observations on the role played by more senior officers. The Police Authority for Northern Ireland is the discipline authority for those ranks. Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Philip Myers, has therefore informed the chairman of the police authority of these observations, and is making available relevant material for his attention. I have seen the chairman who has confirmed this position to me and that these matters will now be considered by the authority. I shall keep the House informed of further developments on these matters.

The circumstances surrounding and following the incidents in 1982 gave rise to concern about procedures, responsibilities and control within the RUC. In the light of Mr. Stalker's interim conclusions and of Mr. Sampson's further comments upon them, a special inspection into those matters was carried out by Mr. Charles McLachlan, one of Her Majesty's inspectors of constabulary, and I received his report on 25 January. I am grateful to him for the most thorough manner in which he carried out that task. I have since discussed his report with the Chief Constable.

I am most anxious that there should be a better public understanding of the two major issues involved. The McLachlan report deals with the procedures and practices that have been followed in police work in Northern Ireland arising out of anti-terrorist operations. The report essentially covers two areas: first, how the special branch, with its own crucially important and distinctive task, still remains an integral part of the overall force within the disciplines of mainstream policing. The House will be aware of the concerns expressed in 1982 that the special branch had become a "force within a force". The second issue is how to ensure that, notwithstanding security and other considerations, there is a proper procedure for the investigation of all serious incidents, and that full and accurate information is given to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Those questions go to the heart of the problems faced by a police force using the normal processes of the law while fighting a vicious and ruthless terrorist enemy. Intelligence is the lifeblood of that fight. Without it, the security forces are seriously handicapped. It is vital that it is protected. Moreover, knowledge of even the procedures used by special branch and other RUC officers will not only make their task still more difficult, but it will put lives at even greater risk. That is why the security forces are understandably and rightly so committed to protecting intelligence. But the lessons of those incidents show clearly that that desire must not operate outside effective accountability and control.

On the question of a force within a force, Mr. McLachlan's report makes it clear that, while the Stalker-Sampson inquiry rightly focused on the situation in 1982 and immediately thereafter, matters were substantially improved shortly afterwards. In 1983, at the request of the Chief Constable, a former very senior officer of the Security Service carried out a special review into certain aspects of special branch management and its relationship with the CID. His recommendations were implemented in full. The new rank of senior assistant chief constable was introduced for the RUC in 1984. Since then, both the special branch and CID have answered to the same senior assistant chief constable, so that their work has been fully co-ordinated.

Special branch operations must be conducted in secrecy, but they must not be carried out without the knowledge of the RUC senior command. Mr. McLachlan stresses that the regional assistant chief constables are now aware of the operations of special branch within their respective areas, and re-emphasises the importance of them continuing to monitor them. In addition, he makes a number of specific recommendations designed to ensure the highest standard in the selection and training of members of special branch, the prevention of over-specialisation, the encouragement of cross-posting both within the RUC and with other police forces and the further integration of the branch with the other parts of the force. In putting forward these recommendations, Mr. McLachlan pays a strong tribute to the present professionalism and standards of members of special branch, stressing the vital part they play in combating terrorism.

I now turn to the second major issue covered by Mr. McLachlan. This concerns the vital need that serious incidents are thoroughly investigated. At the heart of this is the point that the policies and practices of the RUC should in future reflect the paramountcy of the CID investigations, including the need for evidence to be preserved and for no obstacle to be placed in the way of questioning of suspects and witnesses.

Mr. McLachlan considers that the combined responsibility for both CID and special branch makes an important contribution to the proper handling of such inquiries. In addition, he now recommends that in controversial incidents involving RUC officers, the Chief Constable should consider whether an experienced assistant chief constable from another force should be appointed to lead the investigation; and that an experienced senior CID officer should attend any debriefing where firearms have been used by the RUC and people killed or injured. He also recommends improved arrangements at the scene of such incidents so that the forensic, pathology and photographic resources available are used to best effect.

In addition, however, to the specific recommendations of Mr. McLachlan in this area, as my right hon. and learned Friend told the House on 25 January, the Director of Public Prosecutions was intending to discuss with the Chief Constable and deputy chief constable of the RUC safeguards to ensure that in the future facts and information given to the Director are in all respects full and accurate, whether or not any security interest is involved. The House will recognise that this is precisely the issue that I identified earlier and that has to be addressed. I can inform the House that a first meeting has already been held and that these discussions are now proceeding.

The House will note, therefore, the steps that have been taken and are now in progress to address these difficult issues. The Chief Constable has implemented in full the recommendations of the special review in 1983; further changes have been made subsequently, including in particular the control of both CID and special branch under a single senior officer; and the Chief Constable is now in discussion with the Director of Public Prosecutions on the necessary safeguards for full and accurate disclosures to the director. I can also tell the House that the Chief Constable has confirmed to me that he has accepted in principle all the recommendations of Mr. McLachlan.

There is one further particular aspect that I should mention. Shortly before one of the incidents in 1982, two RUC officers were given approval to cross the border into the Republic of Ireland. At the meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference yesterday, I advised Irish Ministers of the full circumstances of the officers' presence in the Republic. I emphasised that the two officers who made the crossings were in plain clothes, were unarmed and were in an unmarked car. As the Chief Constable said in the statement which he issued on 7 April 1984, the crossings were made

"for observation purposes only. There was no preplanned incursion, nor is there any deliberate or authorised system of incursion."

Nevertheless, it is fully accepted that it was wrong and regrettable that two RUC officers were permitted to enter the territory of the Republic unannounced as part of an on-going operation. It is the Government's intention that this should not happen again and the Chief Constable for his part has undertaken to ensure that it does not; nor has it occurred since.

These incidents of 1982 and the subsequent events illustrate sharply the acutely difficult problems faced by a parliamentary democracy and the police service in combating the evil of terrorism. These incidents, in which six lives were lost and in which one person was seriously wounded, have already led to four policemen being prosecuted for murder, two more senior officers suspended, and the shadow of innuendo cast more widely over the RUC. Undoubtedly, serious mistakes were made which have damaged the reputation of the RUC.

This is a particular tragedy for a police force of the courage and professionalism of the RUC today, who have given ample recent evidence of their commitment to protecting the whole community from violence from whatever extreme it may come, and who fully deserve the tributes that Mr. Stalker, Mr. Sampson and Mr. McLachlan all pay to them. We owe it to them and to the whole community in Northern Ireland to ensure that these matters that I have described to the House today are dealt with promptly and correctly, that the wider lessons have been fully learnt, and the necessary changes effected to ensure that such problems can never happen again.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): This is perhaps one of the most serious and grave statements that we have heard about the British security forces in Northern Ireland while these present problems have been vexing the House over the past 20 years. We have also heard the most amazing rehabilitation of John Stalker. By what they have said, the Government have confirmed every item and every incident to which he refers in his biography and found it necessary to implement those reforms and ideas that he put forward.

The House will have listened with regret to what the Secretary of State said, because it is about an area of these islands where we are supposed to enforce the rule of law. In many ways, what the Secretary of State has said has sought to muddy the waters. Talking about the McLachlan report, he was confirming the Stalker-Sampson report. Indeed, we heard him attempting to staunch the wounds of an enormous casualty list that has emerged since the Attorney-General first made his statement.

The first casualty was the rule of law. "Be you ever so high," said Lord Denning, "the law is above you"—unless, of course, you are a police officer suspected of perverting the course of justice, conspiracy or obstructing a constable. It is perhaps well that the statue of justice is blind; otherwise it would see the scales weighed heavily against the innocent in Northern Ireland.

The second casualty is the Royal Ulster Constabulary —those brave and honourable men who held the line at the Tunnel in Portadown and throughout the marching seasons, who were the subject of abuse, and who saw their families threatened, being burnt out or bombed out from their own homes. All that they had won for the RUC and all the esteem that they had achieved is lost by the Attorney-General's statement and by what we have heard today.

The third casualty has been the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It has been badly, but I hope not fatally, wounded. The spirit of trust that had grown between both Governments is badly damaged. The difficulties that the present Irish

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

Government had on the floor of Dail Eireann to get through extradition, the searches of nearly 50,000 houses in the Republic, and the pressure that was placed upon the Irish Government are all as good as lost by the Attorney-General's statement. The mounting confidence between the Gardai and the RUC and the co-operation at all levels have been put at risk by the Attorney-General and the Government by their actions.

The final casualty——

Hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. McNamara.

Mr. McNamara: The final casualty is the Secretary of State. When I heard last week, I did not know whether to feel pity or contempt—pity for what had happened to him, or contempt for the fact that he allowed it to happen to him. All we have heard today is an attempt to salvage what he can from the mess with which he was left.

Let us look at what the statement actually says. New procedures and new structures of command will not help the situation at all unless there is confidence in the men who operate them and in their objectivity. There is no word about how we will prevent future Chinese parliaments, which we heard about before. There were rules and procedures before, but they did not stop the records being altered about the telephone calls that were made and about the movement of cars and operatives. We still do not know what was recorded on the tape in the hay shed and whether Macaulay was properly prosecuted. We do not know whether telephone calls went from Armagh to RUC headquarters when the outrageous lies were perpetrated and the cover-ups carried out.

The Secretary of State has rightly used the power to make this statement that was contained under the order that we passed last year, the Police (Northern Ireland) Order 1987. In so far as one can be happy about the statement, we are happy that the Secretary of State has gone right through all the ranks of the RUC, not just the foot soldiers, but has referred to the policy authority.

May we know the time scale of the inquiries by the chief constables? May we know the ranks of the officers who have been referred to the police authority following Mr. Sampson's report? What were their ranks and how many have been referred for possible disciplinary proceedings? Will the Secretary of State explain the strange account of the incursion into the Republic, that

"two RUC officers were given approval to cross the border",

but that

"There was no preplanned incursion",

and that it was

"part of an on-going operation."

What sort of gobbledegook is that, and what is it meant to mean?

At the beginning of my observations, I gave a list of the casualties of this affair. However, there is one victor from all this, which has scarcely said a word but has enjoyed immensely not a mere bone thrown at it by the Government, but the whole roast and the silver platter as well—that is the Provisional IRA. It is the only victor of this sad three weeks of accounts from the Government.

Mr. King: The only matter on which I agree with the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) is, as I made clear in my statement, that I regard these as very serious issues. The hon. Gentleman's comments referred to the rehabilitation of Mr. Stalker. Some people have been anxious to peddle various theories of conspiracy and have to sought to imply that the work that Mr. Stalker did was lost with his transfer and non-availability. I can confirm to the House that all Mr. Stalker's work was available to Mr. Sampson. I have seen the full copy of Mr. Stalker's draft final report on these matters, and the recommendations that fall within my area of responsibility. Mr. Sampson has commented on them, and likewise Mr. McLachlan had full access to the work that had been done.

The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the same team that had been working for Mr. Stalker carried on working with Mr. Sampson and was, in fact, reinforced in the sense that the information that he had garnered in the volumes of reports that he produced were all available to the Chief Constable and the Director of Public Prosecutions. I advise the House that a number of recommendations flow directly from Mr. Stalker's work and recommendations.

I cannot answer specifically the hon. Gentleman's question about time scale because, of course, it will be for Mr. Kelly to determine what, if any, charges he recommends should be brought forward, and the time scale. However, I can advise the House that he has already started that work and that it is not in anybodys's interest that it should be delayed. I hope that we shall have an early resolution and understanding of whether there are to be charges and, if so, what they will be, so that the people concerned know where they stand.

In spite of the hon. Gentleman's dire warnings—as much as any hon. Member, I am under no illusions about the strength of feeling of the Irish Government and Irish Ministers—the House will be aware that the Taoiseach today moved a motion in the Dail and spoke to it, in which he made clear the determination to secure the achievements and goals of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I want to put on record on behalf of the Government, and I sincerely hope on behalf of all hon. Members, our warm recognition of the Taoiseach's firm commitment to the continuance of the closest cross-border security co-operation in the vital interests of all the people in the island of Ireland.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): Is not Mr. Des O'Malley, TD, right to deprecate the use of security co-operation by other Irish politicians as what he calls a "diplomatic crowbar" to extract concessions from Her Majesty's Government? May we have an end to these apologies for border crossings by members of the security forces? Will the Government make members of the Garda Siochana, the Irish Army and the Irish air corps welcome if they want to cross the border to our side in pursuit of the common enemy?

Mr. King: With the obvious exception of the extremist political groups, I am not aware of any party in the Republic which advocates the discontinuance of cross-border security co-operation. Certainly in his speech to the Dail today the Taoiseach made it clear that

"the protection of the security of this State,"—

the Republic—

"and the protection, to the utmost of our ability, of the interests and security of all the people of Northern Ireland . . . dictate cross-border co-operation. It is obviously in the interest of both communities that this co-operation should be as effective as possible."

The Taoiseach said that in the Dail this morning. I welcome those comments and I make absolutely clear the British Government's commitment to the closest co-operation.

I am glad to see the strong support that the Taoiseach is receiving from the leaders of other constitutional parties in the Dail. I am encouraged by that, as we are all aware that difficult issues are involved and very strong emotions have been stirred. I have listened to what my hon. Friend has said. We are determined to achieve the closest co-operation. As my hon. Friend is aware, there is much interchange and a close relationship between the Garda and the RUC. I stand by the statement that I made on the matter of the particular incursion.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): While these police officers are being offered up as sacrifices, will equally effective action be taken against those who actually made the crucial decisions, whether at the level of the Joint Intelligence Committee, MI5 or certain other bodies perhaps at a slightly higher level?

Is that not vitally essential, particularly in the light of the comments made by the spokesman for the official Opposition, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), who seemed very reluctant to tread on that ground?

Mr. King: If I understand the question correctly, the right hon. Gentleman knows better than I that those are not matters for me.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that at this very hour a gallant young 23-year-old lance-corporal of the Ulster Defence Regiment, Alan Johnson of Kilkeel, is being buried? Is he not also aware that nothing that he has said at the Dispatch Box today will give any comfort to the mourners at that funeral? Will he take that on board and think of those who are suffering as a result of an officially declared shoot-to-kill policy of the sectarian Irish Republican Army? Will he now do what he did not do in his statement and tell the House that the four police officers were cleared of the charge in the court of law? Why did he not tell the House, when he was talking about their being brought to court, that they were cleared?

Will the Secretary of State also tell us that, now that discipline is to be applied in the ranks of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, similar measures should be taken in the ranks of MI5, and should reach to the top of MI5, the Prime Minister's own office and the Prime Minister herself, who is in charge of the security arrangements? Does the right hon. Gentleman really think that anyone in Northern Ireland will be bluffed by what he has said about Charles Haughey today? I listened to the debate in the Dail. Charles Haughey made it clear that extradition had been stopped, and would be stopped until such time as he and his Government got their act together.

Was not the Anglo-Irish Agreement sold on the basis that we would have extradition? Now Mr. Haughey has told us that we shall have none whatever. Would it not be better for the Secretary of State to admit that the Anglo-Irish Agreement has failed? Is it not his duty to institute immediate talks with all parties concerned for a new and viable agreement — an alternative to the present agreement — in which the majority of the people of Northern Ireland can take part, and which they can support? Is that not the best way forward?

Mr. King: Of course I am aware of the appalling and savage murder of the UDR lance-corporal Alan Johnson in Kilkeel. As the hon. Gentleman knows full well, Lance-Corporal Johnson is sadly another in the list of victims in the continued assault on democracy — the terrorist campaign that Northern Ireland has had to endure. What I have said today is relevant because I know that the best hope of ensuring that we avoid such killings in the future is by obtaining the fullest commitment of everyone in the island of Ireland to the defeat of terrorism. That is why close co-operation with the Irish Republic is in the interests of all in the Province.

With respect, what the hon. Gentleman said about extradition is not correct. The Taoiseach made clear his concern that extradition should operate effectively, and stressed that it was necessary for it to work within the terms of the new Act that the Dail passed recently. I made it clear to Irish Ministers that I hope that it is possible to resolve the problem. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General is anxious to find out whether it can be resolved on the technical basis of the provision of adequate facts for the Irish Attorney-General, so that extradition can operate effectively. But, far from saying that extradition had been stopped, the Taoiseach made it very clear in his speech today that he wished to see it operating effectively, and that it was in the interests of the Republic as well as those of the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the good faith of the Irish Government in co-operation did not begin today, that they have acted in good faith since they came to office—particularly, as the results show, in security co-operation? Will he also acknowledge that the trust and confidence on which such co-operation should be based has been dealt a very damaging blow by the amazing statement of the Attorney-General, which seemed to suggest that certain people are above the rule of law and that the rule of law is transcended by national security? Has he any plans or proposals for steps to undo the damage done to that essential trust?

Mr. King: Of course, I know very well the strength of feeling on those issues. The Irish Government have made clear to me their views both on the Attorney-General's statement and on the judgment on the Birmingham six, although one of those issues is not my responsibility.

Having said that, I recognise that, in certain respects, we are not able to meet the Irish concerns. The Taoiseach referred to an impasse; however, I noted that in his speech today he was careful to stress that there was not an impasse right across the board in Anglo-Irish relations, but only in respect of those issues.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said earlier, there was, in a sense, something of an impasse for us over extradition arrangements, which were not exactly as we would have wished. But, having argued our case very strongly, we eventually had to decide that the Irish Government were sovereign in that regard, and they made their decision. The Attorney-General has his responsibilities—very clear responsibilities—and, with integrity, he made his decisions. Ultimately, such decisions must be made. Then we have to see how it is possible to deal with the lack of confidence or other problems that may flow from those decisions.

In this instance, we have made it clear that we do not like the extradition arrangements. They raise additional

[Mr. King]

problems. Having said that, however, we will try to make them work. That must be the spirit in which we approach the problem. As the longest-serving member of the Anglo-Irish Conference on either side, I believe passionately that we should thank God that we have got a mechanism that enables us to sit down and argue out difficult issues, instead of engaging in megaphone diplomacy on either side of the Irish sea.

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): While I welcome very warmly my right hon. Friend's commitment to continuing co-operation with the Republic in the struggle against the IRA, does he not agree that such co-operation requires some flexibility in respect of the border —a border that is crossed, I understand, by hundreds if not thousands of civilians every day? Was it really necessary to apologise for our two policemen having crossed the border in plain clothes for observation purposes? Can my right hon. Friend assure us that flexibility between ourselves and the Republic will allow policemen from the Garda and the RUC to continue flexible co-operation? As I understood it, my right hon. Friend's statement contained an assurance that we would not do it again.

Mr. King: I made a very clear statement, which I have also made to the Irish Government. I recognise my right hon. Friend's close interest in these matters. However, we now have the best opportunity of really close co-operation with the Irish. We can only take the greatest satisfaction in the achievements so far. My right hon. Friend will remember the substantial arms find on Five Finger beach in Donegal. Just imagine the terror and carnage that would have occurred if those weapons had become available within Northern Ireland.

How are the benefits of co-operation to be achieved? The RUC, in which I have the fullest confidence, recognises the need for an understanding with the Garda. There are sensitivities on the Irish side, as there are on our side. What I said about the incursion is, I think, correct. It is necessary to make the position clear, because I also believe that there are huge benefits to be gained from sensible co-operation, without our trying to work in ways that affect too keenly some of the sensitivities on the Irish side.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Does the Secretary of State accept that neither a debate in the House nor internal disciplinary inquiries within the RUC can get to the heart of what was a mistaken policy, which was clearly being pursued by sections of the police and security forces in the Province at the time, and which led to the murder of civilians? That is the key issue.

The right hon. Gentleman referred in the opening paragraph of his statement to areas within his responsibility. Will he be more specific than he was in his reply to the leader of the Official Unionists, and make it clear that that area does not include the activity of the security services and their relationship with special branch? That is the area for which the Secretary of State cannot answer to the House.

Following the meeting that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) had on Monday with Chief Constable Hermon, we certainly agree with the sentence in the statement in which the Secretary of State talks about it being undesirable that the "shadow of innuendo" should hang over the RUC itself. Our concern is that his statement will not lift that shadow. Does he accept that it is not in the national interest that a sour and hostile atmosphere should exist either between the Republic of Ireland and ourselves or between the two communities in Northern Ireland, because it is in precisely that atmosphere that the IRA flourishes?

Therefore, will he accept that nothing less will do than the establishment of a Select Committee of the House with the capability of inquiring into these matters and the oversight of the security services? If for security reasons it has to be a Committee of Privy Councillors, so be it. It is surely not good enough that the Congress of the United States and most of the major European democracies have such accountability while we do not. Will he see that such an inquiry is established without delay?

Mr. King: Certainly, of course I am aware of and deeply regret the difficulties and problems that this has posed for the RUC. The events of 1982 continue to haunt the RUC. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) paid tribute to just one of the incidents in which the RUC was involved — the protection of Nationalists in Portadown and elsewhere. That is only one of a whole range of activities that involve protecting the community from terrorist attacks from whichever side they come. The RUC have also been involved in seizures of arms from both sides of the community. We have recently seen arms seizures from extremists on both sides. Mr. Sampson, Mr. Stalker and Mr. McLachlan have all expressed their admiration for the present-day RUC and its excellent work. However, this ghost from all those years ago has come back to haunt the RUC, and I greatly regret that.

One point was incorrect. These events did not lead to the murder of individuals in the sense that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North put it. It is important to remind the House in connection with the very unsatisfactory phrase "shoot to kill" that the hon. Gentleman used that my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General said

"that . . . no evidence has been disclosed of any offence—such as incitement to murder—such as would be comprised in what has been loosely called a shoot-to-kill policy."—[*Official Report*, 25 January 1988; Vol. 126, c. 24.]

We are concerned here with the key issues that I sought to put before the House; the perversion of the course of justice has to do with the issues of the subsequent investigation and those aspects.

We have had a report by a chief constable that runs to some 17 volumes of criminal investigation. That was the most thorough investigation that could have been carried out, and Mr. Stalker interviewed some 300 police officers, some of them undercover and secret surveillance men. There were 600 written statements from policemen, forensic scientists, doctors, pathologists and relatives of the dead men. That is the depth of that investigation, and all that information was available to the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Attorney-General. In a democracy where sensitive security issues are involved, in the end matters in his area must be the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General and I must be responsible as Secretary of State. In the final analysis, we are accountable to the House.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): All decent people here and in Northern Ireland, and I would say elsewhere,

will be delighted to pay tribute to the RUC for its courage, fairness and professionalism. That force is facing an evil and sophisticated terrorist organisation that will take comfort from every word of criticism that is uttered today against the Royal Ulster Constabulary, a force that has lost so many gallant officers in order to defend the people of Northern Ireland. We should try to support the security forces in Northern Ireland. Nobody is attacking or setting up committees of inquiry to inquire into the activities of the IRA and the way in which it murders and mutilates innocent people.

Is it now possible after a sustained campaign in the media and from Dublin for the suspended police officers to obtain a fair, unprejudiced disciplinary hearing? I and many people in Northern Ireland fear that they they will be sacrificed in order to please a Republican element.

Finally, may I ask the Secretary of State about the penultimate paragraph in his statement about a minor incident that took place six years ago? Was an apology deliberately included in that statement as a result of the meeting of the Anglo-Eire Conference yesterday, when Dublin demanded that further criticism should be made of the RUC? This is strange, because when a Dublin Minister visited Newry last week he demanded that a British Army observation post should be demolished. Who is fighting the enemy?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman asked about the suspended officers. I have made clear, and I think it is right, that the Chief Constable decided that these matters should be decided by independent chief constables from other police forces. I am sure that that is right, and I think that it is in the interests of any officers who may find themselves facing any disciplinary charges that these matters should be dealt with as speedily as possible. I think that the whole House will understand that.

In the case of the report that I gave the House about the incursion, as I had given information to the Irish Government about the presence on their territory and in their jurisdiction of RUC officers in the course of an operation, I thought it right to report that to the House.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I ask for briefer questions please? We have a very heavy day before us and I have had great pressure from hon. Members who wish to speak in a subsequent debate.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): The Secretary of State has spoken about serious mistakes in a force in which I still have very many friends, even after the many years since I was in the Province. I agree that those mistakes have to be corrected because, unlike the IRA and all the other paramilitary organisations, the RUC is our responsibility. Does he agree that, if we concern ourselves with those matters, we are in no sense condoning the shoot-to-kill and the bomb-to-kill policies of the paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland? Is it not now appropriate for us to debate the first part of the Secretary of State's statement—not today but shortly? We tend to forget the security situation in Northern Ireland in a way that the Secretary of State cannot. We ought to discuss it and his plans for reorganisation.

I was surprised at one answer that the Secretary of State gave the leader of the Official Unionists, the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), when he seemed to indicate that as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland he had no responsibility for the other security organisations working in the Province. That was not the way I operated and that matter ought to be cleared up. I should like to ask the Secretary of State a number of brief questions to which we ought to know the answers. Under what Act is the Kelly inquiry instituted? I ask that question because my investigations this morning show that, if it is the 1970 Act, the public interest comes into it, as it came into the Attorney-General's statement the other day.

If there are disciplinary charges on very serious issues, what representation will be available to the police officers concerned, and will they have the right of appeal? These are important issues that were considered for open court but it was decided not to do that. The men that have been brought to my notice feel very strongly about this. It is being said, "Is the Secretary of State aware that if it is in the public interest that Mr. Stalker can print his views of what went on, surely these policemen have the right equally to make public their views on the same matter."

Mr. King: I very much appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's remarks. As a predecessor of mine, he is familiar with these issues. As he knows, the question of a debate is a matter not for me but for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who will have heard what he said. I note that a draft order under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act is among the remaining Orders of the Day, and I hope that it will be debated shortly.

I understand that, following the introduction of new regulations, police officers facing disciplinary charges will be able to be legally represented. That is my present understanding of the matter, and I shall inform the House if that is not correct. As to the other questions that the right hon. Gentleman asks, I cannot add further to the answers that I have given.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): In his statement today, the Secretary of State has brought no encouragement to the people of Northern Ireland. Will he accept that over the past months the majority of the population have been sickened by the manner in which the RUC, which obeyed its orders and carried out its duty, has been hounded to please a nest of Republican vipers? Will he accept that the RUC deserves the support of the House when carrying out its difficult duty facing a terrorist organisation, the IRA, which has brutally murdered its members and which continues to destroy young lives and homes in the Province?

Does the Secretary of State agree that it would assist the debate if most of the Opposition Members who have spoken, other than the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) who set himself apart from them in his remarks, had used their verbal powers to condemn the murderous scum of the IRA, which is bringing turmoil to the country, instead of using their verbal power against the Royal Ulster Constabulaory, which has suffered so much during those years of turmoil? Does the Secretary of State agree that my hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, North (Rev. I. Paisley), the leader of my party, stated a fact—that the four members of the RUC who were brought to court were cleared? Are they to be part of the disciplinary procedure, or will the court's decision stand?

Mr. King: As to the hon. Gentleman's last point—I apologise to the hon. Member for Antrim, North, whom

[Mr. King]

I did not address—it is correct to say that those four policemen were acquitted. I cannot go further as to against whom criminal charges may be brought. That is entirely a matter for Mr. Kelly and his colleague; rightly, I am not privy to those matters.

It is precisely to defeat the evil of the IRA, the INLA and other extremist organisations, from whichever side they come, that we must ensure that we achieve the highest level of support throughout the community for the work of the security forces and the RUC. We are entitled to expect the highest standards, which is why, when those high standards are not achieved and mistakes are made, they must be addressed. That is what I have sought to do in my statement today.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Does the Secretary of State agree that many people will see his statement as a damning indictment of the leadership and direction of the RUC? Does he further agree that public confidence will not be restored, or the damage done to the process of justice ameliorated, unless the Chief Constable, assistant chief constable and deputy chief constable whom Mr. Stalker wanted to interview under criminal caution are removed from their positions in Northern Ireland?

Given that this police service required the involvement of people ranging from Sir Arthur Young, Sir Kenneth Newman, Chief Constable Drury, John Stalker, Colin Sampson, Mr. Charles McLachlan, Chief Constable Charles Kelly and other police officers who were brought over to investigate other instances, will the right hon. Gentleman further agree that it is time that there was a Chief Constable in charge of the RUC who could rule his force properly and with integrity, who would not need the involvement of policemen from this side of the Irish Sea?

Mr. King: When I listen to the hon. Gentleman, I sometimes get the impression that he is trying to imply that the events that we are discussing have occurred in the past year. He knows that these events occurred in 1982. He said that my statement is a damning indictment of the current leadership. I precisely paid tribute, as did Mr. Stalker, Mr. Sampson and Mr. McLachlan, to the changes and improvements that have been made and to the professionalism and integrity of the current RUC.

To be fair, the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the number of times that hon. Members representing constituencies in Northern Ireland have had reason to be grateful for the efforts of the RUC. I know of occasions when he has asked for help because he was worried about intimidation and invasions by thugs of parts of his constituency. The RUC has turned out on such occasions to protect people regardless of their religion or background.

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, under the double jeopardy rule—which I, among others, negotiated with a Labour Home Secretary — the evidence brought against the police officers charged with murder, but who have been found innocent, will not be admissible for disciplinary purposes?

Will he acknowledge that Mr. Stalker, whatever else he did, was naive in failing to realise that undercover stories are sometimes essential to protect sources in intelligence gathering? As my right hon. Friend was present at St. Anne's cathedral, when a memorial to 252 murdered police officers was unveiled, will he confirm that he is at one with the Primate of all Ireland, who said.

"Without the RUC, civilised life in this province would be impossible"?

Should we not consider that as the heart of the matter?

Mr. King: I believe that my hon. Friend is correct in his point about double jeopardy, but I should like to check that matter, and if I am not correct I shall so advise him.

In his second point, my hon. Friend mentioned undercover stories. The purpose of my statement—I sought to be franker with the House than has hitherto been the case with this matter—is to explain a dilemma. In the protection of sources of intelligence lives are at risk, and people seek to protect them in any way available to them, for the highest and most principled of purposes.

Having said that, there must come a time when that protection and those undercover stories are subject to accountability. My hon. Friend, who knows a lot about this matter, will have listened carefully to what I said about discussions between the DPP and the Chief Constable. At the end of the day, the DPP must be given full and accurate information. I think that I have said enough for the House to understand why some of these problems arose.

My hon. Friend rightly referred to that moving occasion at which a memorial to 250 members of the RUC was unveiled—the window that the Police Federation has had installed. It was the clearest reminder of what the archbishop said: that the whole community of Northern Ireland owes a massive debt to the members of the RUC, the UDR—both full-time and part-time—the security forces and all those in public positions, such as judges, who have helped to maintain civilised life in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Harold McCusker (Upper Bann): Is the Secretary of State aware that the three incidents that were investigated occurred in what was my constituency? I support the Secretary of State in asking people to understand the circumstances of six years ago. Is the House aware that, in the previous 11 years, five of the six men who were shot and their associates—this is not intended in any way to excuse any wrongdoing—had murdered 222 people in my constituency, 42 of whom were policemen, 35 of whom were UDR men, over 20 of whom were innocent Catholics and the rest were regular soldiers—constituents of hon. Members—and Protestants? I ask hon. Members to understand that background, not to excuse wrongdoing but so that they may know the circumstances in which these people were operating.

May I ask the Secretary of State two simple questions? Are we to take it from the statement about over-specialisation that department E4A is being abolished? If so, can he tell us at what political level it was approved that members of E4A should be trained in speed, aggression and fire power by the SAS; and, having been trained, what were they expected to do? Secondly, can he tell us whether he uncovered the person in the security services, in his office or in the RUC who advised the special branch of the RUC to use the cover of the Official Secrets Act 1911 to convey to the men on the ground that national security was the basis upon which they could defend their wrongdoing? Has the Secretary of State uncovered the person who gave that advice, or does he expect us to believe that a middle-ranking police officer came up with the idea?

Mr. King: I think the whole House will have noted the opening remarks of the hon. Member and what occurred in his constituency, and will have gained an understanding of some of the pressures and appalling challenges that were faced by people in his constituency. The House will have noted that he was careful, correctly, to make it clear that in no sense was he condoning wrongdoing. I understand that five of the people who were killed were acknowledged members of terrorist groups—of course, that in no way condones any wrongdoing that may have occurred; the hon. Member put that on the record — and my understanding is that that information is correct.

The hon. Member was right to say that we must ensure that, if there was wrongdoing, there is a proper and full investigation. I cannot comment on any of the matters that he raised about E4A. I shall certainly not comment on the last point the hon. Member raised.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): Mr. Stalker claims that he was forced off the inquiry and out of office because of pressure by Ministers of the Crown. Will my right hon. Friend deny this? If so, will he make it clear to Mr. Stalker that this contemptible behaviour of touting his allegations and his book from town hall to town hall plays into the hands of the men of violence?

Mr. King: I have seen some suggestions; I do not think there has been a specific statement by Mr. Stalker. If there is uncertainty in the House, I am more than ready to make it clear that I am unaware of any truth in these suggestions.

From my point of view, the events in Manchester that led to the non-availability of Mr. Stalker were extremely inconvenient in relation to Northern Ireland. It meant greater delay and an interruption of the process of the inquiry. One did not need a crystal ball to know that there would be all the allegations that people have made about cover-up or conspiracy. It was profoundly annoying. We wanted an early resolution of the matter, but I constantly had to disappoint the House because of the interruptions and delays those problems caused.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): Does not the Secretary of State consider that the behaviour of Mr. Stalker was reprehensible in so far as he was, during his investigation and since his removal from the inquiry, engaged in a cynical exercise of self-promotion? Was Stalker being professional when, from May 1985, he communicated both his position and his prejudices on the issue on an almost daily basis to Michael Unger, the editor of the *Manchester Evening News?* Is it not a fact that he has, since then, turned the inquiry into a drama, an entertainment or even a farce, where fact cannot be differentiated from fiction?

Can we expect members of the RUC to get justice from something that he has trailed through the public domain for so long? Are the heads of middle-ranking officers now to be offered on a platter to placate Dublin's uncooperative and duplicitous politicians? When do the Government intend to stop toadying to terrorists and their apologists and remember, for example, the 195 people who have died in my constituency, with 168 of those cases remaining unsolved? When do the Government intend to remember the 150 people who have died in an escalating death toll since the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed? Indeed, when do they intend to remember the 2,625 people who have died from terrorist violence?

Mr. King: On the hon. Member's first point, I have had the opportunity to study Mr. Stalker's draft final report on the matters within my responsibility. In that there is much excellent work. It is very unfortunate that there was, as everyone in Northern Ireland knew, a lack of confidence between Mr. Stalker and the RUC. I know that part of that undoubtedly derived from a feeling, justified or not, that an awful lot of the proceedings in Northern Ireland seemed to be appearing regularly in press bulletins. If the extracts of Mr. Unger's diary are correct, I find it difficult to understand how that could properly have taken place. I am concerned with the substance of the inquiry and to see what lessons are learnt from it.

In respect of the pursuit of terrorism, I believe more firmly than ever in my time as Secretary of State that the best hope for the end of terrorism is the carrying forward of the co-operation with the Irish Government which is starting to develop in cross-border security, as we have seen in the recent searches.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to bear in mind, as I have already said, that a very important debate on ILEA is to follow and that there is great pressure to take part in it. I will allow questions on the statement for a further 10 minutes, but I propose to give preference to hon. Members who were not called on the statement on a broadly similar subject on Monday 25 January.

Mr. W. Benyon (Milton Keynes): Accepting the very nature of the alleged offences, and accepting everything that my right hon. Friend has announced today, but remembering that all these things happened way back in 1982, may I ask whether it is not essential to carry the Government in Dublin with us because, without their active co-operation, there is not a cat in hell's chance of defeating terrorism?

Mr. King: I certainly attach the greatest importance to that. I think I have given testament to that. The hours that I have spent in discussion with the Irish Government on these serious issues are evidence of that.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Cannot the Secretary of State, setting aside matters relating to 1982 which are under consideration, pay tribute without apology to the service given by the RUC and the security forces to all the citizens in Northern Ireland? Will he assure the House that RUC officers who carried out operational directions and anti-terrorist duties will not be sacrificed and persecuted to satisfy high-level, anti-Unionist agitation through the media, Republican prejudice and unwarranted interference from the Irish Republic and the representatives of that foreign Government? Will he agree that the shoot-and-kill policy and the bomb-and-murder campaign of the IRA, which have resulted in 252 police officers being murdered, the majority of which murders are unsolved, make it necessary in considering any future disciplinary action to take account ot the circumstances that prevailed in 1982?

Mr. King: I have already paid clear tribute to the RUC, as have other right hon. and hon. Members. As to the position of anyone who may face disciplinary charges, I think the integrity of the chief constables who will be responsible for both stages of that process is the firmest assurance on the point the hon. Member makes.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne) Is my right hon. Friend aware that it is not his wise and resolute statement this afternoon but the response of the Opposition Front Bench — very ill-judged — that will give encouragement to the IRA? Will my right hon. Friend consider again the answers that he gave earlier this afternoon? Does he recall that the preamble to the Anglo-Irish Agreement refers to the need for real co-operation between friendly neighbouring states to defeat terrorism? Is my right hon. Friend really telling the House that if members of the Garda — whether armed or unarmed, in uniform or in civilian clothes — should cross into the north in pursuit of terrorists he would lodge a complaint with Dublin?

Mr. King: On my hon. Friend's opening remarks, I found the response of the Opposition deeply disappointing and I understand entirely why my hon. Friend commented as he did. On the question of a member of the Garda crossing the border in pursuit of such an operation, it is absolutely essential that there is trust and understanding between the RUC and the Garda. What is not acceptable on either side is for these things to happen without warning and without co-operation. That must be understood on both sides.

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): Will the Secretary of State now accept what some of us tried to say at the outset — that one cover-up leads inexorably to the next? Mr. Stalker finds senior police officers concealing the truth, so he in turn has to be silenced. If the boil is now finally to be lanced, would it not have been wiser, in the interests of everyone, to appoint investigators from outside the police force? Can the Secretary of State tell us which of the reports that he has mentioned this afternoon will be made public?

Mr. King: I have already made it clear to the House that the reports will not be published, for the reason that they contain a considerable amount of extremely sensitive information. What I have tried to do in my statement is to give the House the clearest picture of what is covered by the recommendations and the particular aspects of concern.

On the idea of Mr. Stalker being silenced, I sought to address that point. In the one independent study of this matter that I have seen, the conclusion of the writer is that there was no evidence whatever of an involvement in that way. The matters that arose in Manchester, as I said, I bitterly regret because they were extremely inconvenient.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): Does my right hon. Friend accept that I find it difficult to support what he has had to say and to share his confidence that what he is doing will be anything other than detrimental to the RUC, which the House holds in great esteem? It seems to some Conservative Members not only that he is taking a step that will damage the RUC but that possibly prosecutions should be against people of a higher rank. On cross-border incursions, surely my right hon. Friend does not suggest that in a country divided by a border, in which families are divided by a border, it is anything other than good that plain-clothes policemen, off duty or on duty, should cross from south to north and from north to south as rapidly and frequently as possible.

Mr. King: My hon. Friend referred to the action that I am taking. The disciplinary matters are for the Chief Constable, and they are actions that he is taking. The police authority is taking action, and it has clear responsibilities for the RUC and for the morale and good standing of the RUC. On my other announcements, my hon. Friend will have noted that Mr. McLachlan's recommendations have all been accepted in principle by the Chief Constable. They are working in the interests of a stronger and improved RUC in those respects.

I have nothing to add to my point about incursions.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): May I ask the Secretary of State a simple question? In view of the value set by Mr. McLachlan on the preservation of evidence — endorsed by the Secretary of State in his statement — was Mr. McLachlan made aware of what happened to the crucial tape of the events in the hay shed in which the boy Tighe was murdered in 1982?

Mr. King: Those matters have to do with the criminal investigation and not with the structure and organisation of the RUC, and that is the view that Mr. McLachlan took.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): A 16-year old boy was murdered — possibly murdered, I should say—the policemen lied to the court, and there is evidence of perversion of the course of justice. The Chief Constable — if we are to believe Mr. Stalker — for 18 months delayed the inquiry in respect of the tape and then told him that the transcript of the tape was destroyed. At the end of the day, what I cannot understand is how that can reflect well on British justice and the rule of law. Are not decisions such as this, which fudge the issue, more likely to detach Ulster from the United Kingdom?

Mr. King: The issues that my hon. Friend raises are germane to investigations into criminal proceedings and that matter is addressed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General. My statement is concerned with discipline and the structure and organisation of the RUC, which are within my responsibilities.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Secretary of State answer the question that I tabled last week, which he avoided answering? Does that tape exist? He knows the answer to that question.

Will he condemn West Yorkshire police who persist in smearing Mr. Stalker by issuing unofficial statements linking him with the murder of Sergeant Speed?

Mr. King: On the latter point, I have no information, and I am certainly not entering into arguments between two mainland police forces in this matter. The hon. Gentleman knows well that the first matter is for my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while the events of the past few weeks will undoubtedly damage Anglo-Irish relations in the short term, they make it more imperative than ever that we have a structure such as that provided by the Anglo-Irish Agreement which is a framework for sensible discussions between the two countries?

Mr. King: I very much agree with my hon. Friend, and I certainly believe that very strongly. We may not always agree, but we have a mechanism and a procedure under which discussions can take place. I welcome the comments of the Taoiseach in the Dail today making clear the Irish Government's position.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): Will the Secretary of State accept that, despite the comments of Conservative Members, the Official Opposition wish to support and do, indeed, support the security forces in the Province in the fight against terrorism? However, in that fight we must above all be seen to be acting within the law. Opposition Members do, indeed, support the fight within the rule of law.

Does the Secretary of State accept that, if the RUC is to be successful not only in its fight against terrorism but in its fight against other forms of crime, it is essential that it should have the confidence and support of both communities in the Province? As the Secretary of State will accept, there has been a gain of confidence in the RUC among the Catholic community in the past few years. If we are to remove the damage that has been done by Stalker and the innuendo and rumour, it is essential that the ghosts of six years ago should be fully exorcised and that the disciplinary procedures are seen to be operated—it is to be hoped, within a relatively short period.

On extradition—a question that the Secretary of State raised—he accepted that the Republic has laid down certain rules and guidelines for the acceptance of extradition warrants from the United Kingdom. The Secretary of State accepted that those conditions existed and that it was correct for a foreign sovereign Government to place such conditions upon extradition warrants. If that is the view of the Secretary of State, will he ask—and inform—his right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General to comply with those conditions, as that is the reason why extradition proceedings are not taking place?

On the matter raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees), will the Secretary of State again take on board the need for a full day's debate on all these issues? We certainly do not accept that the three-hour debate on the emergency provisions legislation provides adequate time or scope for such a full debate.

Mr. King: The last matter is not one for me, but I think that the hon. Gentleman heard my earlier comments. I thank him for his opening remarks, which showed a balanced approach. I think that the whole House will be pleased to hear that support for the security forces and the comments on the importance of acting within the law and the need for the security forces to have the community's confidence and for disciplinary procedures to be seen to operate fairly and effectively.

On the hon. Gentleman's point about extradition, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General is anxious for officials to meet to resolve the technical problems. We hope that it will be possible for that to happen soon, so that extradition can operate effectively.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am very sorry that it has not been possible to call those hon. Members who have been rising. I assure them that I have taken careful note of their names and that they will be given some preference when this matter is next debated.

Standing Committee Proceedings

Sir John Farr (Harborough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: I shall take the point of order.

Sir John Farr: I am grateful to you for accepting this point of order. I know that the correct procedure is for me to write to you but, in view of the urgent nature and importance of the matter and the implications to the House, I feel that I should give you notice orally before I send a letter——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Notice of what—a matter of privilege?

Sir John Farr: It relates to the proceedings this morning in Standing Committee C, when the Chairman recommended that I should——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but I cannot adjudicate on the Floor of the House on matters that have gone on in Standing Committee. If the hon. Member would like to write to me about the matter, I shall certainly consider what he says, but it cannot be raised on the Floor of the House now.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 4 MARCH

Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. Nigel Forman
Sir John Biggs-Davison
Mr. Jim Marshall

Grandparents (Adoption of Children)

4.52 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide legal rights to grandparents for the care or adoption of their grandchildren.

By this Bill, I seek to highlight the fact that the law on this matter, besides being most complicated, provides little legal right for the grandparents of children who are at the centre of care or custodial proceedings arising out of divorce, legal separation or death of the parents or where the children have been the subject of abuse in the matrimonial home.

My Bill will seek to correct a situation in the law that was recognised and partially corrected in 1978 when the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) commenced a campaign, erroneously called the "Grannies Charter", which led to extra clauses being inserted in the Domestic Proceedings and Magistrates' Courts Bill 1978. Those clauses allowed grandparents to apply to the courts for the right to see their grandchildren. The position in law was further recognised by the hon. Member for Westbury (Mr. Walters) when he introduced an amendment in 1986 to the Child Care Act 1980. I commend both hon. Members for their tireless efforts and all those whose speeches I have read on this subject. Indeed, I was pleasantly surprised at the extent of effort that has already been made. Nevertheless, the law as it stands provides little legal right for grandparents, for the most part, or for any other interested party, be that family, friend or neighbour.

The law should recognise that the grandparents, from time immemorial, have been regarded by all except the law as part and parcel of the family unit. It should recognise also that, like the children who are at the centre of access, care and adoption proceedings, the majority of grandparents are the innocent victims. The law should recognise and protect the close bond that develops between children and their grandparents.

Because the grandparents, when seeking access, care or adoption orders in the courts, are not treated as close family, as they should be, it leads to many distressing situations that neither they nor the children involved can understand. I should be the first to admit that the children's welfare must be of paramount importance and that there are times when the grandparents' suitability to look after young children is in question, but I know of cases when the grandparents' request for care or adoption has been turned down for the reason of age alone. I suppose that that is understandable in some cases, but it cannot be justified when the people who then become foster parents or guardians are older than the grandparents. That is totally unacceptable.

It is to be hoped that, by making the grandparents' legal position clearer in these circumstances, they will not be the subject of the sometimes unassailable and tyrannical treatment that is meted out to them by the employees of some social services departments. It is heartbreaking to read some of the letters that I have received from grandparents who have been at the receiving end of some of these caring services' decisions. Some people from social services seem to treat grandparents more like interfering strangers than loving members of a close family unit.

Even when grandparents seek access to their grandchildren — what could be more natural than a loving grandmother or grandfather wishing to see her or his grandchild — things are not simple. There are many cases when grandparents have been denied this access by ex-sons-in-law or ex-daughters-in-law or, in some instances, sons or daughters, guardians or foster parents or even, dare I say, the social workers who on occasions seem only too intent on destroying close family ties—for the good of the children, or so they purport.

I point out that, in the eyes of the law, there may be ex-husbands, ex-wives, ex-sons-in-law or ex-daughters-in-law, ex-fathers-in-law or ex-mothers-in-law, but there cannot be an ex-father or ex-mother, ex-son or ex-daughter or, indeed, an ex-grandparent or ex-grandchild. Blood binds these people together and blood ties cannot be broken by any laws. To attempt to do so is usually to cause great distress.

As I have already stated, the laws appertaining to children and young persons are complex and involve the law courts at many levels. Although I bring the Bill forward in an attempt to change the law for just one group involved, it would have been preferable if the Government had looked into the whole matter of child care laws and brought forward a major review. When debating this subject in the past, many hon. Members have advocated that a family court system should be set up to deal with the type of problems with which I have dealt.

I should like to place on record my deep indebtedness to the many grandparents who have taken the time to write to me on this subject. I am especially grateful to Mrs. Shirley Hefferman, the founder and organiser of POPET, the Parents of Parents' Eternal Triangle, for the wealth of information and help which she has so willingly provided. She has catalogued for the record 400 heartbreaking and emotive cases, some ending in suicide. I have no doubt that her efforts will be rewarded one day, and justice will be done.

There are 93,000 children in care today. An estimated 20,000 children are in care awaiting adoption. Most of them will still be in care at 16, and about 9,000 children are now in care in England and Wales because they have been deserted. Research shows that children in care for six months or more have only a one in four chance of returning to their natural families.

We have the Children Act 1975, the Domestic Proceedings and Magistrates' Court Act 1978, the Child Care Act 1980 and the Children and Young Persons (Amendment) Act 1986. Numerous other Acts cater for and cover child care, but it is essential that we examine the rights of grandparents. I believe that the Government have a duty and responsibility to reform all the laws on children and young persons. That will take time, effort and expense, but it is essential, if we are to give protection to children, that legal rights be given to people who are near and dear to them, so that they are afforded access to them, and the right to love and care for them. They should have the right to shower on the children the love and affection that children who have suffered through no fault of their own deserve.

Thousands of grandparents do not know where to turn when confronted with their grandchildren being taken into care. They should have the right to have their grandchildren before the social services take them into care and appoint guardians and foster parents for them. Most of the heartache I have been told about during the

past months could have been avoided if grandparents had been consulted at the start; in that way, the children that we seek to protect would have benefited.

Let this message go out loud and clear. Hon. Members care about the the plight and misfortune of children and parents—especially grandparents. We shall act to ensure that the law is just and fair and will be altered to protect and win further rights for thousands of heartbroken grandparents who are denied access to their grandchildren. My Bill will help all the thousands of grandparents in this terrible position who desperately want to give true love and understanding to their grandchildren. Theirs is such a pure, innocent, friendly, sexless type of real affection that it should not be denied to their grandchildren. The joy that that would give to grandparents can be clearly understood only by those who have experienced such a wonderful family bond.

For all these reasons, I ask the House to give me leave to bring in my Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Ray Powell, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. Frank Haynes, Mr. Alfred Morris, Mr. Gareth Wardell, Mr. Sean Hughes, Mr. Stuart Bell, Mr. Barry Jones, Mr. Robert Litherland, Mr. Roy Hughes, Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse and Mr. Robert Wareing.

Grandparents (Adoption of Children)

Mr. Ray Powell accordingly presented a Bill to provide legal rights to grandparents for the care and adoption of their grandchildren; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 22 April and to be printed. [Bill 98.]

Inner London Education Authority

5.5 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I beg to move,

That this House notes that the Inner London Education Authority has combined profligate overspending with a persistent failure to raise standards of education in its schools; recognises the urgent need for improvements; welcomes the Government's proposals for the transfer of educational functions to the inner London councils in 1990 as the best means of building an education service of high quality for the people of inner London; and approves the decision to table amendments to the Education Reform Bill for this purpose.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I should tell the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition.

I should also tell the House that Mr. Speaker intends to give some preference during the debate to hon. Members representing seats in the Inner London education authority area.

Finally, Mr. Speaker has particularly asked me to appeal for brief contributions, as many right hon. and hon. Members want to take part in the debate.

Mr. Baker: The need to improve the quality of education in inner London is urgent. The contrast between ILEA's levels of expenditure and its mediocre performance is frankly scandalous, and ILEA has shown itself quite incapable of improving matters. There has been a growing view that our objective to raise standards in inner London would be best achieved by a single, orderly transfer of education functions. For that reason, on 4 February I announced the Government's intention to table amendments to wind up ILEA and to transfer education responsibilities to the inner London boroughs and the City of London from 1 April 1990; and I tabled those amendments yesterday.

The authority is so large, and its lines of responsibility so attenuated, that it has been very difficult to start the process of change in the classroom which is so necessary. In addition, those in control of the authority have been too intent on fighting battles peculiar to the London Labour party to get on with the job of improving education. The head teachers of inner London have not been given the support they need. ILEA lost one in seven of its head teachers in 1986. One of them said:

"Most of us fought like dogs to save the ILEA. We wouldn't cross the street to save it now."

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Baker: I have just started; I shall give way later.

There has been weak political management, coupled with culpable extravagance. Let me remind the House of the levels of ILEA's spending in terms of unit costs. In the primary school, teaching staff costs for metropolitan districts average about £530 per child, for the outer-London boroughs, £590 and for ILEA £730. For primary support staff, the average for the metropolitan districts is £110, for the outer-London boroughs, £130, and for ILEA, £230. As for secondary school support staff costs, the average for the metropolitan districts is £120 per pupil, for the outer-London boroughs, £160, and for ILEA, more than twice that sum—£370. Or take central administration and inspection costs. The average for the

[Mr. Baker]

metropolitan districts is £13 per head of population. The corresponding figure for the outer-London boroughs is £17. The figure for ILEA is £36.

How can one be happy with an education service in the capital city of our country in which the level of truancy has got worse over the past decade? In the final year of compulsory education, the truancy rate is almost 30 per cent. across ILEA as a whole, and much worse in some schools. More than 20 per cent. of young people leave school without any qualifications. Barely 15 per cent. of school leavers achieve five or more O-levels, or equivalent, and Her Majesty's inspectorate's assessment is that about 40 per cent. of classes in secondary schools are unsatisfactory or poor. I can do no better than quote the ILEA chairman, Neil Fletcher, who said in 1987:

"We have achieved little or nothing in educational terms this year."

Many would accept these criticisms, but argue that there should be more time for ILEA to turn the corner. That is a triumph of hope over experience. ILEA has had seven years in which to reform itself since my predecessor, my noble Friend Lord Carlisle, demanded that it set its house in order. It has not done so. Many of those outside ILEA's charmed circle believe that it is incapable of doing so. That is why the time has come for a new beginning, to rebuild the education service in inner London. I give way to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks).

Mr. Tony Banks: I cannot remember what I wanted to ask.

Mr. Baker: I am delighted that the hon. Member has been convinced by the argument.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Redditch): The Secretary of State made great play about the cost of ancillary support in ILEA schools. Is it better to have a school secretary or a teacher typing out and duplicating material?

Mr. Baker: That is a daft intervention. By any standard, ILEA, in terms of both central administration and support staff, is extravagant. That is almost beyond debate. It is accepted.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I can perhaps make the intervention that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) sought to make. The Secretary of State said that head teachers were worried about the state of ILEA. Is he aware of the recent statement made by the London Head Teachers Association, a branch of the National Association of Head Teachers? It said:

"It is absolutely essential to emphasise . . . the need for a unified education service in Inner London."

How does he square that with what he said?

Mr. Baker: I am delighted that the hon. Member can at least speak for one person in the House other than himself, although I find the idea of him speaking for the hon. Member for Newham, North-West extraordinary. I have asked to see the various head teacher associations about this matter because they have expressed their views, and later I shall be sending out other invitations. I can square what the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) has said with what I have said. Many individual head teachers in London have clearly expressed the view that they do not wish to continue under ILEA.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baker: Let me continue my speech. I will try to give way to as many Opposition Members as I can.

In our manifesto, we signalled the end of the unitary authority for the education service in inner London. As councils have taken advantage of the opportunity presented by that policy, many have also argued that it would be more sensible to have an orderly transfer of educational responsibilities, and this we have now accepted.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): The Secretary of State said that in the manifesto the Government signalled the end of ILEA. He knows that not to be the case. Why was it that he and other members of the Cabinet rejected the proposition from the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) that ILEA should be abolished? Why was that not included in the manifesto?

Mr. Baker: I answered that point a fortnight ago, but I am happy to answer it again. In the manifesto we clearly signalled the end of a unitary authority in London because we allowed London boroughs to opt out if they wished to do so. Because three London boroughs have already decided to do so and two others have also shown their interest in doing so—[HON. MEMBERS: "Which?"] Both boroughs have seen me about this. I am not including any of the Labour boroughs, but one happens to know through the gossip net—I never pay attention to the gossip net, and never adduce it as support for our policy—that certain other discussions have taken place and interest has been shown by some of the Labour boroughs. However, I do not wish to give credence to the gossip net.

Yesterday, we tabled amendments to the Education Reform Bill.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Baker: No. I do not intend to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Yesterday we tabled amendments. Some are arguing that constitutionally a new Bill is needed. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has argued this point. I have looked into this and there are precedents for what we are doing. For example, with the Labour Government's Industry Bill in 1975, which was under the guillotine, there was a supplementary timetable because an important part of it had to be redrafted to accommodate a major change in policy. On that occasion, the Government did not provide an extra day on the Floor of the House. When the amending guillotine motion was moved, the new clauses and amendments were not available to the House. It is absurd to claim that the Education Reform Bill, which clearly envisaged from the start the end of the unitary authority, should not be amended in this way.

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): As one of those who was responsible for drafting the Industry Bill in Government, I would be obliged to know what the right hon. Gentleman thinks the substantive part of that Bill concerned.

Mr. Baker: The Bill, as it was presented to the House, set out a voluntary process by which companies provided

information to their employees, and the Government in which the hon. Gentleman served—or was he a civil servant at that time?

Mr. Holland: A civil servant.

Mr. Baker: The Government which the hon. Gentleman served in that capacity decided that voluntary powers were no longer necessary and changed them to compulsory powers. Therefore, there is a precedent for this procedure.

Mr. Holland: There is no comparison between those provisions of the Industry Bill and what the Minister is doing. A comparison would be if the Government, after introducing a Bill that did not include a major national holding company such as the National Enterprise Board, then sought to do so.

Mr. Baker: I regret that the hon. Gentleman thinks that a change from companies voluntarily providing information to the Government compelling them to do so is a minor matter. That view is not shared by the Conservative party.

In clause 115 of the Education Reform Bill, we set out the need for a residuary body in the circumstances of ILEA's abolition. We made it clear that that residuary body would be modelled upon the one that was set up for the abolition of the GLC. Thus, the principle of abolition was clearly envisaged in the Bill as it was presented to the House. What we are doing in the amendments introduced yesterday is specifying in more detail how this should be done.

Twenty-five clauses were added yesterday and nine have been dropped from the earlier Bill, so there is a net addition of 16. Of those 16, half relate to the London residuary body and the other half to the arrangements for the transfer of staff. It would have been irresponsible not to have specified in detail the arrangements we propose.

I come now to the details of the new clauses that will be before the Committee. In new clause 61 we shall require the inner-London councils to publish development plans. Each plan will provide a basis for local consultation and will offer local people an opportunity to comment to their councils.

I intend to issue statutory guidance as soon as possible after Royal Assent making clear the ground to be covered in those plans—for example, the boroughs' proposals for organising the transfer of responsibilities and the way they would implement them for primary, secondary, special and further education, including adult and continuing education, and for services such as the careers service and the youth service. We shall wish to pay particular attention to the administrative structure and arrangements for senior appointments. We intend to issue a draft of this guidance while the Bill is before Parliament so that we may take fully into account the views of interested organisations. I shall shortly be inviting ILEA and the leaders of all the inner-London boroughs to meetings with me and the unit that I have established in the Department to deal with this process.

One important aspect of these plans will be the property which the boroughs will need to inherit from ILEA to run their education service. The duties of the London residuary body will be extended to allow it to function as the residuary body for ILEA. It will have the task of disposing of assets which remain unallocated to local councils, and will be able to use the proceeds of these disposals for the purpose of paying staff compensation. It is our intention that part of the proceeds of the sale of county hall should be available for this purpose. The clause I have tabled will ensure that a proper distinction is made between the London residuary body's functions arising from the abolition of the GLC and those arising from the abolition of ILEA.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baker: In a moment.

The hon. Members who are familiar with the arrangements following the GLC abolition will know that the London residuary body has taken on certain functions of the GLC to allow time for other arrangements to be made. A similar provision is included in the new clauses I tabled yesterday. I remind hon. Members that we propose to extend the life of the London residuary body to three years beyond the abolition of ILEA. This will allow sufficient time for any appropriate arrangements to be made.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way and no doubt he is grateful to me that he can now have a drink of water. He answered one point about the extension of the life of the LRB. Is he aware that the LRB was aiming to wind itself up 12 months earlier than the statutory limit set down in the abolition Bill, and that, in anticipation, it has been getting rid of its staff? What will he do about getting more staff for it now that he plans to extend its life?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman follows these matters closely. The LRB has conducted its affairs exceptionally efficiently. The new clauses give it the additional functions of winding up the residual functions of ILEA. I have seen the chairman of the LRB, Sir Godfrey Taylor, this morning and he is content with that particular role.

Mr. Banks: I am not surprised.

Mr. Baker: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to resign and offer his services in various capacities in inner London, I am sure that many will at least consider him, if not offer him something.

Eight of the clauses tabled yesterday relate to staff transfer and follow closely those arrangements established for the abolition of the GLC. They are designed to prevent any disruption to the education of children. *[Interruption.]* For that reason all ILEA staff working at individual schools and colleges at the date of abolition will transfer by order to the employment of the borough concerned. Those block transfer arrangements will cover well over 80 per cent. of ILEA staff.

For all recent local government reorganisations a staff commission has been set up. The work of the staff commission was greatly valued at the time of the abolition of the GLC. The clauses that I have tabled will provide for a staff commission with the same terms of reference as the one for the GLC.

The particular concern of the staff commission will be in relation to staff who are not transferred by order, namely those not linked to particular schools or colleges. Those include the staff in county hall and divisional offices, the direct labour organisation and the supplies organisation, as well as groups such as inspectors, youth and community personnel, educational psychologists,

[Mr. Baker]

educational welfare officers and drivers. It may be that some of these staff will be transferred by order with the agreement of the relevant borough. In any event, individual boroughs will need to recruit staff in order to carry out their responsibilities as education authorities. The staff commission will give guidance to authorities about their arrangements for the recruitment of staff, encouraging them in the first instance to consider staff from ILEA. We want to ensure, so far as possible, that the store of experience which is available within the authority's staff continues to be used for the benefit of the education service in inner London.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South) *rose*——

Mr. Baker: I will give way in a moment.

Redundancy compensation will be available for those staff who are not offered a post by one of the boroughs, and detriment compensation will also be available, where appropriate, on the generous terms applying at the time of the abolition of the GLC.

Mr. Spearing: The Secretary of State has touched on a matter which runs contrary to what he said earlier. He talked about schools and colleges, but did he not say that there would be special arrangements for special schools and the whole of the 500,000 adult education structure? In what he has just said he is implying that the boroughs will be the prime employer. How does that square with what he said earlier?

Mr. Baker: In some cases the boroughs will want to take on the responsibilities exclusively, for example, on special education. In other areas they may wish to do so on a co-operative basis with the neighbouring borough. That is why I am inviting the leaders and chief executives of the London boroughs and ILEA to see me. What may be appropriate for one borough may not be appropriate for another.

The detriment arrangements will provide compensation for those who are recruited directly by local government employers but on lower salaries than they had been paid by the ILEA. The detriment compensation would offset the salary loss up to a maximum of £5,000 a year for up to seven years. Redundancy payments will be based on length of employment, with a special weighting for those over the age of 41.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Baker: No; I have given way twice to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Banks: Only once.

Mr. Baker: Twice. The hon. Gentleman missed his other chance.

Let me make it clear that the fundamental principle of our proposals is that each borough should become the LEA for its area. Under the Education Act 1944 I have the power to require authorities to set up joint education committees for particular aspects of their service, where I believe that this would be of benefit. Less formal co-operative arrangements are also available. The Government have not decided which, if any, aspects of the education service in inner London might need to be treated in this way. We shall naturally be looking carefully at this question, but we believe that this is a matter on which the views of the inner-London boroughs and of organisations and others with an interest in education should be taken fully into account.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): If consultative arrangements did not produce an agreement to share resources, can the Secretary of State honestly say to the House now that he is satisfied that boroughs which he has often criticised, such as mine in Southwark, are competent to run education for the children of Southwark? That has never been his view. Is it now his view?

Mr. Baker: I find it extraordinary that a Liberal Member makes that point. A closely neighbouring borough, Tower Hamlets, where the Liberals are in charge, has expressed considerable interest in running its education authority. What is right for the Liberals in Tower Hamlets does not seem right for the Labour party in the rest of inner London.

To answer the hon. Gentleman directly, there are various safeguards. There is the whole process of publishing the development plans and all the discussions that go into that. We shall be particularly concerned with the administrative structure that will be set up by each borough to administer the local education service. There is the possibility of co-operative arrangements and already there are signs of interest in them in certain areas. There are safeguards in the Education Reform Bill in that while this will be happening we shall introduce the national curriculum, so it will not be possible to distort the curriculum for political reasons. There will be more open enrolment. The Liberal party broadly supports all of those. There will be a greater choice for parents. There will be improvements in financial delegation and heads will have much greater authority. There will be the opportunity for schools to opt out. The ultimate safeguard, which will no doubt please the hon. Gentleman because he is a democrat in all these matters, is that there will be borough elections in May 1990. Local councils will have to go to their electorate with their proposals for the education service in their area and by then they will be independent LEAs.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Until I was elected in June I was an education officer with an outer-London borough. Is my right hon. Friend aware that we had good inter-borough relationships with other boroughs and with the shire counties for special education? Clearly, individual boroughs cannot provide the complete range of special education that is necessary.

Mr. Baker: I am glad of my hon. Friend's confirmation of that. There is a great deal of co-operation on special education within inner London and between inner London and the rest of London. It is likely that there will be a large amount of that in future. The services cannot always be duplicated.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch) *rose*——

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central) *rose*——

Mr. Baker: Many hon. Members wish to speak, including those who represent inner-London constituencies, so I must press ahead.

Mr. Fatchett *rose*——

Mr. Baker: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall continue. He will have his chance later if he wishes to speak.

I should like to say something about the financial implications of our proposals. Opposition Members continue to spread scare stories about the rich boroughs gaining and the poorer boroughs being left destitute, but that simply fails to recognise the effect of the new arrangements for local government finance from 1990. Under the new financing arrangements each inner-London borough will get a standard share of the unified business rate and a revenue support grant based on an assessment of its need. That assessment will include allowance for socio-economic factors. It will take account of special needs and deprivation. The balance of funding will come from the community charge, although in the early years there will be dual running with domestic rates and safety net arrangements to assist the transition for community charge payers in the inner-London boroughs.

From 1 April 1990, therefore, all inner-London boroughs will get a needs grant which will take account of their individual circumstances. Part of that grant will be based on an assessment of education need, including such factors as the number of pupils and students and a measure of additional educational needs reflecting the socio-economic circumstances of the area. The Government will naturally be consulting on the detailed arrangements with the local authority associations.

Mr. Corbyn *rose*——

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford) *rose*——

Mr. Baker: No, I will not give way.

The result will be to allocate resources to boroughs according to their needs, which is what ILEA claims that it does currently with the resources that it distributes centrally. The Government recognise that the boroughs are likely to inherit high-cost provision from ILEA because it is such a high-spending authority.

There are powers in the Local Government Finance Bill, currently before the House, to cap community charges. Those powers will allow my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to distinguish between different categories of authority when determining the criteria for selection. The inner-London boroughs will form one of those categories and this will enable my right hon. Friend to consider their particular circumstances. In addition, we are considering whether any special transitional measures for community charge capping might be desirable in the case of the inner-London boroughs. That means that, by the time of the borough elections in May 1990, each inner-London borough will have assumed education responsibilities.

Their education policies will be a central part of those elections and that is how it should be. Behind all the arrangements, supporting and buttressing them, will be the Government's radical proposals to improve the quality of education throughout the country. All the policies which I have already mentioned and which are part of the Education Reform Bill—the national curriculum, open enrolment, financial delegation and the power of schools to opt out—will, of course, apply to inner London.

We now have an opportunity for a new beginning. The leaders of the Labour councils in inner London, for all their huffing and puffing, recognise that. In a letter to *The Independent* on 9 February they wrote:

"The uncertainty has now come to an end."

I welcome that recognition. I remember only too well that false hopes about what would happen in the House of Lords over the Greater London council abolition Bill meant that the Labour boroughs started very late in the day to plan for transfer. That delay was damaging for them. Three boroughs are now well advanced in their planning. Westminster has already appointed a shadow chief education officer — a former senior official of ILEA. Preliminary work and discussions have taken place in another two boroughs. It is in the best interests of everybody, for ILEA and the Labour boroughs, to co-operate now in planning the transfer. I hope that all the boroughs will use the two years available to the full and that they will enter into discussions jointly with my Department to achieve orderly and beneficial change in the interests of parents, staff and children—particularly the children.

What we are doing is to give local councils and local people the opportunity to improve London's education service, and to create schools and colleges of which we can be proud. I commend the motion to the House.

5.32 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I beg to move, to leave out from "notes" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"that successive reviews under the present Administration have concluded that the educational needs of inner London are best served by a unitary authority; salutes the Inner London Education Authority for its achievements in maintaining and improving educational standards and opportunities; and condemns Her Majesty's Government's about-turn in deciding to break up the Inner London Education Authority, a decision without mandate or popular support and one which will put educational standards and provision in inner London at serious risk."

The Government are led by a Prime Minister who has made an obsession of constancy and never turning back or turning round. This afternoon's motion asks us to approve a Government U-turn that is so complete that it wholly contradicts what was said by Ministers on Second Reading of the Education Reform Bill. Indeed, the U-turn is so sudden that it contradicts the settled line taken by the Government as late as the end of January. It is so hasty that the crucial detail of what we are being asked to approve was not tabled until last night, in 23 clauses and a host of amendments, in what amounts to a medium-sized new Bill.

In his speech this afternoon, as in his statement on 4 February, the Secretary of State has stretched credibility to breaking point by asking us to believe that there is no significant difference between the policy that we are now invited to approve and that which the House approved on Second Reading on 1 December 1987. The Government's new policy is to break up ILEA. The Secretary of State tried to suggest that that was the same policy on which the election was fought, by which ILEA was to be retained. He claims that it is all part of the same continuum or, to put it in the Secretary of State's words, that the U-turn for the destruction of ILEA was somehow "signalled" or "flagged" in the election manifesto in June 1987, which explicitly provided for ILEA's continuance.

If the Secretary of State knows what was in the June 1987 manifesto, he must know that his current claim is sheer baloney. There is not a word, dot or comma in that manifesto about the abolition of ILEA. All that was said

[Mr. Jack Straw]

about ILEA concerned allowing boroughs, in strictly defined circumstances, to opt out of ILEA. The manifesto said:

"In the area covered by the Inner London Education Authority, where entire borough councils"—

one assumes that that means that it is the unanimous view of a borough council—

"wish to become independent of the ILEA, they will be able to submit proposals to the Secretary of State requesting permission to take over the provision of education within their boundaries."

That pledge was contained in the Bill, debated on Second Reading less than 11 weeks ago, and in the speeches made by Ministers on that occasion. On Second Reading the Secretary of State went out of his way to play down any disruption that might follow in the wake of any individual borough applying to opt out. He said:

"I shall need to be satisfied that the borough has a full plan covering every aspect of the education service for its area . . . no borough can opt out of ILEA without specific parliamentary approval."

As ever, it is to the Secretary of State's deputy, the Minister of State, to whom we are truly indebted. When she replied to the debate, she went much further. She went out of her way to distinguish between the Government's proposals, which, at most, would have ensured that no more than four boroughs would have opted out leaving the majority of ILEA intact, and the policy that was then being urged upon the Government by the right hon. Members for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). In answer to those two right hon. Gentlemen specifically the Minister, with the Secretary of State at her side, said:

"the Government's aim is to improve both the quality and cost-effectiveness of education in inner London. That would not be achieved at this stage by imposing educational responsibilities on unwilling boroughs."—

[*Official Report*, 1 December 1987; Vol. 123, c. 780-856.]

That was the clear view of the Secretary of State and of the Minister. Perhaps the Secretary of State can tell me how that view is consistent with the view that he has now enunciated to the House. I defy him to do so.

Mr. Michael Heseltine (Henley) *rose*——

Mr. Straw: Ah! The real Secretary of State is here, the man who makes the decisions. Of course I will give way to him.

Mr. Heseltine: Does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that my right hon. Friend belongs to the listening party? Having listened to the arguments, he has come to the right judgment.

Mr. Straw: I recognise only too well that the right hon. Member for Henley has rolled over the Secretary of State and forced the U-turn upon the Government. I am extremely glad of his confirmation of that, but it was not the line adopted by the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State would have us believe that there is no difference between the decision adopted on 1 December and that adopted today. How odd it is that today the Secretary of State made no reference, at any stage, to the speeches of the right hon. Members for Henley and for Chingford or the early-day motion to which those right hon. Gentlemen were such proud signatories and which was the only cause of the subsequent policy change.

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West): If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the steps that the Government have taken are so wrong, how does he square that with the views of the immediate past chief education officer of ILEA and a former deputy education officer of that authority, that if four boroughs were allowed to opt out it would be better to abolish ILEA now?

Mr. Straw: I square that by giving the view of Mr. Stubbs who believes that ILEA should never be abolished either by allowing individual boroughs to opt out or by its complete dismemberment.

The settled policy of the Government was based not only on the policy enunciated on 1 December. In a detailed press notice issued on 21 January 1988—less than two weeks before the Secretary of State's statement today—the Home Secretary set out the new electoral arrangements for the Inner London education authority. That set out in detail the new arrangements that would be operated for the ILEA elections to take place in 1990. Yet, less than two weeks later, the Secretary of State had to stand on his head and tell the House and the country that improving the quality and cost-effectiveness of education in inner London would, after all, be achieved by imposing education responsibilities upon unwilling boroughs—the exact opposite of what the House was told just 11 weeks ago.

For such an extraordinary change in policy—that is what it manifestly is — we might be forgiven for expecting a clear or detailed explanation to be offered by the Secretary of State, but, as we heard from his tawdry, lacklustre speech, none whatever was forthcoming——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): It says it here.

Mr. Straw: No, it does not say that at all.

The real explanation has nothing to do with the needs of London's children and everything to do with the private enterprise of the right hon. Member for Henley and his Siamese twin the right hon. Member for Chingford. Where is the right hon. Member for Chingford, given the close interest that he has claimed to take in the future of London's education and given the articles that he has written excoriating inner London education?

Mr. Dobson: He is mending telephones for BT.

Mr. Straw: I think that I do both the right hon. Members for Henley and for Chingford no disservice if I say that, in the past, neither has been known as a byword for educational enlightenment. In fairness to both right hon. Members, we can say that in the past their ignorance of ILEA and its work has been matched by a humble public silence. For instance, the right hon. Member for Henley wrote a book fewer than 10 months ago entitled, "Where There's a Will." I understand that the right hon. Member for Chingford is not here because he is earning an honest copper writing a slim volume for British Telecom entitled, "Telephone Boxes in Working Order."

Mr. Corbyn: Will my hon. Friend confirm or deny that the book written by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) is already remaindered at Waterloo station?

Mr. Straw: If the section on education is anything to go by, which is the only chapter that I managed to read, I am not surprised.

The right hon. Member for Henley devoted a Fabian-leaning chapter in "Where There's a Will" to "Education, Investing in the Future." But in the whole of that chapter —and in the whole book—there is not a single word about the abolition of ILEA. That is the issue that the right hon. Gentleman now regards as of paramount importance above all others in British politics, yet 10 months ago he wrote not a single word about it in his book, which offered the most detailed prescriptions for all the country's woes, and many that we did not even know were woes at all.

As was all too apparent in the statement two weeks ago, for the right hon. Members for Henley and for Chingford the issue of ILEA's future is all a bit of a lark—an occasion, as the right hon. Member for Henley described it, for a "couple of likely lads" — the right hon. Gentleman's words, not mine—to mess about with the education of 270,000 pupils as if it were an expendable plaything.

The ignorance and irresponsibility of those two right hon. Members may just be excusable as neither of them holds high office any longer; but, if there is any excuse for them, there can be no excuse for the ignorance and irresponsibility of the Secretary of State. By his supine decision to roll over and order the break-up of ILEA, he has shown himself to be an unworthy guardian of the needs and interests of London's children and students and to be blind to inner London's achievements.

I am not surprised about the Secretary of State's ignorance. He has been Secretary of State for nearly two years; yet, according to an answer that he gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), in the whole of that time he has managed to visit just one ILEA school, which was a voluntarily-aided Roman Catholic school. In the whole time that the right hon. Gentleman has been Secretary of State, he has not visited a single county primary, voluntary-aided primary, voluntary-controlled primary or county secondary school in the whole of ILEA. Yet, on the basis of total ignorance, he believes that he can make judgments on the future of 270,000 pupils and students, about which he knows virtually nothing.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): My hon. Friend might remember that in Committee the other day I was talking about visiting schools, and the Secretary of State lectured me, telling me that it was about time I visited a few schools. He said that, having visited just one Catholic school in ILEA. What a nerve!

Mr. Straw: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It proves the point that the Secretary of State has never been willing to allow the facts to interfere with his ignorance about ILEA.

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that ILEA has been a great educational success?

Mr. Straw: Yes; and if the hon. Gentleman wishes to listen, I shall quote from a report by Her Majesty's inspectors, which the Secretary of State has sought to suppress from the House.

During the statement two weeks ago, the Secretary of State made much play with selective quotations from reports on ILEA schools by the inspectorate. I asked him from which reports he was quoting, to which the Secretary of State replied:

"These are very recent reports. I shall make them available."—[*Official Report*, 4 February 1988; Vol. 126, c. 1182.]

I asked the right hon. Gentleman what reports he was referring to and whether he would specify all the reports that had been written on ILEA. The right hon. Gentleman fudged the issue. I have checked in the Library which reports he made available. No report on ILEA has been made available since the right hon. Gentleman made his statement. Indeed, the most recent report that has been made available was in respect of an inspection on Clapton school for girls, dated 28 October to 1 November 1985 —two and a half years ago.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The hon. Gentleman referred to the published reports on ILEA by the HMI. All the reports are now published and made publicly available. When I quoted, I quoted from publicly available reports. I shall take no lectures from any member of the Labour party about the publication of reports because, while the Labour Government were in office, they did not publish one report.

Mr. Straw: The decision to publish HMI reports was taken by the then Sir Keith Joseph—a decision that we applaud—and no thanks to the Secretary of State. If the right hon. Gentleman is trying to preen himself on his record of publication, perhaps he will say why, in the answer that he gave me, he made no reference to the report by his senior chief inspector on the future of ILEA, dated 2 February. It was sent to me by a well-wisher. It gives a completely different picture from that which the Secretary of State has tried to paint.

Today the Secretary of State said:

"ILEA has shown itself quite incapable of improving matters."

The motion describes ILEA as a profligate overspender "with a persistent failure to raise standards of education".

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I shall give way in a moment.

Let me read to the Secretary of State what the report says about the authority that has apparently failed to raise standards. On primary education, it says:

"The ILEA's provision for the under-fives is among the best in the country".

On primary, post-nursery education, the report says:

"overall the quality of ILEA's primary schools is similar to that found generally in the country."

On non-advanced further education, the report says:

"Standards of provision and work are generally good and in some cases excellent. In our recent national survey on non-advanced further education, the proportion of good work seen in ILEA's colleges was significantly higher than that of the country as a whole."

Is that an example of an authority with a persistent failure to raise standards of education?

Mr. John Marshall *rose*——

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest) *rose*——

Mr. Straw: I shall give way in a moment.

On adult and continuing education, the report says:

"overall ILEA's adult education is a first-rate service in every respect . . . Most of the work seen is judged excellent or good".

On youth service, the report states:

"Overall the quality of youth work and provision is good but there are examples of poor standards in practice . . . That said youth work in the ILEA has to deal with some of the most difficult situations in the country: in Brixton, in Tower

[Mr. Straw]

Hamlets and in Soho and the West End where it is concerned with homeless drifting young people, not only from London —often involved with drugs."

On special education, the report states:

"The ILEA makes complex and extensive provision for the full range of special needs and puts particular emphasis on catering for special needs in ordinary schools".

The report is critical of ILEA's secondary schools. It says:

"Secondary education in the ILEA is generally rather poor though there are a few schools of high quality, mainly in the voluntary sector . . . Pupils taking public examinations at 16 in the ILEA do less well in absolute terms than do their counterparts from maintained schools in England as a whole".

Her Majesty's senior chief inspector wrote to the Secretary of State:

"When the results are statistically adjusted for socio-economic factors the ILEA appears to perform up to expectations."

Just to deal with the central part of the case that was made by the Secretary of State, which is that ILEA has been incapable of improving itself and that it has persistently failed to raise educational standards, I shall quote paragraph 6 on page 8 of the senior chief inspector's report. It states:

"Whatever its"——

ILEA's—

"previous shortcomings, over the past two or three years there has been a marked move towards the improvement of quality, notably through an increase in inspection and in school improvement strategies arising from the findings of inspection as well as from the policies of the authority. In fact there are clear signs that the findings of inspection are beginning to have an influence on the formulation of policy in the Inner London Education Authority."

Of seven services analysed in the report, four are described as good, two are described as average, and one is described as poor. The one that is described as poor is also described as getting a great deal better. I ask the Secretary of State whether the report was made available to the Cabinet and the Cabinet Committee when the Cabinet decided to dismember ILEA, as the right hon. Member for Henley has wished.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: It is not a report; it is a confidential minute to me from the senior chief inspector. In the course of each month, I receive many such reports on a variety of different matters. The hon. Gentleman said that it came into his hands through a well-wisher. We should like to know who the well-wisher is, because it is a leaked document. The paper that is attached to it is not a separate report; it is a summary of all the independent reports that have been published. They are public documents and are available. The hon. Gentleman quoted selectively from it. I remind him of the grave concern about secondary education that that minute conveyed to me. The hon. Gentleman said that secondary education is a matter of concern. It is a matter of grave concern when the figures come out and 40 per cent. of lessons are judged to be unsatisfactory or poor.

Mr. Straw: I quoted from that document, but the Secretary of State knows that I quoted the next paragraph also, saying:

"When the results are statistically adjusted for socio-economic factors the ILEA appears to perform up to expectations".

Above all, I quoted from the section showing that, according to the senior chief inspector, standards in ILEA are rising and the authority has been doing a great deal to ensure an increase in standards.

Mr. John Marshall: How does the hon. Gentleman square his comment about ILEA with those of Mr. Neil Fletcher a year ago? Writing to members of his own Labour group, he said:

"We have achieved little or nothing in educational terms this year."

Prior to that, he said:

"Parents believe the schools are now out of control. Their heads have largely adopted a bunker mentality, believing things are going to get worse before they get better."

Surely Mr. Neil Fletcher knows the facts of the situation, and the hon. Gentleman should accept them.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman does well to read from the Conservative Central Office brief a quotation that the Secretary of State has used about three times. The important thing about that quotation, as Mr. Neil Fletcher has made clear in a long letter to the Secretary of State this afternoon, is that it was taken completely out of context.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): On the point about secondary schools, is the hon. Gentleman aware that, within ILEA, there are facts showing that there are 83 totally empty secondary school classrooms, that 20 per cent. more pupils are leaving the ILEA area and 20 per cent. fewer are going into it? Parents are particularly concerned about secondary education. That is the crux of the matter. The hon. Gentleman does the House a disservice by ignoring it.

Mr. Straw: As ever, the hon. Gentleman is wrong. Every day there is a net importation into ILEA of 3,000 pupils, including 300 from Barnet.

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. Straw: I shall not give way. If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I must get on and finish my speech.

It is not only the inspectorate that has praised the performance of ILEA, but, for example, the Confederation of British Industry and leading industrialists. One of the many good things that ILEA has done has been to establish the London business compact. According to *The Times Educational Supplement*,

"Some of Britain's top industrialists are praising the authority for breaking new ground in collaboration with employers.

Sir David Steel, former BP chairman, says that the scheme is a long-term policy for the good of the country."

The Secretary of State mutters under his breath that that will continue, but he is placing at serious risk all the good things that ILEA has done.

Mr. Marlow: The hon. Gentleman has launched a full-frontal assault on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I am glad, but not surprised, that my right hon. Friend is totally undamaged by it. Having launched his assault, will the hon. Gentleman tell the House whether it is the policy of the Labour party to reinstate ILEA at a later stage?

Mr. Straw: It is the policy of the Labour party to fight for the continuance of ILEA and to ensure that this obnoxious proposal is overturned in the House of Lords when it is debated there. Unlike the Conservative party,

the Labour party has democratic procedures for deciding the future of its manifesto. It will not be written on the back of an envelope and then torn up a few weeks later.

The Secretary of State referred to ILEA's examination results. A great attempt has been made by Conservative Members to use crude examination figures, suggesting that ILEA is near the bottom of the league table. The right hon. Member for Henley may well try to do that, but, as he will know, that is as absurd as seeking to compare the examination results of Eton college with those of an inner-urban school in adjacent Slough. Her Majesty's inspectors accept, as does anyone who studies the matter, that examination results must be offset by reference to pupils' socio-economic backgrounds. When that is done, ILEA's performance turns out to be average or above average. It was above average — almost exactly the same as for Oxfordshire and well above that for the right hon. Member for Chingford's Waltham Forest—when it was controlled by the alliance of Liberals and Conservatives. According to the Sheffield university league table, ILEA came 56th. According to the Department of Education and Science's own statistical bulletin, No. 13 of 1984, ILEA was placed 45th—somewhere below Oxfordshire, but miles above Waltham Forest at 86th.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Before the hon. Gentleman concludes his reference to exam results, on the undoctored results, ILEA comes bottom of the list. I would not quote those figures. When the list was published, it came close to the bottom. It was 86th. I shall not base my argument upon that. The hon. Gentleman said that if we allow for socio-economic factors, it comes about halfway down the list — about 56th or so. I accept that if we allow for socio-economic factors. I have always said that, and I have said it repeatedly. But the point is that ILEA comes halfway down the list. When we consider education results and costs, it is number one. It is the cost-effectiveness of ILEA that is the gravest indictment against it.

Mr. Straw: I was about to refer to costs. Ten authorities were below ILEA. It was not bottom of the league. It is typical of the Secretary of State not to have the details at his fingertips, to make a point, and then to say that he is not making that point. It is absolutely typical of the shoddy way in which he seeks to treat the House.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Is my hon. Friend aware that, on the adjusted results of two analyses, the Conservative-controlled boroughs of Bexley and Bromley had worse examination results than ILEA in the Sheffield university study and the Department of Education and Science's own analysis of examination results, adjusted for socio-economic factors? Does that mean that the Secretary of State will abolish Bexley and Bromley because their results are worse than ILEA's?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend has made a crucial point. As ILEA is by no means the least cost-effective authority, will the Secretary of State use his axe on other authorities, including many Conservative authorities, and say that, if they fall below a particular standard, they, too, will be abolished, or that their educational responsibilities will be handed over to authorities which have no mandate for them and do not want them?

I shall now deal with the issue of costs, which the Secretary of State has just raised. First, there will be higher costs for running any service in the centre of a capital city, but the Secretary of State tries to close his eyes to that argument. All capital city services cost more — indeed, that is true of private sector organisations such as banks and insurance companies. That is why so many have moved their administrations out of the capital. Evidently, that would not be available to a London-based service. That fact is also true of the Health Service and of social services. Per head the social services costs of Westminster city council, which is Conservative-controlled, are three times those of boroughs outside London, and in many cases Westminster's costs are much higher than those of other inner-London boroughs.

Above all, that fact is true of the Metropolitan police —[HON. MEMBERS: "Give us the figures, Jack."] Indeed, I shall give the figures. Of course, the Metropolitan police force — any city police force — has responsibilities for terrorism, diplomatic protection and fraud simply by being a capital city and such responsibilities are not encountered elsewhere. If those are taken into account, a malign Secretary of State could easily say of the Metropolitan police force, "Here we have a police force which has continued profligate overspending and shown a persistent failure to raise standards."

The crime rate of the Metropolitan police area is only marginally above that of the Greater Manchester police and Merseyside areas. However, the clear-up rate for the Metropolitan police is one third that of Merseyside or Greater Manchester. For every 12 crimes that are cleared up per police officer in Greater Manchester and every 13 that are cleared up in Merseyside, only four crimes are cleared up per police officer in London.

When we consider overall costs, those of the Metropolitan police are more than twice as high as those of other authorities. The cost per police officer in the Metropolitan area, at £35,000, is 1·4 times higher than that for England as a whole; the cost of civilians is 3·2 times higher; the cost of premises is twice as high; and the cost of catering four times as high. Will the Secretary of State use those figures to tell us that, on the basis of that persistent failure to improve standards, the Metropolitan police should be handed over to the London boroughs, because that is the clear conclusion of that argument?

Secondly, ILEA has had to pay heavily for a stable teacher force. This afternoon the Secretary of State tried to make much of the fact that one in seven head teachers has left the service in the past year. That argument was completely confounded when it was pointed out to the Secretary of State that both the Secondary Heads Association and the London branch of the National Association of Head Teachers have completely damned his proposals for dismembering ILEA.

It is a self-evident truth that the cost of living in London is much greater than the cost of living elsewhere. The response of private sector employers is to pay what the market will allow, but, because of the Remuneration of Teachers Act 1965, that option is not available to any individual education authority. Therefore, what ILEA has had to do—and what it has done over the past 14 years —is to improve the conditions of service facing teachers in its schools. It has reduced pupil-teacher ratios to make a more congenial working environment. It has greatly expanded in-service training and support. It has increased non-teaching assistance. It has used its ability as a unitary authority to move teachers to the least popular areas—

[Mr. Straw]

for example, Tower Hamlets and Hackney—and to give teachers in those areas support which they could not possibly achieve in an individual borough.

Moreover, ILEA's high level of spending has benefited the outer-London boroughs in terms of training, support, curriculum and development. ILEA has subsidised the outer-London boroughs and the rest of the country. Indeed, my third point relates to the volume of provision. ILEA covers 5 per cent. of the population, but accounts for 18 per cent. of all adult education provision and 25 per cent. of this country's youth provision. That is a question not of profligacy but of democratic choice by the electors of London. London, and London alone, has paid for that choice, and for five years not a penny has been forthcoming from central Government. Those decisions have been made by Londoners for Londoners, and the Government have not paid a single penny for them.

The Secretary of State should say whether he wants that provision to be cut. Conservative Members should say whether they want that because their electors, living in the rest of the south-east, often make great use of adult education provision that is paid for by the inner-London ratepayers. Their electors benefit from the youth service provisions. The Secretary of State should say whether he wants that youth provision cut. He should also say whether the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis wants that provision cut, with all its consequences for the crime rate. He should say whether he wants adult education provision cut because, if he does not, he will never achieve the level of savings that he is now seeking.

As I said on Second Reading, it is not easy to bring the charge of consistency against the Secretary of State. However, as he admitted on "Newsnight" two weeks ago, he can claim an unremitting hostility to ILEA ever since the authority closed the St. Marylebone grammar school for boys in 1977. Like all hon. Members, I understand the strong feelings that school closures engender. There is no doubt about the Secretary of State's feelings about that closure, even though ILEA, the then Secretary of State and the governors of the school, who proposed not a closure but a reorganisation and a merger with another school, would have a different story to tell. Whatever the merits of that decision, anger about it is a wholly inadequate reason, 11 years later, for running a vendetta against ILEA and for placing London's education service at such serious risk.

The case for a single unitary authority has been examined with considerable thoroughness four times during the past 10 years. Lord Marshall, then vice-chairman of the Conservative party, conducted an inquiry —*[Interruption.]* I am glad that the right hon. Member for Chingford regards this issue as so important that an hour into the debate he has deigned to show his presence.

Lord Marshall, then the vice-chairman of the Conservative party, conducted an inquiry in 1978 and concluded in favour of a single authority. His comments on the flimsy recommendations of the Secretary of State when, as a Back Bencher, he produced a report on an ILEA break-up were:

> "The physical and financial difficulties in setting up new local education authorities in the inner London boroughs would be so severe that in my submission only a fool would attempt it."

The Secretary of State's 1980 views were rejected root and branch by the then Secretary of State, Mr. Mark Carlisle, as they were later by his successor, Sir Keith Joseph. In his statement to the House on 5 April 1984, Sir Keith Joseph stated:

> "Those whom we consulted, in particular those Members of the House and others with a close understanding of the needs of inner London, were overwhelmingly in favour of a directly elected authority. We have been persuaded by their arguments. The nature, scale and importance of the education service in inner London, taken together, justify a directly elected authority in this special case."—[*Official Report*, 5 April 1984; Vol. 57, c. 1124.]

On Second Reading of the Local Government Bill, in December 1984, Sir Keith Joseph explained his reasons:

> "We came to that conclusion"—

the conclusion to have a single unitary authority—

> "because there is so much movement across borough boundaries by London children and students that to break up ILEA would mean a very big departure indeed from current practice. We therefore decided to keep a unitary authority" —[*Official Report*, 3 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 127.]

I ask the Secretary of State again: have those movements across borough boundaries suddenly ceased in the past four weeks? Of course not. In the most densely populated part of Britain, the case for a single unitary education authority remains as strong as ever. It was that case that persuaded Lord Whitelaw, the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister to reject the proposals of the right hon. Member for Chingford when he was chairman of the Conservative party in the run-up to the election and to keep the core of ILEA intact.

As a single unitary authority, ILEA has been able to take resources from where they were most available—the City, Westminster and the southern part of Camden—and to use them where they were most needed—in many parts of inner London. ILEA has been the single most important agency for equalising opportunities across our great city. That, plus the fact that the electors have consistently placed their confidence in the Labour party to deliver that service, is what lies behind the desperation of the Conservative party now to abolish the authority—an act which *The Financial Times* of 8 February 1988 described as one of "political spite."

In his statement on 4 February, the Secretary of State said that the Government

> "attach paramount importance to improving the quality of education received by inner London's children."—[*Official Report*, 4 February 1988; Vol. 126, c. 1179.]

Given the Government's record on ILEA and its prospects, those words will be regarded as unctuous and hollow by those who run London's education service and by those who use it. Given the personal assault that the Secretary of State has made upon London's education service, the wonder is not that standards could be better, but that the service has survived at all. The authority has been rate-capped for the past three years with the Secretary of State in complete control of is budget and, if he chose to exercise it, of its manpower.

It does not lie with the Secretary of State to complain about profligacy or overspending. The Secretary of State has set the budget and he has had the power to set the manpower for ILEA for each of the past three years. This year, the Secretary of State, who claims to be so concerned about education standards in London, is seeking to ensure that there is a cut of £100 million in ILEA's budget. ILEA is to be evicted from the headquarters that it has occupied since 1922. In an act wilfully designed to destabilise the authority, and demoralise the staff, the Secretary of State

engineered to poach ILEA's chief officer for a position for which Parliament had not even given approval. Now, in the interests — as he says — of higher standards, the Secretary of State is to dismantle the London service and pass it over to individual boroughs.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) explained, in the exchanges on the statement, that it is a supreme irony that the Government, after years of mindless abuse of London boroughs, should hold up the councils as paradigms of administrative virtue, ready and willing to do the Secretary of State's bidding.

I have made it clear that the Labour party, unlike this Government, will not play politics with other people's children — *[Interruption.]* Every decision that we make will be taken with only one interest in mind — that of London's children. The simple reality is that London boroughs face social and economic problems on a scale almost without parallel in the rest of the United Kingdom. The boroughs in greatest need are rate-capped. No council has a mandate to run education, and all the councils will face, as the Secretary of State made clear, additional upheaval that will coincide with the transfers involved in the Secretary of State's other inventions — namely, the introduction of the poll tax and the uniform business rate.

Is it any wonder that the morale of staff in schools, colleges or administration will plummet? Is it any wonder that good people—possibly the best people—will follow the example set by the Secretary of State and Mr. Stubbs and seek to further their careers elsewhere? Is it any wonder that the positive progress to raise standards, which has followed the Hargreave and Thomas reports and which was well documented in the minute from the senior chief inspector, may be stopped in its tracks and that the view of many sober observers is that London will be lucky if standards of education and administration remain intact between now and any transfer in 1990?

No wonder the HMI report to the Secretary of State damned the policy. It stated that the question whether the shift to the boroughs would lead to higher or lower standards was "an open question." Is it any wonder that the respected editor of *The Times Educational Supplement*, Mr. Stuart Maclure, believes that education standards may be damaged for five years or that the Conservative Education Association has dismissed the proposals as "essentially spiteful and negative"?

The Secretary of State is taking a massive gamble with the education of other people's children through his decision to abolish ILEA. He would not take that gamble with his own children. If the education of 270,000 children is put at risk and damaged, the responsibility will lie not with the parents, the boroughs, the teachers or ILEA, but with the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State sought today, as he did on 4 February, to take comfort from the relative ease, as he claimed, with which the transfer of the GLC to other bodies took place two years ago. On 4 February he said: "when I was dealing with the abolition of the GLC I was constantly told that the London boroughs could not do it." —[*Official Report*, 4 February 1988; Vol. 126, c. 1184.] Again the Secretary of State re-writes history. The fact is that the London boroughs did not do it. The abolition of the GLC involved only minimal devolution of services to the boroughs. The overwhelming majority were kept intact. Only the administrative arrangements for overall political control were changed.

The Secretary of State deludes himself if he believes that the abolition of the GLC provides any easy parallel for the problems that he is forcing on the boroughs. For example, London Transport was not split up and handed over to the boroughs. It was nationalised and placed under central control. The fire service was not handed over to the boroughs. It was kept intact and made subject to a joint board. Arts provision was transferred to the South Bank board and the Arts Council. Indeed, ILEA took on many central services at considerable expense. For example, it took on architects and the provision of supplies that it had previously obtained from the GLC. Of the 42 major functions that were transferred, 32 — or 75 per cent. — were not transferred to the boroughs. All the major services were transferred to joint boards or quangos.

Once the GLC had lost housing and transport, it did not run any personal service. There is no more direct or personal service than education. The parallel with the abolition of the GLC, as the Secretary of State is aware, is nonsense. In his statement on 4 February and in his speech today, he betrayed his own nervousness and lack of conviction that what he is doing is right when, by his own admission, he said that many of ILEA's services, including perhaps adult further special education, cannot be run properly by the boroughs and will need cross-borough joint board arrangements. I am sure that he will discover that such arrangements will be needed for schools in many of the boroughs.

No Education Minister in recent years has made more of the rhetoric of parent power than the Secretary of State. We were told that great consultations were held on the details of his education proposals, including proposals for the future of ILEA. There were promises that the Government would only proceed by "broad agreement". However, the proposals that we are considering today have not been submitted to any test of popular will. They have not been tested by a general election, borough election or by-election. If the Secretary of State means what he says about parent power, will he back the London Parent Governors' suggestion for a consultative ballot on the proposals? Or is the truth that, like everything else the Secretary of State professes to believing, his subscription to parent power is just skin deep and that the clear views of parents are to be cast aside whenever they get in the way of the leviathan of the Secretary of State?

Unless the Secretary of State is very lucky or very careful—or both—the only political epitaph that he will earn is "this man wrecked London's education". The proposals are without a mandate, without popular support and without reason. They will place the education of 270,000 children seriously at risk. The proposals must be opposed in the Lobby tonight.

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the first of the Back-Bench speakers, may I say that there is great pressure on this debate. When we previously debated this subject, many hon. Members were disappointed because of the length of speeches. I appeal for brief speeches today.

6.16 pm

Mr. Michael Heseltine (Henley): Everyone who has listened to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) will have recognised a fluency of delivery, a recollection of statistics and a reference to quotation that one would expect from someone so deeply immersed in the subject. That is what we would expect from a former deputy leader

[Mr. Michael Heseltine]

of ILEA. He has covered the ground thoroughly from the point of view that he represents. His right hon. and hon. Friends would acknowledge that he has made a formidable and even overwhelming and unanswerable case. However, there is a small lacuna in his argument. When my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) asked whether the logic of the overwhelming case was that ILEA would be restored by the Labour party if it ever came to government, there was no answer.

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: The reality is known to us all. We know that many people behind the hon. Member for Blackburn in the Labour party know that the Government's decision is right and——

Ms. Armstrong: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: They will welcome that precisely as they welcomed the break-up——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is not giving way. He has only just started to speak.

Mr. Heseltine: They will welcome that precisely as they welcomed the break-up of the GLC and the metropolitan counties. There is no way in which the Labour party will restore ILEA, the GLC or the metropolitan counties because Labour Members know that power concentrated in unitary authorities in urban districts is the most effective way to achieve accountability and the effective management of services.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman knows, for the reasons that I have explained, that it is impossible to give a commitment about what will be contained in a Labour party manifesto four years before a general election. However, if it is any comfort to him, I believe that the case for a unitary education authority for inner London is unassailable and I will argue that with great conviction when we come to discuss what should be in the manifesto.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman knows that the Labour party is making commitments left, right and centre about all manner of national policy without let or hindrance. Yet when it comes to a real decision about real education, Labour Members cannot make up their minds what to do.

Ms. Armstrong: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: No, I shall not give way.

No one participating in a debate about the education of London's children disputes the gravity of the problem. The issue is not about the scale of the problem; it is about the right way to address the solution. I hope to argue that, in getting rid of ILEA—a move on which, naturally, I congratulate my right hon. Friend—the Government have a unique opportunity that will not only provide a framework within which to address the educational problems of inner London but, equally important, lay the foundations for a far more relevant and effective framework for London's inner administrative local government services.

I share, as must everyone, my right hon. Friend's judgments about the overspending and misuse of ILEA's resources, and about the inadequacy of results. I must add, however, that in urging the end of ILEA I recognise—as did my right hon. Friend—the value of much of the contribution that has been, and is being, made by those who work for ILEA. Whichever route my right hon. Friend adopts, as he has made clear, the majority of teachers and administrators who work in the new structure will in practice be the same as those currently employed by ILEA. In all that we do and discuss in the House, it would be as well to remember that. There is no great untapped reservoir of talent to which we can turn to man London's education system.

Mr. Tony Banks: Does not the right hon. Gentleman recognise that many teachers are attracted into ILEA because of the resources available and the professional standards, and that they will not necessarily be interested in going into the boroughs and will therefore go elsewhere?

Mr. Heseltine: I understand the argument about teachers being attracted in, but I am equally aware of the larger argument about their being attracted out. That is the heart of the problem. Part of the difficulty that we face is the crisis of recruitment and retention of good teachers in inner London, and a huge trans-London authority, which, far from providing a means to an easier solution, has actually made the solution more difficult.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: No. Mr. Speaker has clearly asked us not to take longer than is necessary. There has been a huge number of interruptions, and time has gone very fast; so, if the House will forgive me, I shall not give way.

ILEA's policy of trying to attract teachers by widening the support services for them has neither solved the shortage nor improved the education standards. Having said that, however, I do not believe that education standards will be addressed as long as a small minority of teachers can hold back the efforts of the large majority by hiding behind the virtual impossibility of removing teachers from posts for which they are not suited. That, of course, is a problem that affects our education service nationally, and not just in London.

In approaching the issue of ILEA, the first question we must deal with is the proper role of central Government. No one in the House seeks to transfer to central Government all responsibility for the day-to-day running of state sector schools, but what is at the heart of my right hon. Friend's legislation—and rightly so—is the belief that central Government must recognise, openly and more directly, their responsibility for the standards of education. That is not in any way inconsistent with a delegation of wider responsibility and choice to parents, teachers and governors locally. They should play——*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Holland: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: No. *[Interruption.]* I have made it quite clear that I shall not give way.

The essence of the Government's case, which I strongly support, is that all the people involved locally—teachers, governors and parents—should play a bigger role in the provision of education, while the Secretary of State plays a bigger role in insisting on the standards of education. The Opposition ignore at their peril the wide demand in the nation for people locally to play a much

bigger part in the life that they lead and the services that they enjoy. It is at the heart of the Government's policy to build on that instinct.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Corbyn: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, throughout ILEA, every parents' organisation is opposed to the break-up? Polls of every school show that parents are opposed to it, and to the effect that it will have on their particular schools. Will not the right hon. Gentleman agree to abide by the results of the parents' poll, which will almost certainly show an overwhelming majority against the break-up of ILEA?

Mr. Heseltine: I find it fascinating that, if there is such overwhelming public support, the party that is prepared to adopt any issue with a populist ring about it is not even prepared to give a commitment to restore ILEA when it has the chance.

The essential difference between the two sides of the House is that Conservative Members are trying to remove power from the centre and to put it into the hands of the people of this country. To make that possible, the Government are rightly insisting on the need for a basic curriculum, with much tougher testing and inspection. But teachers and heads will take over the management of their schools, and governors, and especially parents, will take on new responsibilities. There will be a greater variety of provision, within the state sector. The prospects now exist — as it is very desirable that they should — for city technology colleges, opted-out state schools and open enrolment, all of which will increase the discretion and accountability of parents for the education of their children. That educational provison will take place in a far more rigorously monitored and competitive environment.

I believe that the House will overwhelmingly support my right hon. Friend in seeing this as the right balance between a range of choice in the provision of education driven by local authority power, parental power, industrial power and teacher power and the workings, in partnership with those interests, of a central Government who see it as their duty to insist on and promote higher standards. Central Government should not—and our Government do not seek to—administer the institutions themselves, but they point to the need to place the power as close as possible to the people, and they argue the need to create local authority organisations that are effective and accountable.

The next stage of the debate must be to discuss the role of local government. It is as much the responsibility of central Government to ensure that local authorities are able to carry out their responsibilities effectively as it is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend to insist on proper education standards. Indeed, my right hon. Friend cannot properly carry out his specific education responsibility if the Government of whom he is a member fail to ensure that local authorities are capable of administering all the other local authority services.

That brings us to the heart of the ILEA debate. I have always been appalled by the argument that ILEA is essential because the inner London boroughs are not capable of administering an education service. If they are not capable—*[Interruption.]* It has been widely said, and is one of the most significant arguments used to defend ILEA, that the inner London boroughs cannot be trusted. I find that argument wholly unacceptable.

Mr. Tracey: Does my right hon. Friend find it interesting that the one report that the Labour party does not mention, the report by the only independent commission on London's government, the Herbert Commission, said quite categorically that education should be in the hands of the inner London boroughs and not in the hands of a unitary authority?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend makes the point very clearly.

There has been wide debate about ILEA for a long time, and one of the arguments always produced to defend it is that one cannot trust the inner London boroughs. That is a totally unacceptable argument. If those inner London boroughs are too small, too badly managed, too short of resources and too politically extreme, the logic is that we should not tolerate the mismanagement of inner London's housing, planning, refuse collection, social services, urban regeneration and a host of other services. That is the logic of the argument that says that the inner London boroughs are not up to being education authorities.

Within a year we shall face exactly the same debate that is now taking place over ILEA when, one hopes, the Griffiths report recommends the transfer of large parts of community care from the central Health Service to local government. Again we shall have to face the problem that these same London boroughs will be deemed inadequate for their widened opportunities.

In working with my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) to persuade the Government to go down the path that we are debating, I attach considerable priority to the need to persuade the Government not just to end ILEA but, more important, to address the issue of the fundamental weakness of some of the inner London boroughs. Those boroughs are not unimportant or incidental to our national life. They have too much power, affect the lives of too many people, determine the quality of too many public services, operate too ineffectively and waste too much public money for it to be any longer tolerable for central Government to wash their hands of the quality of the services that those boroughs provide.

Central Government should insist upon three fundamental changes. First, they should insist on the break-up of ILEA and the Griffiths report should be seen as a unique opportunity to establish powerful and effective local authorities in inner London. To achieve this, central Government must positively assert their determination as a partner in the endeavour, both by insisting on quality within the services and by demanding value for money for the taxpayers' funds upon which those authorities totally depend.

The Government must address the arguments about the size of these authorities. If they are too small and too weak they should be joined together, not by joint boards that will simply gloss over the structural weakness, but by the fusion of two or more of the authorities.

Next, central Government should insist that each authority has a proper management structure and that the posts within the structure are filled. For example, it is quite unacceptable that today neither Camden nor Lambeth have directors of finance. I see no objection in principle to

[Mr. Heseltine]

legislature changes to bring the practices in local government into line with those of central Government. We could make councillors responsible for the proper discharge of local authority functions, including the recruitment of qualified officials.

Mr. Dobson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is not a Second Reading debate, but a debate on a motion that refers exclusively to the Inner London education authority. Many Opposition Members wonder whether it is in order for the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) to crowd them out by taking up the time that they want to devote to talking about inner London's children. Rather, we are having to listen to speeches that are clearly bids for the leadership of the Tory party.

Mr. Speaker: I called the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and it is in order for any hon. Member to speak if he is called by the Chair. But he might bear in mind that time is getting on.

Mr. Heseltine: It is perfectly legitimate to be sure, when one is taking a major stand by breaking up the Inner London education authority, that one is responsible in speaking about the authorities to which its powers are to be transferred. It is not enough for the House simply to say that it will break up that education authority and leave a range of weak authorities to which it will be transferred. It is at the heart of our responsibility to ensure that we do this job effectively.

As I have said, I see no objection in principle to legislative changes to bring the practices in local government into line with those in central Government. We could make councillors responsible for the proper discharge of local authority functions, including the recruitment of qualified officials. It would be a simple step for the Audit Commission to have to satisfy itself that the proper steps to ensure the recruitment of the appropriate officials had been taken. No central Government Minister can ignore the power of the accounting officers in his Department, the Comptroller and Auditor General or the Public Accounts Committee. I have no doubt that if we brought into line the responsibilities of local government to fill the posts upon which adequate services depend, it would be a significant change.

I realise the problems of recruiting people to inner London boroughs, and I see no objection at all to making arrangements for specific grants from central Government to help underprivileged authorities in the recruitment of appropriate, experienced staff. It follows that the local authorities cannot be permitted to frustrate the proper appointment of executives of quality and experience in order to conform to the whim of serried ranks of committees that examine the qualities of people applying for official jobs against a whole range of standards about their approach to racism or sexism or whatever it may be, but which have nothing whatever to do with their ability to keep the financial records of the authorities.

Finally, we must make it clear to the handful of local authorities seeking confrontation that central Government is not without alternatives in this matter. Increasingly, central Government, waking up to their latent responsibilities, are insisting on a wider choice of instruments for the provision of public services. The housing associations now provide competition for local authority housing departments. Urban development corporations can provide a rival means of securing urban regeneration. The need for local authorities to put their services out to competitive tender ensures a much more thrusting quest for value for money.

In all these things, local authorities are finding that central Government are insisting upon quality of service. There is no reason why, in coming to arrangements for the distribution of taxpayers' funds, central Government should not insist upon a specific agreement with individual local authorities about the way in which those funds will be used and the quality of services that will be delivered. There is no question that if central Government took a more positive role in the distribution of funds, many authorities would queue up to get a larger share of the available resources. Local authorities have a perfectly legitimate choice. They can decide whether they want to administer the funds that the taxpayer contributes or whether they are content to see central Government distribute those funds to other agencies that will deliver the quality and the value for money for which the Secretary of State is calling.

The essence of the debate is that the House has to make a simple judgment. It is whether we are prepared to place our trust in the concept of powerful inner-London authorities. Frankly, very few of those authorities merit such trust. Year after year the House has diverted taxpayers' funds to those authorities without insisting upon the quality of the services that they should deliver. That is an abdication of the responsibility of Parliament. If the Government now grasp the opportunities to create powerful and responsible authorities, the demise of ILEA will be viewed with as little concern as the demise of the GLC and the metropolitan counties.

6.39 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): It was right that the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) should be called early in the debate because he is the co-architect and author of this proposal to abolish ILEA. It was interesting to contrast the assurance of his speech, which was based on ignorance, with the diffidence of the Secretary of State, whose speech was based on some knowledge. Clearly, one cannot afford to be so cavalier if one knows something about the needs of inner London and the problems with which the children and people there are faced.

The right hon. Member tried to turn the debate and this vandalistic proposal, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) described it, into a defence of local democracy. I must say I find that rich. If the right hon. Gentleman had any faith in democracy, he would have backed the proposal for a test of democratic opinion before ILEA was abolished. As he must know, ILEA is unique among education authorities because it is composed of directly elected members who have no other function. They are there because people have voted for them to conduct ILEA's affairs. So much for the advance of democracy.

What the right hon. Gentleman said about strengthening the functions and capabilities of small inner-London boroughs so that they can take on these functions was impertinent. When the right hon. Gentleman was Secretary of State for the Environment he did more than anyone else to weaken and undermine the resources available to inner-London boroughs. He began the process

of taking away major planning functions from London boroughs. That was most evident in the docklands area, where he set up the London Docklands development corporation to take power away from the boroughs that he so deeply distrusted. That same right hon. Gentleman reduced, almost to desperation, the funds available for housing programmes and other services in inner London. We do not need to take the right hon. Gentleman very seriously.

We must confront the arguments and proposals put forward by the Secretary of State, who has now left the Chamber and run for cover. He has failed to produce, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) showed, a serious or argued case for the demolition of ILEA or for the transfer of its functions to 12 inner-London boroughs. I do not think that he even tried. He seems to be content in the knowledge that he has more troops than us, even though the strength of his vote in the Lobby will be in inverse ratio to the strength of the argument that he advanced.

As an inner-London Member of Parliament, what fills me with disgust — my hon. Friends will share these feelings—is that the educational future and life chances of 280,000 children have been put at risk. Until what is being done can be undone, they and succeeding cohorts of the young will be grievously disadvantaged by what the Government are doing.

The Government have sought to base their case, as they did last Wednesday, on what they call—the motion says this in so many words——

"the persistent failure to raise standards of education in its schools"

and the alleged "profligate overspending" of ILEA. To advance that case, the Secretary of State has done a hatchet job on ILEA. When he quoted the only piece of evidence available to him — that ILEA ranks 86th among LEAs in the league table—he had not even the basic intellectual honesty—he knows better than to use crude examination statistics to prove a point—to place it in the context of the other serious adjusted studies of educational performance that have been published twice by Sheffield university and which are available from other sources.

I know of no serious educationist who would claim that crude examination results are a valid test of the value and quality of an education service. The fact that the borough of Harrow performs two or three times better than ILEA says more about the social background and class composition of the Harrow population than it does about the quality of education in that borough.

It is simply illiterate to attempt to judge one authority against another by examination results without taking into account the social background of its pupils. I am particularly aware of that—I wish that the Secretary of State was present to hear this—as no fewer than 44 per cent. of pupils attending schools in Tower Hamlets are from Bengali families. Bengali is their mother tongue, and a substantial proportion of pupils in schools in that borough came to the United Kingdom only in the past 10 years. It is not serious to make a comparison between examination results at O-level of pupils in my borough with those who are resident in Harrow, Bromley, Bexley or elsewhere.

The Secretary of State knows very well—we willingly concede this point — that ILEA's performance, while certainly capable of improvement, does not justify its annihilation. *The Guardian* was good enough to inform us that the Secretary of State received a 12-page report less than a fortnight ago, from which my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn quoted earlier, from Mr. Eric Bolton, who is his senior chief inspector. The burden of what the chief inspector said has been put to the House, but I shall quote two points because they are relevant to the argument that I am advancing that a case against ILEA cannot be based on crude examination results.

Mr. Bolton said:

"The ILEA, covering as it does the whole of Central London, has to confront a range of social problems, including large-scale homelessness, whose concentration and severity make for what is generally accepted as a unique combination of difficulties."

He notes—this is directly relevant to the Secretary of State's use of crude examination statistics—that when ILEA's examination results at 16 years are statistically adjusted for socio-economic factors, it

"appears to perform up to expectation."

If that is a case for getting rid of ILEA, I cannot recognise it in the language and report of the Secretary of State's senior inspector.

The Secretary of State put forward a second and equally spurious reason for getting rid of ILEA — the high cost of education in inner London. I need make only two points because my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn gave the House the truth of the matter when he drew attention to the obvious high cost of all services in inner London—not only those in the public sector, but those in the private sector. Many institutions and companies have had to leave inner London because the costs are so high or because they have difficulty in recruiting people of adequate capability to perform the services that they require.

When the Minister, on 4 February, first presented his statement of intent to abolish ILEA I asked him how he could possibly justify the transfer of education to inner-London boroughs when he and all his colleagues, including the Prime Minister, have nothing but contempt for the administrative capacity and political judgment of the authorities concerned. The Government have decided that inner-London authorities are not competent to run their housing services—hence the Housing Bill. Many other services must be compulsorily put out to tender in the private sector because councils are not thought to be capable of running them properly. The Government have decided that rates decisions should be taken out of their hands—in many cases by rate capping—and decided by ministerial order.

In reply to my question, the Secretary of State made the simple debating point that he was surprised that I and other inner-London Members had so little confidence in our local Labour councils. The answer to that is twofold. First, it is not Labour Members of Parliament but Ministers who have shown their complete lack of confidence in and their contempt for inner-London councils. Secondly, the progressive and massive cuts in Government grant aid for local government services and for housing in the inner-London boroughs have resulted in falling standards of service and increasing inefficiency in administration.

It is against this background of continued stringency that the Government propose in just over two years that each of the inner London boroughs should set up a separate administration for the provision of education services. Apart from the fact that we are to have 12 mini

[Mr. Peter Shore]

education administrations where only one existed previously—anyone who thinks that will be cheaper will have another think coming—the crucial factor will be the amount of money that is made available to the individual boroughs.

Under the inner-London equalisation scheme, the rich boroughs — the City of Westminster, the City of London, Camden, Kensington and Chelsea — contributed heavily to education expenditure in the poor boroughs such as Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Southwark, Lambeth, Islington, Hammersmith, Greenwich and the rest. Just how important that cross-subsidisation is can be illustrated by my borough of Tower Hamlets. We contribute £40 million in precept to ILEA. We receive in ILEA expenditure some £70 million. Even today, in spite of the substantial pooling of resources that ILEA can undertake, we are nearing crisis in the shortage of teachers and in the lack of primary school places in Tower Hamlets. We are short of 100 primary teachers. We are in the middle of a population explosion, which will mean that the school population will have virtually doubled between 1982 and 1992. A large-scale £16 million building programme for new primary schools is under way. I do not believe that Tower Hamlets will receive from the Secretary of State direct funding of its education service on the scale that it undoubtedly needs.

No doubt the Secretary of State will consider that our special needs are simply evidence of extravagance and overspending, because that has been the Government's whole approach to the question of need and expenditure from the moment they took office. Wherever they have seen above-average expenditure, they have assumed that the cause is profligacy and waste, whereas we have always assumed, rightly, that it is an indicator of greater need. All the social studies that have been made illustrate that we are right and they are not.

In Tower Hamlets, we have not a Labour but a Liberal council. Among its other innovations, in a period of enormous financial stringency it is pushing through a programme of far-reaching decentralisation. Nearly all the borough services will soon be provided, not from the town hall in Patriot square, but from several mini town halls which are being constructed and serviced at great cost. They out-democrat even the right hon. Member for Henley. The chaos in our borough is such that it is literally inconceivable that an adequate education service can be established in two years' time. All this must be well known to the Secretary of State. If not, he should have a word with his colleague, the Secretary of State for the Environment, who will brief him on the state of administration in Tower Hamlets.

Let me read to the House the views of one of our headmistresses, Sue Gilman, who runs the Cannon Barnet primary school in Spitalfields, where all but one of the 300-odd children are Bengali:

"It is already difficult persuading young teachers to stay in Tower Hamlets because of high rents and house prices. But many are attracted by the range of facilities, the scope for promotion, the in-service training that only an organisation the size of ILEA can offer. Children suffer terribly when there is a high turnover of staff and I fear the problem will get much worse if Tower Hamlets is left to recruit its own teachers."

The House and the country should know that the abolition of ILEA has nothing to do with the alleged quest for higher standards of education, for improved administration or for the necessary reduction of over-costly education services. It was not in the Government's manifesto. It was explicitly rejected by the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor, Sir Keith Joseph. It has not been recommended by any serious impartial group of educationists or academics. It is solely the result of Back-Bench Conservative pressure, led by the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) and the right hon. Member for Henley. Neither of them has had any experience in ILEA. Both are motivated by a crude political desire to punish what they consider to be a wayward, Left authority.

To give in to such pressure is not the way to make serious decisions about the educational future of 280,000 London schoolchildren. It is indeed a recipe for chaos and a disaster for the young people of Tower Hamlets and many young people in other London boroughs.

6.55 pm

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West): What is interesting about the two speeches from the Opposition Benches so far is that one would think there was nothing wrong with education in inner London. Apart from a passing reference by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) to a little problem with secondary education, as though that was a peripheral activity of ILEA, one would have thought that there was nothing wrong with it.

The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) said that the Secretary of State was putting at risk the life chances of the 280,000 children in ILEA. If those children's life chances have been put at risk over the last two years, it has been, first, by the obsession of ILEA with politics, and, secondly, by the incessant strikes which have been promoted, encouraged and comforted at every turn by his party. If anything has damaged the children's chances, it is the strikes that have been taking place in the schools over the last few years.

I will not try to pretend that everything about ILEA is bad. It is not. There are some good things about ILEA. *[Interruption.]* It would have been interesting if the right hon. Gentleman had confessed some of the bad things. There are certainly some good things about ILEA. There has been a good deal of deathbed repentance in the last year since its continued existence has been under threat and its leadership has changed.

However, there are many bad things to do with the standards that have been achieved, the expectations that are made of children and the amount of money that has been spent on achieving relatively little. Today I received a letter from a constituent whose daughter is at an ILEA primary school in the constituency. She says:

"I am seriously thinking of putting my 7½-year-old daughter into private education. In the 2½ years that she has been in school she has not learnt anything. She learnt more in the private kindergarten when she was aged between 2½ and 4½."

[Interruption.] May I make my speech? Opposition Members will get an opportunity to speak later.

Among the quotations by the hon. Member for Blackburn it would have been interesting to hear him mention Mr. Neil Fletcher, the leader of ILEA, who said that the education service was in chaos and had achieved nothing in educational terms. It would have been interesting to hear a quote from the report of Her Majesty's inspectorate, which said that, after attending 200 ILEA science lessons, the inspectorate rated 40 per

cent. as less than satisfactory and 15 per cent. as appallingly bad. It would have been interesting to hear the hon. Member compare the unit cost of pupil-teacher ratios with Brent. I agree that it is not fair to compare ILEA with Harrow or Barnet, but I think it is reasonable to compare it with Brent. There are similar social conditions; the pupil-teacher ratios are almost the same. Brent achieved slightly better unadjusted examination results. The ILEA unit cost of educating a child at secondary school is one third more than the unit cost in Brent, and it does not even succeed in achieving as much.

The Sheffield study has been widely quoted. For all the money that it has spent, ILEA comes at No. 56 out of 96, after adjustment for social factors. That is hardly the sort of performance that one would have thought was justified by the expenditure. The Sheffield study makes two noticeable points, the first being that there is a substantial correlation between the socio-economic background and examination results. That is undoubtedly true, but it is in danger of becoming an alibi for low expectations. While it is certainly a factor in achievement, Opposition Members should recognise the danger that this has become an excuse and an alibi. As a result, in school less is expected of children from poor homes and working-class backgrounds than of other children.

The second point that emerges from the Sheffield study is that there is no statistical correlation between adjusted examination results and the spending of additional money. That is surely interesting in the context of the fact that ILEA spends so much more.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): The hon. Gentleman has made much of the comparison between ILEA and Brent and told us that in the Sheffield study ILEA came 56th. Where did Brent come?

Mr. Maples: It did not do very well either.

Mr. Smith: Give us the number.

Mr. Maples: I will make my own speech. In citing Brent, I sought to make the point that Brent has similar social conditions and the same pupil-teacher ratio, yet spends one third less than ILEA. If I ran ILEA, I would say to myself, "I wonder whether I can achieve the same with one third less."

The acid test is the unit cost of educating a child in a secondary school. In ILEA schools, it is £2,650. The London average is £1,700. But in the average inner-London independent school it is £2,535—less than in ILEA schools. Do Opposition Members think that the average parent of a child in an ILEA school, if given £2,650 and told that he or she could spend it on education where he or she chose, would put the child back into the ILEA school? Would they not opt for one of the independent schools?

Mr. Dobson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maples: No. I shall finish my speech. The hon. Gentleman has no responsibility for education, and he is interfering in the debate.

Many very good independent schools in inner London charge considerably less than ILEA. I should have thought that, given the choice, the average parent would take it.

My second point on unit costs is that, if the average head teacher of an inner-London school were given £2,650 for every pupil in his school, I would wager a substantial amount that he would achieve considerably more than ILEA achieves.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Maples: No, I will not give way.

I suspect that doing something about education in inner London is the same as doing something about what is wrong with education in the country as a whole. The national reforms that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State proposes are perhaps even more relevant in London than elsewhere. They have nothing to do with who runs education in London; they have much to do with the national curriculum, opting out and financial delegation. My right hon. Friend's proposals on the national curriculum and testing will do just as much, if not more, for standards in inner London as for standards elsewhere. The proposals for financial delegation and opting out will do an enormous amount in inner London, because they will provide diversity and choice and a far more efficient use of resources. Both the national reforms that my right hon. Friend proposes and the structure are crucial to the reform of education in inner London.

I simply cannot accept the argument that inner-London boroughs are not appropriate vehicles for providing education services. Outer-London boroughs do it perfectly satisfactorily — some better than others and some extremely well. The top two areas in the Sheffield study, which Opposition Members are using as their alibi today, are Harrow and Barnet—two outer-London boroughs which provide education services. No doubt some will do it better than others. Some may do it better than ILEA and some not as well. But the fact that they can do it is borne out by the experience of the outer-London boroughs. The boroughs will be closer to the schools and the people involved, the decision-making machinery will be closer to the action, and the authorities, being smaller, should be able to run a more efficient and less bureaucratic service.

One or two points have to be taken into account in making the substantial change from a Londonwide authority to arrangements under which the inner-London boroughs run their own affairs. The first relates to cross-borough services, to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred — adult education, special schools and the youth service, music and computer centres and so on. When boroughs were to be allowed to opt out of ILEA, it was fair to assume that they would make the necessary voluntary arrangements to provide such services. However, if we are to break up ILEA, we must ensure that the arrangements are in place and that if we are not satisfied with the voluntary arrangements that the boroughs make there is a mechanism to allow us to insist that the necessary cross-borough arrangements are made.

Secondly, whatever is wrong with ILEA is doubly wrong with one or two London boroughs. ILEA may be profligate and heavily politicised, but the London boroughs of Southwark and Lambeth are more so. [HON. MEMBERS: "Lewisham."] Lewisham comes close. There is concern that some children will be taken out of the frying pan and put into the fire. People question whether their education will be better dealt with by boroughs such as Lambeth and Southwark.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will say that one of the remedies that the schools have at their hands is to opt out. No doubt some schools will do

[Mr. Maples]

that, but others will not be able to do so, for perfectly good reasons. Some will be too small and for some it will be inappropriate to act as an opted-out service. Will my right hon. Friend assure us that he has, or will have, the power to take the necessary action if that happens and he finds that the education plan of an inner-London borough is inadequate, or inadequately put into effect?

When the Bill is enacted and the smoke has settled and the Labour leaders of inner London boroughs who now say that they will defend ILEA to the death come round to the idea that they would quite like to run education in their boroughs after all, it will be important to turn them into willing partners in this exercise. There will be nearly two years left before their responsibilities are put into effect; during that time it will be important to turn them into willing partners.

I make one point specifically relating to my constituency, which contains the Horniman museum. It was given to the people of London—originally to the London county council, then to the Greater London council and then to ILEA. It performs a valuable educational function and it would be totally wrong to transfer it to the borough concerned. There is a good deal of support for the idea that the museum should become a national institution, nationally financed and with nationally appointed trustees so that it can continue to provide an education service to children in schools in the south-east.

The most important ingredient in the improvement of education standards in inner London is the programme of national reforms that my right hon. Friend proposes—the national curriculum, testing, opting out, financial delegation, grant-maintained schools and so on. A few factors need to be taken into account. If they are, I believe that we shall end up with a considerably better education service than we have now in most London boroughs. I hope that that will be the outcome.

7.6 pm

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): We are considering the proposals at a time when children in our schools have had to bear the malign effects of conflict and cuts for far too long. Children in London—especially at secondary level—have suffered more than most from industrial action and political interference from all sides. The introduction of the GCSE — too quickly and with inadequate resources—is adding to their problems. As has already been said, teachers' morale is at an all-time low and the better teachers are decamping in droves, both for financial reasons and because of the political interference in their work. At a time when matters could be starting to stabilise somewhat, our children are being threatened with a further change and a potentially catastrophic period of instability.

I would be the first to agree that ILEA needs reforming, but to abolish it is going too far. It should be replaced with a unitary body for London to provide the high-quality cost-effective education to which our children are entitled. Let us consider what ILEA has done in recent years. We have heard the statistics for the cost per child. Where does the money go? ILEA's own budget document shows that only about 40 per cent. goes on teaching staff; it is nearer to 60 per cent. in most authorities. Administrative costs have risen catastrophically, at a time when the number of pupils and teachers is declining.

I shall quote the words of one of the Government's well-respected chief inspectors, Hargreaves, not from the Hargreaves report but from his recent document on quality:

"Within a national context, ILEA secondary schools, when account is taken of intake, perform as a whole at an average level; but the level of resources is higher than anywhere else in the country . . . Moreover, is an average performance in national terms good enough in the light of the Authority's equal opportunities policy?"

Hargreaves continued:

"Recently, and by coincidence, I had separate conversations with a member, an inspector and an ILEA head on the same theme. All four of us"——

I share this——

"had one common element in our histories: we were working class and attended grammar or direct grant schools. Our parents had limited formal education and no special educational ambitions for us. Our schools however had high expectations for us and pressured us to work hard, raising our aspirations so that we found our way to university. How high was our confidence, we wondered, that our educational histories would be the same had we attended an ILEA comprehensive school of today?"

Hon. Members should note that that section was removed before the paper was made public.

This is not a record of which to be proud. I constantly cite the fact that commuter trains into London are full of youngsters from the surrounding shire counties who come in to take those plum jobs that our inner-London children should get. Let us not underestimate the considerable areas of excellence that ILEA has fostered over the years.

As a parent of a child with special needs, I have great reason to be grateful for the provision that my son has as a partially hearing boy. He would have had that provision nowhere else in the country—in fact, nowhere else in the world. There has been a boy in my son's school from a wealthy Nigerian family who were looking for private provision anywhere at any price for their son when he lost his hearing through meningitis. He ended up in the partial hearing unit at Sedgehill school, because there was nowhere better. Although I will criticise ILEA for what it has not done well, I will give credit where credit is due.

Mr. Tracey: I have often listened with interest to what the hon. Lady has said about education, especially reflecting on what happens in her borough. Does she think, on reflection, that Greenwich could work better as a separate education authority than the monster of the ILEA?

Mrs. Barnes: I do not. I shall come to that point.

To pay tribute to another area of excellence, this morning I visited the Thamesside adult education institute, one of 18 in ILEA, offering services during the day and evening. The institute attracts 12,500 people a year, almost two thirds of whom are retired, unemployed, in receipt of benefit or on literacy or English-as-a-second-language courses. Seventy-four per cent. of them are women and 500 children are enrolled in the crèches there. The total cost of the institute is £1·6 million. Of that, less than a quarter comes from Greenwich rates. The institute provides a valuable service, which I suspect will be severely threatened if ILEA's responsibilities are entirely devolved to the boroughs. I am sure that this non-statutory provision will suffer.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I was pleased to hear the hon. Lady pay tribute to the partial hearing unit at Sedgehill school, for which I had responsibility for seven

years. Does she agree — it is important for the Government to realise this — that that unit and others like it must continue and that, as part of the special education provision for London, they will need to continue to take children from other boroughs?

Mrs. Barnes: That is important. Although I live in Greenwich, which is division 6, my son is at school in Lewisham, which is division 7, because of his hearing difficulties. Children from a wide catchment area in London go to the three remaining partial hearing units within ILEA.

Why am I protesting about the break-up of ILEA, in spite of my reservations about it? As a London Member, with first-hand experience of how the boroughs have coped with services of such critical importance to people's lives as housing, I am totally dismayed at the prospect of them having control of my children's education. What happened when housing benefit was transferred? Some boroughs are still dealing with the vast backlog of several years ago, with what was a fairly simple procedure compared with transferring the whole of an eduction service. The prospects of inefficiency, bureaucracy and politicisation are frightening. There is no evidence that children will receive a better standard of education within the control of the London boroughs than they would within a unitary authority. If anyone thinks that children might, they should spend some time in the boroughs and see what happens.

I am not the only one who has reservations about the London boroughs. One of the Minister's closest colleagues, the Secretary of State for the Environment, recently said:

"Labour's loony left Council leaders are behaving like Eastern Bloc Commissars, ruling people by fear."

Mr. Holland: Do not spoil it. It was a good speech.

Mrs. Barnes: I shall put this straight. The right hon. Gentleman said:

"Town Halls founded on civic dignity have become an arena for aggressive political posing, disruption, wild accusations, threats and fear".

If a Government have in their inner echelons someone with those beliefs, how can that same Government think that those boroughs can improve education standards?

Let us take a more impartial view, from the Audit Commission's document "The Management of London Authorities: Preventing the Breakdown of Services", in January 1987:

"large parts of London appear set on precisely the course which will lead to financial and management breakdown."

The Government have gone to extraordinary lengths to eliminate what they see as the profligacy and irresponsibility of ILEA, yet by their own arguments they are handing education straight to the local authorities which the Government have so readily and so consistently condemned. Giving control of education to those councils which are already mishandling and mismanaging housing and social services is an absurd triumph of myopic dogmatism over the consumers' interests. They are the people with whom we must be concerned—the children, the young people and the adults who are in receipt of education provided by London.

Education will not be improved by being kicked around from one authority to another. The Government should look at how the management of a London unitary education authority can be improved, and how it should be made more representative. There is ultimately only one way to make local authorities more representative — proportional representation. The case for it is, if anything, stronger at local level than at national level. It would end extremism at a stroke.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does my hon. Friend and political neighbour accept that, if the Government and ILEA had adopted proportional representation before, ILEA would not be facing abolition now?

Mrs. Barnes: I agree with that absolutely. If standards and quality are what the debate is about — and I applaud that—let us consider what the London branch of the National Association of Head Teachers recommends. It recommends an expert task force under an independent chairman to decide on the format of a unitary body. The association defends the idea of a unitary body in its document, not ILEA as it is now. There is a strong suggestion that the 58-person committee of politicians has been inept and indecisive, and perhaps, in some ways, that is not a bad thing. Had they been able to make decisions, we might have been in an even worse mess.

Let us also consider the idea floated in *The Economist*, which is not usually a bastion of Left-wing thought. It suggests a 12-member board, with each member being elected for four years on a staggered basis so that there is some continuity. I am making suggestions about how a unitary body, quite different from ILEA, could be conceived. All I ask is that we give proper thought to what will improve standards and quality of education, and that we do not jump, as we are doing now, from the frying pan into the fire.

7.21 pm

Mr. William Shelton (Streatham): I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes). I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would have the power to do as she suggested, if he so wished, under the 1944 Act. He could appoint a committee comprising a non-political group of people—including most of his friends, I hope—to run education. However, I do not think that is likely.

Either ILEA must stay or it must go. I want to refute the notion that we keep hearing to the effect that this is a political attack. I was the chief whip of ILEA 20 years ago. Then I moved across the river to the House, and even then, in 1970, my first machinations and discussions were directed to seeing how we could get rid of ILEA. It was a far better organisation in those days than it is today, but I wanted to get rid of it then because I thought that it was too big and remote. The William Tyndale school would never have come about if it had been run by local councils. Indeed, hon. Members may recall some discussion about breaking ILEA into four.

I shall not conceal from the House the fact that, in the run-up to the 1983 election, when there was some discussion about including the break-up of ILEA in the manifesto, my valour was tempered by the thought of facing my Streatham constituents and telling them that Mr. Ted Knight would be controlling the education of their children.

Mr. Holland: What did the hon. Gentleman decide to do?

Mr. Shelton: The question did not arise, as it was not included in the election manifesto, as the hon. Gentleman well knows.

How is it that I can now support my right hon. Friend's proposals wholeheartedly?

Mr. Simon Hughes: Just to ensure that the hon. Gentleman is fair when comparing his views in 1983 with his views now, can he tell his constituents now that he is happy that education in Lambeth will be run by Miss Linda Bellos and her colleagues, which is what the Government propose?

Mr. Shelton: That is going to be the burden of part of my speech.

I shall give four reasons why I am now perfectly happy that ILEA should be abolished. The first will be understood by men of good sense, and by the Opposition. It is clear that at least three, and probably four or five or more, boroughs would have opted out of ILEA, so there is no way in which ILEA could have proceeded. That must be common sense to anyone who lives in London and knows ILEA's education service. From that point of view, there is no choice. So this is a sensible decision.

Secondly, as I said a moment ago, ILEA is a far worse organisation now than it was when I was its chief whip. I do not want to go through all the figures on spending again, but ILEA spends considerably more per capita than places such as Bradford, Manchester and Sheffield. Some hon. Members asked about private schools. ILEA spends considerably more than Putney high school and James Allen's school for girls, which are both good schools. Hon. Members can take it from me that ILEA has been letting down London's children, who are at risk under ILEA. It has also been ripping off London's ratepayers——

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Shelton: If I may proceed a moment longer, the hon. Gentleman may be fortunate later.

The hon. Member for Greenwich mentioned administration. I understand that ILEA spends £55 per pupil on administration, while Bradford spends only £15.

Mr. Holland: Bradford has only one-sixth of the density.

Mr. Shelton: Two years ago I was reading through CIPFA, which makes excellent reading for anyone interested in education. I have always had a fondness for ILEA, and I was delighted to see that it spent more than any other authority in the country on school meals. I thought, "At least, they get a jolly good lunch." In the small print I discovered that ILEA spent almost the least in the country on food and by far the most on administration. So perhaps ILEA's pupils are being well served, but they are not getting much to eat.

Mr. Corbyn *rose*——

Mr. Shelton: I shall not go through the exam results figures again, except to say that, even after they have been massaged, ILEA, which spends the most, comes out only halfway up the academic list, so something is wrong somewhere.

As for ILEA's loony policies, that business about non-competitive sport was nonsense—a fact that has now been recognised. But how long did it continue before it was recognised?

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) asked about Lambeth. The Education Reform Bill has certain safeguards that did not exist in 1983, and they have been listed already. They include a national curriculum, more open enrolment, financial delegation and opting out if it becomes necessary, and if the parents vote so to do; and Lambeth will give the local service that I wanted 20 years ago for London's education. It will have local councillors, for many of whom I have a high regard. I have a high regard for officials in division 9. I know them well. That acquaintance, together with the safeguards in the Bill, reassures me.

It is true that one must be wary of Lambeth—especially of its leadership. Lambeth was described in an editorial in *The Times* a week or two ago as being—among other boroughs—a by-word

"for political extremism, bloody-mindedness, incompetence."

That may well be true. Three Lambeth councillors were elected to ILEA, all of whom were disqualified and surcharged under the reign of Mr. Knight for making an illegal rate. So the differences between ILEA and Lambeth are very small.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples), with whose speech I agreed, I want to make a few pleas to my right hon. Friend. First, I ask that the boroughs in 1990 should not inherit any of the vast overhead costs of ILEA, because, if they have to accept responsibility for the redundancies, or the rent for county hall, they will do badly. They must start with a clean sheet, and the residuary body must have enough funding to take care of the backlog of expenses.

Secondly, my right hon. Friend should give continuing thought to the fact that certain Labour boroughs may not co-operate much. I do not know to what extent he can seek some sort of compulsory timetable and specify particular positions in local authorities and place responsibilities on them. I fear that, unless he does that, he may not get the co-operation that is so much needed.

Thirdly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West said, the cross-borough boundary traffic—adult and further education, youth, career and special needs—is vital. I have little concern about primary education, and secondary education can only be improved; but ILEA does well for the non-statutory bodies. We must look after them carefully, because it is essential to maintain and foster them.

There has been a campaign, which I strongly support, to regularise the position of Morley college. That must be done. Lambeth has three excellent special schools which feed a large area, including outer London, and adult education is shifting more and more into job training, which is important. I hope that my right hon. Friend will use his powers, should it become necessary, to set up joint education committees to look after such cross-borough traffic and to avoid duplication, maintain the organisations and soothe ruffled feelings in the various boroughs involved. It will be difficult for a borough to run only one further education college without cross-borough help.

Mr. Spearing: This is something on which the hon. Gentleman and I wholly agree. Did he notice that, in respect of the 500,000 London citizens who go to further education colleges and the many pupils who go to special schools, whereas in the first statement the Secretary of State said that he would do just what the hon. Gentleman is asking for, and which I would like, today he carefully avoided any such reference?

Mr. Shelton: My right hon. Friend is a sensible and far-seeing man. I am sure that he will accept both my advice and that given by the hon. Gentleman.

My next point is technical, but important. It concerns recoupment of these non-statutory bodies. It is now done on national average costs. It would be better if this were done on actual costs, but it would not be possible because so many people are involved and there would have to be massive computers working it out, which would waste time and money. I hope that my right hon. Friend will consider establishing an inner London average cost on which recoupment can be based when there is cross-borough boundary trade on adult, special or any other provisions. The inner London average would avoid certain boroughs planning to build walls against that trade because they are not receiving sufficient to cover the costs of the services that they are giving. I am thinking especially of Wandsworth which provides services for adult education in Lambeth. I would hate Wandsworth to discriminate against Lambeth residents because they did not carry with them adequate costs when they used a service in Wandsworth.

After 20 years of mixed feelings about ILEA, although I have always liked and had regard for it, I am glad that it will soon be abolished.

7.34 pm

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): If the terms of this motion are implemented in the Education Reform Bill, they will put the educational future of over 250,000 of London's children into limbo, and limbo is possibly the most positive thing that I can foresee. We do not know what will happen to the infant schools, to the secondary schools, to the non-statutory services such as evening classes, access classes or polytechnics, nursery classes, discretionary grants, career services or youth work, as a result of the Government's move.

Why are we being asked to put the future of so many children at risk? First, there is no doubt that abolishing ILEA will save money for businesses, because 73 per cent. of ILEA's funding comes from business ratepayers, over half of them in the City.

Mr. John Marshall: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Abbott: With the greatest of respect to the hon. Gentleman, I would point out that I have only just begun. Perhaps he will allow me to develop my argument.

If one cuts through all the cant from the Secretary of State and Conservative Members, one sees that abolishing ILEA will save their friends in the City money. For over 118 years, London businesses have helped to fund a unified education service in London. That honourable tradition, whereby business and wealthy areas provide a decent education for all our children, is being broken.

Secondly, the abolition of ILEA is of a piece with the holy war that the Government are conducting against any democratic institution which happens to be controlled by the Labour party. Their claims of principle and about parental choice, the consumer and the interests of children go out the window when they are presented with the opportunity to smash an institution whose electors vote in a Labour majority time after time.

The third reason for this extraordinary gamble is a sordid reason, so I will mention it only briefly. It is that the future of Hackney's children and over 250,000 children in inner London has become caught up in a nasty, squalid battle for political success in the Conservative party. It is a disgrace that, because of some temporary manoeuvring, shuffling, alliances and misalliances between the right hon. Members for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) and for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and the Secretary of State, the educational future of children in London is put in jeopardy.

Conservative Members have referred to ILEA's flaws and problems. However, I put this to the Secretary of State. If his ministerial car developed a fault, would he take a sledgehammer to it and smash it up? The answer to the problems in ILEA is not to dismantle it in this way, which runs contrary to professional, educational and parental opinion and to the interests of the children.

We have heard, and no doubt will hear all evening, about the costs of ILEA to London. Conservative Members refuse to accept that everything in London is more expensive. The Metropolitan police force costs twice as much as comparative police forces. That is because London is sui generis. One cannot compare the costs of running a London institution, whether it is education, the police, or social services, to costs in areas outside London. There are the costs of living, housing and transport. Those financial comparisons are fundamentally tendentious and dishonest, and they do a great disservice to Conservative Members.

Hackney parents are asking me questions which I shall now put to the Secretary of State. They are asking when they will be asked for their view. They say, "We heard in the election campaign and we hear week in and week out about parental choice, but when will we be asked about our choice?" They do not believe that their children's future should rest on the whim of the right hon. Members for Chingford and for Henley; they want a say. This measure was never in the manifesto. The Tories could not have won seats in inner London with this in the manifesto. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) is just one Conservative Member who will lose his seat—*[Interruption.]* I will see only some hon. Gentlemen in four years' time. Hackney parents ask me, "What is all this about parental choice? When will we have a say?"

Hackney parents are also saying, "We understand that Hackney pays £33 million into ILEA and that it receives £93 million from ILEA. Where will the missing £60 million come from?" It is one thing to talk about parental choice, giving power to parents and ILEA failing children, but how will my borough manage with a £60 million shortfall? Will the Secretary of State give a commitment that poor boroughs such as mine will not be a penny worse off as a result of abolition? We in Hackney want to know where our £60 million will come from. Is the Secretary of State content to see Hackney's children's future go down the drain because of intra-party manoeuvring between himself, the right hon. Member for Chingford and the right hon. Member for Henley?

I have listened to the debate with great interest, and two things are clear. My borough is one of the poorest in London and will be one of the worst hit by abolition. It also has a high proportion of young people. Conservative Members tell us about the value of accountancy. We hear about unit costs, cost-effectiveness, cash flows, and balancing books, but we hear little about the values that should underlie a decent national education service, about keeping faith with parents, about the historic role of ILEA

[Ms. Abbott]

as an engine of social equality and about giving poor children like mine in Hackney a chance. We hear all about the values of accountancy and ledger books, and nothing about social and community values, continuity, and keeping faith with parents and children. First and foremost, it is clear that this measure is all about the value of accountancy.

The second thing that has been made clear this afternoon from speeches and remarks of Conservative Members and the Secretary of State—and it was clear when the Secretary of State made his original statement—is the fathomless contempt that they have for the people of inner London and their children. That is based on ignorance. The Secretary of State has never been to an inner-London school, he will not visit them, he does not send his children there and nor do his friends. Theirs is fathomless contempt based on ignorance.

I put it to the House that the Government will pay dearly for playing ducks and drakes with the future of the children of inner London. Unless the Government give an absolute commitment that the poor boroughs will not lose financially, the hollowness of their talk about parental choice, standards and caring for children will be made clear. Without the money which time out of mind has been redistributed from the wealthy to the poor in inner London, what are my children in Hackney to look forward to and what are boroughs such as Hackney to do? I urge the House to oppose this motion.

7.45 pm

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): I shall be brief, which is more than some other hon. Members have been, so that as many hon. Members as possible can speak.

I worked for 13 years as a headmaster in ILEA. The old London school board was well respected throughout the world and the old LCC education committee was well respected throughout England. Indeed, when I started teaching, if one got a London first appointment, which was called an LFA—*[Interruption.]* If hon. Gentlemen will listen, they might learn something to their advantage. The LCC education committee gave LFAs, which meant that one could come from the length and breadth of the country. At that time, people from all over the world came to see, not just the schools, but the standard of education in London. I worked for four years under the old LCC education committee with no political interference and in high standard schools, until we came under ILEA.

It must be said that ILEA has never won the reputation that the LCC education committee had. *[Interruption.]* It has not. It is clear from seeing it, from what people say and from where applications come from.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith) *rose*——

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Sir Rhodes Boyson: No, I am not giving way, not even to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) for whom I have great respect. I sometimes wonder why, but I always finish up with the same respect for him. I am answering some of the questions that have been raised.

At that time, applications to the old LCC came from all over the country, but since ILEA there has been a shortage of teachers, despite good conditions and pay. *[Interruption.]* Obviously, what I am saying is hurting, but the truth always hurts. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I felt chastened under the attack.

There are three reasons why ILEA has fallen apart and why this measure can pass today, ILEA will disappear and in five years' time people will see it as the remnants of history.

The first reason is the teacher militancy which swept in from 1968. Even last week, despite the desire of the chairman of ILEA's education committee, there was another day's strike. The rank and file—or what we call rank and rile in many cases in London—took over the NUT in 1968, to the horror of the rest of the country. Since then we have had continued militancy. I served on two committees of the NUT before that and I resigned from it because we were striking at the drop of a hat. I would not strike, but others were brought out in that way. That did untold harm.

The second reason is that many of the appointments in ILEA were not for good teaching but because people served on committees and were union officers, and so became known at county hall. Teachers were not coming in from outside; there were many incestuous appointments from inside of people who sat on committees dealing with the length of chair-legs and such great educational portents as that. Those who met regularly were appointed, not the teachers working in the schools.

The third reason is the results. Whatever Labour Members say, if they sent their children to schools where the results were 40 per cent. lower than the average in the rest of the country, they would be worried. Parents are worried because the standards of schools depend on the standards of results that can be expected. Without doctoring or massaging the results, we are aware that, in comparison with the average for the country, 40 per cent. fewer pupils in ILEA get five O-levels or grade 1 CSEs. Such poor results are despite the fact that 40 per cent. more is spent in ILEA as opposed to the rest of the country.

I believe that there are three reasons for such poor results. First, when children are tested at the age of 11, the results are basically average. Therefore, there is a decline in pupils' educational standards in ILEA's secondary schools between the ages of 11 and 16. We should explore that failure. At the age of 11, only 1 per cent. of ILEA's pupils have an education standard lower than the general average. However, by the time those children reach the age of 16, their results are 40 per cent. lower than those for the country as a whole. Secondly, it is clear that only 1 per cent. of girls at school in ILEA are below standard, so it is the boys who do not perform well. That demonstrates that there is a lack of discipline in the schools. Girls are individualists and they work in schools where discipline is poor. However, boys run with the pack and if a school lacks discipline it affects the boys. Undoubtedly there are poor discipline standards within ILEA.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North) *rose*——

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I can see my hon. Friend moving to give me, as always, some of his wisdom and advice. Before I allow him to do so, to the benefit of everyone—including Opposition Members—let us consider the third reason.

The poor results of ILEA cannot be blamed upon immigration. Indeed, I must pay tribute to ILEA for publishing its results and carrying out research on those results. It is clear that the average results of Indian immigrants are twice as high as those of the host community. Second to them come the Pakistanis, and African children are also above average. It is no good saying that the poor results may be blamed, in some way, on immigration. The results in London would be lower but for those immigrant groups. Therefore, there is no means for turning upon that argument.

Mr. Greenway: In common with my right hon. Friend, I was a member of ILEA and the LCC education committee for some 23 years. From his experience and knowledge of London schools, does my right hon. Friend agree that there are schools today, not far from this House, where packs of children trot around completely out of control—[HON. MEMBERS: "Name them".] That is one reason why the examination results are poor and child attainment so low. Opposition Members need to visit those schools to see what is happening. The other reason for low achievement is that little is expected of the children. Since its inception, ILEA has taken the view that children from a poor or disadvantaged background cannot be expected to achieve much. Therefore, children who formerly achieved a great deal no longer do so.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I believe that it is important to return to smaller boroughs. I believe that, the smaller the borough, the more likely we are to achieve community involvement. It is clear from the percentage of votes recorded at elections that the bigger the borough the fewer the votes cast. If ILEA is translated into smaller boroughs, parents can be influential and there is every likelihood of an improvement in education standards. I believe that that would be a good thing.

Some of my hon. Friends, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), have referred to local government issues. I believe that, the smaller the boroughs, the nearer the people and therefore the better the government. I believe that the 1964 local government reorganisation in London was, in many cases, a disaster, and that the 1972 local government reorganisation—carried out by the Conservative party—in the rest of the country was a similar disaster. The sooner we get back to smaller units the better. We have got rid of the GLC and the metropolitan counties. Now let us get rid of ILEA. In that way, we could transform London, including my area of Brent, into smaller areas because the big units do not work.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I believe that the right hon. Gentleman has concluded his speech.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I sat down too soon. I intended to give way.

Mr. Banks: My feelings for the right hon. Gentleman have increased immeasurably, not merely because he happens to bear a strong resemblance to Wackford Squeers. As the right hon. Gentleman was just about to tell us about how small is beautiful, does he also believe that the shire counties should also be abolished and power given to the district councils?

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I sometimes think that some of the London schools would be better if they had some Wackford Squeerses in charge—at least the children would pass some examinations.

I do not share the hon. Gentleman's expertise on the shires. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I do not regularly read *Country Life*. I do not ride and I do not know what happens in the country. I am sure that he knows more than I do, and perhaps he could give me a private lesson about what to do with the shires so that they, in common with inner London, could be improved.

7.55 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): The Secretary of State has told us that it is the Government's desire to give more freedom of choice to parents, but, as a result of the decision that he is now forcing upon parents in inner London, they are to be denied the right to make such a decision on the future of education in inner London.

Not one school in my constituency—the Tooting area of the London borough of Wandsworth—supports the Government's proposals. I believe that the same could equally apply to schools in Battersea and Putney. I could name all the schools in my constituency that are totally opposed to the break-up of ILEA, but I will give just one example of a meeting that took place at Allfarthing school in the borough of Wandsworth. On 28 January a motion was put before a meeting of that school. That meeting was prior to the announcement by the Secretary of State regarding abolition, and we were then talking about opting out. The motion before the meeting read:

"That this meeting approves in principle of Wandsworth opting out of the Inner London Education Authority".

The result of the parents' vote on that motion was six in favour, 94 against and 16 abstentions. Such an example could be quoted not only elsewhere in the London borough of Wandsworth, but in any division of ILEA where meetings have taken place with the people who matter—the parents of the youngsters.

Mr. John Marshall *rose*——

Mr. Cox: No, I do not intend to give way.

One of the revealing disgraces of this debate is that we now know that the Secretary of State has visited just one school in inner London during his period of office. Yet he can tell us what is wrong with London's provision of education. Where are all the letters of complaint? Where are all the letters that the Secretary of State and his Department have received from dissatisfied parents? If parents are so dissatisfied, why are they opting, in such numbers, to seek to defend the retention of ILEA? Those parents know whether or not their children are doing well at school—they see the evidence—and they want ILEA to remain.

If there is any honesty and any true democracy left, it is about time that the Secretary of State sought to get the views of London parents as to his proposals. He most certainly does not know their views at the present time.

Many of us who represent inner-London constituencies live in our constituencies. We know the schools. We know many of the parents whose children go to schools in our constituencies. We also know about the problems.

Let me quote a report about the London borough of Wandsworth, which goes back to October 1987, four months ago. It states that more than 40 per cent. of the children who go to school in Wandsworth come from families

[Mr. Cox]

"who have incomes so low that they are able to claim free school meals;
—about one in five have unemployed parents;
—27 per cent. come from one-parent families;
—one in five speaks a language other than English at home".

The Minister of State represents a constituency that borders mine, so she cannot claim that she is unaware of what happens in inner London. She must also have some of the problems that we have in the borough where her constituency is. When we are told about how ILEA spends its money, many of us in the Opposition applaud it. We say that at least ILEA's policies bring some hope into the lives of many of the youngsters who go to schools within ILEA.

There is now a great fear that we shall see a division between schools where there are facilities and schools where there are not. Some parents who are in employment and earning a reasonable salary will have the opportunity to contribute towards the facilities that schools need; but in other schools parents will not be in that position. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) referred to equalisation. We did not fully understand what the Secretary of State was saying because he never fully spelt out what he meant. However, other hon. Members have commented. In the London borough of Wandsworth, there will be a difference of £60 million. Few people in Wandsworth believe that, under the present administration, there would be any attempt to insist that present standards were maintained or, indeed, improved.

In Wandsworth we have already been told that if the borough can take over the running of education, one of the priorities will be to put education in the market place. That is the terminology that is used, and we in Wandsworth know what it means. The borough will privatise as quickly as possible as many of the present services in our schools as it can. If any hon. Member believes that that will meet with the approval of parents and that it will help to improve the morale of teaching staff, he lives in a dream world.

Mr. Tracey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cox: I do not intend to give way.

We have fears, and we have ample reason to fear. The leader of Wandsworth council goes around speaking at meetings. When he is challenged about what he will do about the opposition at those meetings, he dismisses it and says, "They're a bunch of troublemakers. They are not parents." That is how much notice he takes of parents who go to those meetings out of interest to hear what the council is seeking to do.

There should be proper consultation by referendum, organised by a body such as the Electoral Reform Society. Such a referendum is not impossible because we know that the names and addresses of the parents of all the youngsters who go to our schools are available. Until there is a referendum, the Minister of State and the Secretary of State will be fooling themselves if they think that they are acting with the authority of the people of London, because they certainly do not speak for the people of London on this vital issue.

Under the leadership of London county council and then of ILEA there have been improvements. Not one of us has said that ILEA could not be improved. The tragedy is, as with the rates debates, that when the elected members of ILEA at county hall sought discussions with Ministers, they were always turned down or they were available only on Ministers' terms. There was never free discussion or the willingness to listen to some of the problems suffered in inner London education.

Neither the Minister of State, the Secretary of State nor this Tory Government speak for the people of London on this issue. If they do not listen to what people are saying, there will be utter turmoil in our education sytem. If that is what they want, heaven help London and the children of London.

8.6 pm

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) has given us an excellent rendition of the emotional case against the abolition of ILEA. However, I am afraid that he forgets that there was a recent by-election in Southfields, in Wandsworth. He may have forgotten—he certainly did not tell the House—that the by-election was fought largely upon the opting-out of Wandsworth council, which is similar to the provisions introduced by the Secretary of State. I do not need to remind the House that the Conservatives in Wandsworth council retained the seat handsomely.

Mr. Tracey: And with an increased majority.

Mr. Carrington: I thank my hon. Friend for reminding me. That gives the lie to what the hon. Member for Tooting was saying about the attitude of those in the borough.

Mr. Tracey: My hon. Friend has missed one other critical factor about that by-election. It was fought by the Labour party on the specific slogan, "Keep Wandsworth in ILEA by voting Labour."

Mr. Carrington: Indeed.

I think that it is fair to say that few tears are shed by anybody in London about the demise of ILEA. However, there are many fears about its demise, which I know many of my hon. Friends will share. They come largely from parents who have children in schools in boroughs that are run by somewhat Left-wing authorities, which, for deliberate political purposes, may go out of their way to disrupt this major change in education and try to make it not work in the efficient way in which it could work.

I believe that we shall see a campaign by certain councils. I trust that Hammersmith and Fulham council, which, unfortunately, and however temporarily, has control of my constituency, will not put the block in the way of the administrative reforms that will have to be introduced. But I am afraid that my optimism may be misplaced. My fears are shared not only by my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Shelton) but by certain other hon. Members. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will bear that in mind when he draws up the necessary proposals.

The reforms that are contained in the Education Reform Bill, combined with the reforms in local authority finance, in the form of the community charge and the uniform business rate, will make the danger of that disruption and that political control of schools by somewhat extreme Left-wing boroughs much less. Nevertheless, it is a danger that we must watch out for.

Mr. Holland: When the hon. Gentleman first raised that point, I thought that I would let it pass, but as he has

come back to it, I draw it to his attention. I do not know whether he will consider the London borough of Lambeth being excluded from that category that he has suggested. I put it to him, as an hon. Member in such a borough, that I have received no such letter from any such constituent —no such representation from any such constituent.

Mr. Carrington: I cannot answer for the hon. Gentleman's postbag. The London borough of Lambeth has a reputation along the lines that I have described. I am talking specifically about my own council's attitudes and expected reactions. I suspect that the cap will fit in certain other parts of London.

It has been made clear that ILEA's problem relates to secondary education. The low standard of ILEA secondary schools is criticised by parents, teachers, head teachers, and people who pay for education in London. However we measure it, the standard is mediocre to bad. The Sheffield university report, which has frequently been quoted, made the point that if one wants high standards from secondary schools, one does not go to ILEA schools. Their performance is based on the low standard measurements in the report.

According to statistics, secondary schools are bad. Some secondary headmasters will blame poor performance at primary schools, the standards at which children are sent to secondary schools, and their inability to be able to cope. But we are not talking about statistics. Education is not about statistics. We are talking about the standard of teaching and the qualifications that pupils—boys and girls—get from schools.

Some ILEA schools are excellent. Some schools in my constituency are excellent. The tragedy is that if one takes out the excellent schools, those that are left are even worse than those that are shown in the statistics. The interesting thing about division 1 schools — that is, Kensington, Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham — is that the ones that perform well are almost exclusively voluntary aided schools. I have talked to the head teachers and teachers of voluntary aided schools that are doing well. They attribute their good results to the fact that they fight ILEA. They do not do what ILEA tells them to do. Indeed, they are extensively criticised by ILEA for their teaching methods and for the standards that they insist that their pupils achieve.

If hon. Members want more than statistics for a condemnation of ILEA secondary schools, it is apparent that all over central London—it is particularly true in Fulham and generally where people have a choice in education—if people can possibly afford to send their children to schools other than ILEA schools, they choose to do so. They have been choosing to do so in increasing numbers. It is not a matter of class or socio-economic divisions. It is a matter of scrimping, saving and struggling to get a standard of education that they know they cannot achieve by sending their children to ILEA schools. Indeed, they would rather pay twice as much and get the type of education that they think will equip their children to be able to face the world after leaving school.

The solution is obvious. It must be the abolition of ILEA. It must be the removal of all the wrongs that go with ILEA. We have heard of many tonight, and I shall add one more.

For many years, I have been a governor of the polytechnic of central London. Until the passing of the Education Reform Bill, ILEA controls the polytechnic of central London. About two or three years ago, a senior ILEA education officer was present at a court of governors meeting. I shall not name him. He has gone on to bigger and better things. I am sure that he does not wish to be reminded of the pressures that he was under when he worked out of county hall. We were being pressured by the Labour group in control of ILEA to pass a political motion about a certain aspect of Government legislation, which was only tangentially related to education. */Interruption./* It was to do with overseas students and funding. It was tangential to the control that was exercised by the governors of the polytechnic of central London. */Interruption./* Opposition Members are making remarks from a sedentary position. I shall answer them. The reason I said that was that, as a court of governors of a polytechnic, we were forced to make political resolutions about something relating to Government policy and which only slightly affected the polytechnic, in the sense that it affected only a small proportion of students.

The court was not minded to pass the resolution. The senior officer said, "Unless you pass the resolution, it will have a bad effect on the block grant settlement that you will get from ILEA." He confirmed it when I challenged him. Needless to say, the court took the coward's way out and decided to pass the resolution. That shows the degree of politicisation that was forced upon ILEA officers even three or four years ago. That situation is considerably worse now, and it justifies a major shake-up of ILEA.

Mr. Spearing: Without going into the rights or wrongs of what he said, does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a risk of what he calls politicisation in any authority, and from the Right or the Left? As he is a business man and a representative of business, will he assure the House that the general level of support for education will not be reduced if the Bill is passed, as was stated by himself and his hon. Friends?

Mr. Carrington: I have not mentioned the financing of education in London.

Politicians on the court of governors of schools or polytechnic have a perfect right to try to get any political resolution passed. It is wrong for an officer who is there to advise and to be politically impartial to threaten the court of governors.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) mentioned financing. I was fascinated to hear some statements about the financing of education after the change to the uniform business rate and the community charge, which will coincide with the introduction of the Education Reform Bill and, therefore, the abolition of ILEA. Of course, the uniform business rate will completely change all the numbers that the hon. Gentleman talked about.

Mr. Spearing: Not the needs.

Mr. Carrington: The need-related element that will go into the financing of local education authorities will be covered by the central Government grant element, not the business rate. That is much better. High business rates destroy jobs. The hon. Gentleman would know that, as he lives in a high-rated area.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carrington: No, I shall not give way. I must go on.

Mr. Corbyn: On the point about funding?

Mr. Carrington: No. The point about funding is secondary to my argument. I must get on. The hon. Gentleman may refer to that matter later. The sooner I conclude my remarks, the more rapidly the hon. Gentleman will be called.

The abolition of ILEA is essential. The imposition of the correct controls, which will come about through the Education Reform Bill, is the right solution. It will mean that our schools will be controlled by parents and teachers for the benefit of the local community, with a local education authority in the borough that will be much more attuned to the particular needs of that borough and able, therefore, to give to its schools the assistance, resources and support which at the moment they often lack.

I have given examples of voluntary schools and, indeed, the competition between the good schools and ILEA will no longer exist once we have local education authorities within our boroughs.

I should like to echo some of the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friends about those services that ILEA provides well. Although its secondary schools are a disaster, ILEA runs certain areas well. My hon. Friends have mentioned special schools and adult education and I echo their comments. There are special schools and a special hearing unit in Fulham and I echo the view that they need to be protected and supported.

I should like to mention another type of provision, which has not been mentioned so often — nursery provision. I am a great supporter of nursery schools because I think that they lay the foundations that enable a child to develop much more rapidly. ILEA has a good provision of nursery schools which must be protected in the transition to boroughs. The boroughs should be encouraged to develop that nursery provision and to build upon what ILEA leaves behind.

ILEA will not be mourned. It has failed the children of London and it must go. Indeed, the sooner that it goes the better. My only regret about this reform is that it will take two years, not one year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I remind the House of Mr. Speaker's plea for brief speeches.

8.21 pm

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): The abolition of the Inner London education authority means the abolition of the promise of equal opportunities for inner-London's children. It means the abolition of the hopes of every parent in my constituency who wants his or her child to get a fair share of the capital's education resources. It means the abolition of the rights of the overwhelming majority of parents — simply to satisfy Tory spite. Nothing can justify robbing a generation of children of educational opportunity in this way. I speak not from a basis of prejudice or partisanship, as do many Conservative Members, but from my own observations and experiences, both previously as a governor of a school in a shire county and now as a Member of Parliament for an inner-London constituency.

For historical reasons, the constituency of Lewisham, Deptford is faced with some of the worst problems of urban decay. We all live, travel, work and try to find some leisure in a small area of land which consequently looks, and is, over-exploited and polluted. Almost one in five of my constituents is unable to find work. Within the borough of Lewisham, 25,000 people are on a housing list for a decreasing chance of better housing. A disproportionate number of people fall sick under the mental and physical strain of living in the inner city. Therefore, it is not surprising that my mailbag and my advice surgeries are filled to overflowing with people's individual problems, and that all too many of them are tragically similar.

However, hon. Members may be surprised to know that, when it comes to education, I can remember every single case that has come to me, and the reason that I can do so is that there have been so few. There have been three out of 1,000 constituency cases and not even those parents wanted ILEA to be abolished.

The schools in my constituency are proof of the value of a unitary authority and are a vindication of ILEA's overall philosophy and performance. Through its priority area assessment, ILEA has been able to provide between one and three extra members of staff to each Deptford primary school, giving us a teacher-pupil ratio greater than 1:20. That is of benefit, judged not in monetary terms, but proportional to the needs of the area. It is a shifting of resources from the richest to the poorest. Obviously, that is a Socialist philosophy, but it is one which is approved by Londoners in general and especially by employers, who know that London is a single job market, which needs common education standards.

ILEA policy recognises that children do not all enter schools with the same potential. That is not just a matter of innate intelligence, but a function of the home, the wider environment, health, culture and language. Only a London-wide authority can possibly provide the resourcing and the development of teaching skills to deal with that diversity.

ILEA has provided Lewisham with a multi-purpose teacher centre and a maths centre, both of which have contributed enormously to improving teaching standards, pupil development and pupil performance. No one involved — teacher, parent or governor — doubts that those facilities are of great value. But equally no one expects that such resources could be provided by a single inner-city borough such as Lewisham.

As the most prestigious public schools have always claimed, education is about developing the whole person. Once again, it is ILEA that has made such a philosophy possible for the inner-city schools and that has provided the resources to ensure that every child's imagination is extended in the pursuit of art, drama and music.

Under pressure today, the Secretary of State has flatly refused to make any promises that the present levels of resourcing will be maintained. Indeed, as we know, he has already decided to cut further the funding to ILEA at the same time as his colleagues are crushing still further the rate-capped authorities such as my own. We can but assume that he intends to remove every extra resource that is aimed at greater equalisation in London's education.

That will threaten two further facilities that are available to my constituents, but that are not located in my constituency. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) has already mentioned the Horniman museum. Three ILEA teachers are employed there, enabling schools in Deptford to send parties of children, from nursery to sixth form level, to a place of excellence for the study of history. Even more remarkable is the rural centre at Horton Kirby, where again the employment of ILEA staff allows my inner-city schools to make up to eight study visits per year to the Kent countryside.

The value of such facilities in extending children's experience would be taken for granted in any fee-paying school by Conservative Members, but those facilities are bitterly resented when made available to all through the ratepayers' purse.

Earlier this week, I visited an inner-city school in my constituency, as I frequently do. It is one of the less popular secondary schools, named Hatcham Wood, and is much maligned by Conservative Members. I met there, as in so many schools in Deptford, an enthusiastic and committed staff with high expectations of their pupils. I saw diligent pupils hard at work in small classes. The corridors were lined with pupils' work, as were the teachers' room and the parents' room. The school heavily involves parents, as do most ILEA schools. I also saw the school's bookshop, which sell books, to both parents and children, in 10 languages. This school takes mainly band 2 and 3 ability children, but its English results, despite the 10 languages of its children, had exceeded those of a neighbouring voluntary school with a mainly band 1 intake.

Many of the children in my constituency enter school disadvantaged. Many come from families struggling against the burdens of poverty. Many live in overcrowded conditions and one third face society's discrimination because they are black. Yet when they enter our ILEA schools, they enter an environment which does not have those disadvantages. When they enter ILEA schools, they have every expectation of access to the resources that they need for their education. When they enter ILEA schools, they are treated as equals.

No one denies that improvements could and should be made. However, no one has shown — least of all the Secretary of State — that the abolition of ILEA offers any benefits to the majority of ILEA users or its employees. I want to quote from the governors of a school in my constituency, Deptford Park primary:

"No case is made that a more efficient education system will result. 'Efficient' seems to mean cheap.

Special Needs provision will deteriorate.

Music, science and history centres will be unable to survive. The inspectorate and other Londonwide support services will be split.

We care about the future of our children in Deptford. We do not feel that these proposals will work for our children now or in the future."

I am confident that, in speaking in this way and opposing the motion, my colleagues and I know that we speak for the vast majority of London's parents.

8.31 pm

Mr. Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) made an attractive speech. Obviously she has got to know her constituency very well in the time that she has represented it, but I cannot help thinking that she has glossed over the extent of some of the problems that exist within ILEA today. However, I agree with her on one point about her part of London. I have been asked by a member of the Horniman family to stress that the Horniman museum was provided for the children and people of London. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to confirm that the outcome of reorganisation will ensure that the admirable facilities of the museum will be available to the children of London, as they always have been. I will not tell my hon. Friend the Minister how to achieve that, but it is important that that objective is achieved.

My links with ILEA date back to the time when I was a co-opted member of the education committee of the Inner London education authority. I believe that I was a member at the only time that ILEA was controlled by the Tory party. We were led by Christopher Chataway. I thought that we were rather good, and we had quite a good opposition as well. Like other hon. Members who have spoken in the debate, I have developed an affection and concern for ILEA that has stayed with me, although it has nothing to do with my constituency.

At the time to which I am referring a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends served on ILEA. They included my right hon. Friends the Members for Chertsey and Walton (Sir G. Pattie) and for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) and my hon. Friends the Members for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan) and for Streatham (Mr. Shelton). Over the years we have all watched anxiously what has happened to ILEA.

In those days ILEA was quite a new authority. It had not long changed from being the London county council. It had inherited some of the very distinguished traditions of the London county council. There was a real dedication among those who worked for ILEA towards the children and students of London. There was also a width of resources that gave ILEA certain advantages.

On the other hand, I am bound to say that, as I served on ILEA, two things began to worry me. First, I believe that there was an over-confidence that ILEA was the greatest. It was not very good at asking searching questions of itself. In a sense, parents were always a little down-graded. There was something a little too paternalistic about ILEA's ethos, admirable though it was in some respects. Secondly, there was an over-commitment on the part of the Labour party and the officers to the very big, all-through comprehensive. We began to question and rethink that while we were in office, although we did not get very far. History will clearly show that the notion of the very big comprehensive was flawed. When we talk about what is recognised as being the main weakness in London's schools today — namely, the secondary stage — to some extent the origins of that problem lie in the time to which I am referring. Since then I have not had any direct concern in ILEA, but two of my children have attended ILEA schools and I have close family connections with ILEA teachers.

I believe that over the years a decline has taken place, and that is sad. I believe that the reputation and morale of ILEA have fallen. I do not want to paint a completely black picture today. There are still many people in ILEA who are totally dedicated to the task of teaching. Much good work is being done. Hon. Members have said that adult education is exceptionally good. Special education has always had a high reputation. Good work is being done in higher and further education and good work is being carried out in the schools. Indeed, good work is being carried out in difficult circumstances, which have been described by many hon. Members during the debate.

It would be unfair to give the impression that London education is a shambles. However, I think that things have gone wrong. I do not believe that ILEA has been able to cope, as it should, with the admittedly very difficult pressures and circumstances under which it has operated. We must state that ILEA's record on secondary education, on the basis of the leaked HMI reports to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, as well as other evidence, is unsatisfactory. To have 40 per cent. of secondary schools

[Mr. Timothy Raison]

classed as unsatisfactory or poor is something that we cannot simply shrug off. Something must be done about it.

We understand the problems. Bigness is a problem. When I was a member of ILEA there was a feeling that big was the right thing to be and that we could do big things. At the same time, I was, rather unusually, a member of the education authority of a small outer-London borough. Therefore, I had the chance to compare big and small directly. Over the years, the attractions of smallness have loomed larger. Of course, smallness involves a more intimate way of running an education system.

The task of assimilating children from an enormous variety of cultures has proved to be enormously difficult. I am not sure that ILEA has handled that as well as it should have. My right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) was right to state that the record shows that often children from ethnic minorities do very well judged by formal results. I am delighted at that. However, it is not simply a question of classroom results. There have been great difficulties assimilating the large number of people who come to London with different languages. Because ILEA has pursued too many red herrings and has not concentrated enough on the basic, simple task of teaching all children the three R's, and so providing the basic education which the national curriculum is designed to restore, to some extent it has failed to deal with the problem.

ILEA has played its part in what we can only regard overall as a deterioration in attitudes towards standards and discipline. Of course, the background includes a great deal of family breakdown. We cannot blame the education authority for that. However, I believe that at the heart of ILEA's philosophy—if I can generalise in these terms—there has been a failure to get to grips with what I would call the moral imperatives which must accompany education if it is to be successful.

I also believe that ILEA has not, by and large, been well served by the Inner London Teachers Association or by many of the younger and more militant teachers who have had far too much influence in inner London education. They have been egged on and backed by the other great weakness in ILEA — the excessive or irresponsible politicisation that has been shown——

Mr. Corbyn: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Raison: I will not give way, as I want to be brief.

In London and elsewhere there has been excessive meddling by elected representatives in what I regard to be the true domain of the professional in running education. I know that that is an unpopular thing to say in a House of elected representatives. However, that has been a serious problem to which ILEA has succumbed. All those factors have led to a loss in the intrinsic authority of the Inner London education authority. What should we do about that?

I have to confess, as does every hon. Member who describes his own part in government—if he has been in government—that in the period around 1980 I was one of those who at that time fought successfully to maintain ILEA. I thought at the time that it was the right answer, but I find it much harder to summon up enthusiasm for keeping it today. There is, in any event, a stronger case for change in certain regards. In particular, the removal of the polytechnics of higher education, as laid down in the Bill, will certainly make it easier to hand over the powers to the boroughs, because they are a major part of what might be called all-London provision.

Another point concerns our experience of the dismantling of the GLC. The enormous forebodings expressed about the impact of that abolition have not been borne out. For example, I well remember how the arts lobby, in its usual splendid, stirring, theatrical terms, said that the arts in London would be clobbered by the demise of the GLC. Nevertheless, spending on the arts in London has risen by 40 per cent. People are creating alarmist stories which are not justified by the facts.

Mr. Corbyn: Where is the evidence for that?

Mr. Raison: Of course, I acknowledge that there is bound to be a period of uncertainty. The one fact of which I am certain is that it is right to make a clean break, as these new amendments propose, rather than the slow demise that was implicit in the Education Reform Bill mark 1. That would have been the worst of all worlds, and I think that the Government have taken the right step in providing for a complete end to ILEA.

Let me say a word about the whole business of the transfer. It is, of course, essential that the good aspects of London education, which have been referred to, should not be vitiated during the transfer process. That is the particular responsibility of my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Minister.

As for the mechanisms, I am sure that the residuary body will do a good job with the nuts and bolts. It has shown its capabilities already, and no doubt it will continue to do so. But the crucial decisions will be about the allocation of the major educational systems and institutions. As I understand it, the Government have decided to operate the arrangements—or, it could be said, co-ordinate them — through a unit in the Department of Education and Science. The alternative suggestion is that the task should be performed by an extension of the residuary body, led by a leading educationist. That argument proposes that the power should remain with the residuary body until it is satisfied that the different boroughs are capable of taking over or are in a position to do so.

It is possible to argue about which is the better way of doing that, and perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will comment on that aspect when she winds-up the debate. It is, however, crucial that the operation is carried out with tremendous sensitivity. I hope that my right hon. Friend —who is, after all, generous-spirited—will see the need, during a period in which there are bound to be all sorts of anxieties, to acknowledge the good being done by so many people. I hope that he will do so by telling London teachers —who are teaching in incredibly difficult circumstances —that he understands how difficult it is.

I know of classes in London where it is the exception for children to come from stable homes, and very unusual for a child to have two parents—certainly, two married parents. I know of classes where virtually every child—perhaps every child—receives free meals; where there are cases of incest and, occasionally, murder in the children's family background.

I hope that my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Minister will show that they understand the enormous burdens carried by the teachers who must deal with such

problems, and will therefore do all that they can to deal with the difficulties of transition in as sympathetic and constructive a way as possible. I am sure that they will do so, because they are generous people. Moreover, I feel that they can turn this into the chance of achieving something better, by stressing over and over again that the merit of the borough approach is that is brings decision-making closer to the people.

It will sometimes be dotty decision-making, just as it has been in the past. We must recognise that. It is the risk that we run. However, the aim to bring education closer to the people should remedy to some extent what I feel has been one of the weaknesses of the ILEA regime: the failure to involve parents as they should be involved. I believe that the borough pattern offers some chance of that, and I hope that, provided that that kind of sensitivity is shown by my right hon. Friend, we can look forward to the day when London education ends its long decline and begins an upturn.

8.45 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I am not a London Member, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I am therefore grateful to have caught your eye. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may well find that I can make a shorter speech without their interventions. I was about to say that, in deference to them and to hon. Members who wish to speak, I shall attempt to make my speech fairly short, but if they persist in interrupting me they will find that I can speak for far longer.

I have a few comments to make on behalf of my party, and, in particular, on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes).

Mr. Corbyn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: Yes, if the hon. Gentleman insists.

Mr. Corbyn: I do insist. I find it very strange that, having heard a lengthy speech earlier from the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes), who purported to represent the views of the alliance on education matters, we now have a speech from the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), a constituency which, as far as I am aware, is not part of ILEA. There are not even any ILEA establishments in Yeovil. Apparently, the hon. Gentleman represents some other part of the alliance. Will he tell us what is going on, and how long he will take to tell us about it?

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman will discover that it will take considerably less time for me to say what I have to say if I am not burdened by such ludicrous and ridiculous interventions. I am representing not only my own constituents, but my own view, and, moreover, I am the spokesman for a party with 17 Members of Parliament. I do not think that inconsiderable. I shall confine myself to a relatively short speech, if the hon. Gentleman will allow me to do so.

We have heard some interesting speeches from Conservative Members. The right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) mentioned the size of ILEA; indeed, one of the arguments frequently put forward by the Government is that ILEA is one of the largest education authorities in Europe, if not the largest. For the record, that is not the case: Strathclyde has 135 more schools, and many more pupils.

However, the most remarkable speech that we have heard came from the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). I suppose that the only explanation for that rather extraordinary speech was that it was intended to contribute not to this debate, but rather to a debate with a somewhat wider circle. His most remarkable comment, after a long disquisition about how ILEA had suffered from a lack of teachers, was the presumption that handing it over to such boroughs as Southwark and Camden would cause a flood of teachers to come in.

There is no doubt that ILEA needs reform; I suspect that Opposition Members would agree with that. In some areas, there has been inefficiency and political interference. I am told that not a single ILEA building has been sold for at least 10 years, despite depopulation. However, what strikes me as extraordinary is that, if in isolated instances ILEA is as bad as the Government claim, a Government who have had the power under the Local Government Act 1985 to intervene and to make amendments have never used those powers that they now use as a political pretext to bring about the abolition of ILEA.

Although the excellent speech by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) put the case extremely well, I do not take his view that there has been a substantial U-turn. I do not think that the long-term conclusion of the Government's original proposals—killing off ILEA by stealth—and what they are now doing in a single brutal act of dismemberment are significantly different in outcome, although I recognise that they were not broadcast, as the Secretary of State would suggest, in the manifesto. I suggest that the reasons have nothing to do with the future of 250,000 schoolchildren in London. They have everything to do with the internal squabbles and the personal ambitions in the Conservative party. That seems to have been proved beyond contradiction.

If we need changes in ILEA—and I think that we do—we should have a long-term in-depth review. The recommendations from that could deal with the question whether ILEA should be abolished. That is the way to go about these matters. Instead of a decent, measured, in-depth review we are to get a brutal hastily conducted, politically motivated and inevitably bloody and disruptive dismemberment of London's strategic body.

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: I hope that the hon. Lady will forgive me if I do not give way. I wish to keep my speech brief because other hon. Members would like to speak.

The reasons for abolishing ILEA feature prominently in the motion which talks about

"profligate overspending with a persistent failure to raise standards".

The matter of overspending seems to have been coped with adequately. The reality is that, whereas ILEA spends about 1·5 times the national average, the Health Service—which is controlled not by elected representatives but by politically appointed representatives of the Government—spends about twice the national average. The police, again under Government control, spends about 3·5 times the national average.

The hon. Member for Blackburn spoke about standards. Persistently, reports from Her Majesty's inspectorate say that if we take into account the social and economic factors, ILEA comes out at about the national average in most cases. That is perfectly clearly said. If we

[Mr. Ashdown]

look at the undoctored figures, which I looked at today, the Department of Education and Science figures for the increase in the number of pupils who gained five or more O-levels or the equivalent between 1978 and 1985—quite an important category — we find that in that period ILEA's improvement was 15 per cent. whereas, the national average was 13 per cent. That area touches precisely ILEA's greatest weakness — the secondary sector.

If the problem is standards, how will the Government's suggestions and proposals improve them? As we have had clearly demonstrated, if anything, the poorer boroughs, where one would expect standards to be lower, where the areas of deprivation are highest and the problems greatest, will get not more resources, but massively fewer. Although the Government say that they will compensate for that, the level of compensation required will be massive. I have heard the figure of £10 million quoted by an Opposition Member. Greenwich contributes 2·68 per cent. to the ILEA budget and takes out of it 10·3 per cent. The Minister of State is to reply to this debate. If she tells the House that the Government will make good that shortfall, perhaps she has an argument. I am willing to bet anything that the hon. Lady will make no such commitment and I would bet even more that the Government will carry out no such action. Of course, the consequence of that is that the poorer, more deprived boroughs will have less money and standards will not go up; they will drop.

Evidence from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy published by Mrs. Rita Hale shows that not only will that be the case, but that the higher incidence of families with more children and fewer adults—single parents and so on—may well mean that poorer boroughs will have to pay a significantly higher poll tax than the richer boroughs because of the costs involved. CIPFA calculates that in a borough such as Hackney that could be £50 more per annum in poll tax. Not only will the poorer boroughs suffer from having fewer education resources, but the poor people living in them will have to pay a higher poll tax.

I shall finish with the most telling point of all. The Government complain that they are doing this because of Left-wing profligacy and extremism. What do the Government do? They take the children in these boroughs, lock, stock and barrel, and commit them to the tender mercies of councils such as Southwark, Camden and Lambeth.

Ms. Harman: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the future education of children in boroughs such as Southwark cannot be safeguarded when such boroughs are already struggling with growing demands for housing and social services, at a time when the resources for those services are limited? Does he not think that it is quite impossible for those boroughs to take on the task of improving education in London, which is what we want to see?

Mr. Ashdown: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. Her point is powerfully made in the Audit Commission's report which says precisely that Conservatives should realise that the Audit Commission predicts that if this should happen the burden on the already inadequate administration in many London boroughs could lead to a situation where some areas in London will become like the Bronx or the east of Chicago. Those are not the precise words, but that is what the Audit Commission said. That is the consequence that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) is talking about. I shall give a quotation for the House to think about:

> "Money spent in many areas is wasted. The services are demonstrably poor . . . it is far from being a well-run organisation. In many respects, it is on the verge of collapse".

Is that a comment on ILEA? It is not. It is a comment on Southwark borough council by its leader, Mrs. Anne Matthews. The Government want to give to that borough, not only the capacity to make a mess of the other things that it now organises, but to make a mess of education as well.

When the Secretary of State introduced the Bill, he said that the Government want to improve standards and to bring costs under control. What will they do? They will hand over education lock, stock and barrel to a council such as Southwark which in October had a deficit of £45 million. The Secretary of State has said what the Government want to achieve. That is the way they will set about achieving it.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) said that Camden borough was not fit to take over Hampstead Heath. How can he now be in favour of handing over to that borough the management of its entire education system? It does not make sense. This legislation is not only dangerous but politically motivated. It will make 250,000 children the subject of the ambitions and clashes in the Conservative party. This may well have a cynical outcome. What the Government may well wish to seek by the Bill is not only the handing over of education to Conservative boroughs, but the creation of a situation in the poorer boroughs where many schools will have no alternative but to opt out and come under the direct control of the Secretary of State. So it will be that the Conservatives will take over much of London's education, whether or not they were elected to do that job. A more cynical or corrupt act cannot have been in prospect since the days of the rotten boroughs.

To take a decision to disband ILEA without any sort of review is the height of irresponsibility. To do it hard on the heels of a wholly different commitment in the Government's manifesto is unconstitutional. To do that without setting out clearly what alternative arrangements are to be made is a betrayal of the Secretary of State's office and of the future of this city's children.

8.57 pm

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): At the time of my birth, my mother was a teacher in the London county council education service and in one way or another I have been involved in education in inner London ever since. During that time I have been conscious of a decline in almost every aspect of the provision in our secondary schools. There has been a fall in academic standards, examination results and standards of discipline. We have seen an increasing lack of motivation among teachers. A lack of dedication has crept in because of politicisation and political interference. The saddest scandal of all is that after 10 or 11 years many children who leave school in London are unemployable. They do not have the skills to take up the jobs that are waiting to be done in inner London.

ILEA is over-ripe for reform. It would be the duty of any Government to carry out that reformation. It is right that the Government should regard it as one of their greatest priorities in trying to regenerate the inner city.

I fear that I must tell my right hon. Friend that the solution that he is proposing is not the right one. While it may improve matters for children in some boroughs, it will worsen them for children in boroughs such as Southwark. I look with horror at some of the things that I see going on in secondary schools, but that pales into insignificance when I consider the horrors that will arise from a Southwark education authority.

The borough of Southwark has many problems. It is a poor borough and there is much deprivation. Its history of tackling those problems has been one of abject failure. It has done nothing to improve housing, although there have been more than adequate resources to solve that problem. Its social service provision has been indifferent at best and at worst scandalous when one remembers incidents such as those at Nye Bevan lodge and the three other local authority homes for the elderly that are at present under investigation. I feel nothing but trepidation about the future of children of Southwark, who will have no choice other than to go to a Southwark education authority school. On that basis, I cannot give support to this proposition.

I was happy to support my right hon. Friend's first suggestion. It was, no doubt, to the advantage—and good luck to them—of boroughs such as Wandsworth, Westminster or Kensington and Chelsea, who are capable of providing a better education service than that being provided by ILEA. It was right that they should be able to back their judgment, attract children and give parents a choice of school. In so doing provision should have been made for boroughs which remained but which did not have the will or competence and which deliberately avoided providing educational necessities. By allowing those in competent boroughs to opt out, there would have been an opportunity to restructure the provision for the boroughs that were left. It would have made good sense for boroughs such as Lambeth, Southwark or Greenwich and Lewisham to have formed a small unitary authority. On their own they might not have been sufficiently competent or had the expertise and professionalism necessary to run an education service, but as a small unitary authority in south-east London it could have provided a service better than that provided at present by ILEA. That possibility is not now open to the parents of Southwark. Their only choice will be to look outside the borough for a school for their children if they wish to avoid the horrors of a Southwark education service.

I fear that that is a negative reason for giving my support to this proposal. There is, however, a positive reason for my wanting a unitary authority for London to deal with certain aspects of education. I, like many Conservative Members, have focused on the defects of ILEA, but it has many good points. Those good points were not created by ILEA; they have grown up over the years. The adult education service is such an example. It was not created by ILEA; it was in place many years before that. If anything, it has been the one service that ILEA has undervalued. If ever there has been an immediate need to make a cut, ILEA has made a cut in the adult education service as the first and easiest way out.

The adult education service has been one of those interesting strategic services. It has delivered education at the point of greatest necessity and it has been adaptable in moving from building to building when required. It has adapted to social and changing needs. During the war it provided comfort and support to those who felt that there was something productive to be done together.

We have watched the adult education service develop over the years until we see it as it is today where it provides skill, occupation and hope for many who are unemployed. It offers them a second chance. For the elderly it provides social contact, productive activity and a feeling that there is still something to be learnt even though one may have retired and be over 70 or 80 years of age. I was talking to the principal of an adult education institute the other day and I asked, "What is the age range of your students?" I was told that the average age was about 46. The youngest was two months—brought by her mother to the creche—and the oldest was over 90.

The adult education provision is special and unique to London. It cannot be recreated or transplanted. My right hon. Friend has recognised the importance of AEIs and their London-wide provision. Sometimes people go not to the places which are nearest their homes but to those nearest their work. My right hon. Friend has recognised the expertise and specialism of AEIs. He has recognised the importance of such institutes as the "City Lit", the Mary Ward centre, the working men's institute and Morley college. He has recognised that they provide a London-wide service which could never be taken on by an individual borough. He has to carry out the delicate but difficult act of surgery of trying to separate the bad parts of ILEA from the good parts which may wither if they are not sustained. I welcome the fact that a unit is to be set up in the Department to ensure that the AEIs continue.

As to the importance of special education, we all know that many parents of children with learning difficulties find it hard to get assessments from ILEA. The delays are unconscionable but expertise exists to deal with them. I dread to think what would happen if it were left to the bureaucracy of Southwark council to make the necessary reference for assessment.

I am sorry that I cannot give my right hon. Friend my support for his proposals. I hope that he will be able to reassure me that some of my misgivings about the future are understood by him and can be allayed.

9.7 pm

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): I am glad that the Secretary of State has joined us again, especially in view of much of his misrepresentation concerning the leader of the Inner London education authority, Mr. Neil Fletcher. I have a copy of a letter sent to him today by Mr. Fletcher to which I hope he will be able to respond. I hope that he will respond especially on the matter of the quotations, which the Secretary of State has taken out of context. The first concerns a Socialist Education Association fringe meeting on 30 September. The full quotation of what Neil Fletcher said was:

> "Let me make it absolutely clear that I have always been and remain a fervent believer in comprehensive education. I want to see a service which provides the best quality of education for all the children regardless of their class, their race, or their sex."

In his letter to the Secretary of State Mr. Fletcher has said:

> "Since I sent a copy of the speech concerned to you, I am surprised that you have allowed your colleague to indulge in such gross misrepresentation. You are perfectly well aware that my speech cannot be construed in any way as supporting any of the proposals in the Education Reform Bill."

[Mr. Stuart Holland]

There is also the matter of selective quotations from the reports of Her Majesty's inspectorate. On 4 February the Secretary of State referred in the House to Her Majesty's inspectorate reports on ILEA which "express real concern". There are other quotations from the reports which are relevant to the debate regarding ILEA's provision such as:

"ILEA's provision for under-fives is among the best in the country";

and

"Overall ILEA's adult education provision is a first-rate service in every respect".

On its research and statistics provision Her Majesty's inspectorate's finding is that it

"has now, and has always had, a high national and international reputation. Some of its work over the years has been seminal and had an influence and importance far beyond ILEA".

Again,

"When (exam) results are adjusted for socio-economic factors the ILEA appears to perform up to expectations."

Several Conservative Members have criticised the London borough of Lambeth. It is the second most deprived borough in London. It has the highest proportion of single-parent families and a very high proportion of children with special needs. It is a multilingual borough. One fifth of all schoolchildren speak a language other than English at home—mainly Bengali, Chinese or Urdu. Thirteen ILEA schools in Lambeth are special schools catering for children with a wide range of disabilities — including visual and hearing impairment and motor disability — as well as emotionally and behaviourally disturbed children. Children from all over London attend those schools. In addition, children with special needs are now being supported in mainstream primary and secondary schools.

A further problem facing Lambeth is that, while secondary school rolls are falling, primary school rolls are increasing, with a 12 per cent. rise projected by 1992 demonstrating the need for additional resources to meet the increasing demand for primary places.

I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) is not with us. He said earlier that he could not think of a single way in which the abolition of the GLC had made anything worse. I put it to him that the abolition of the strategic housing role of the GLC has meant that thousands of families and individuals who would have been moved to outer London have not been moved there. As a result, since 1982 the birth rate has risen in inner London, placing increased pressure on the schools. I regret to note that the Secretary of State is involved in conversation and is not paying attention to the argument. No doubt his officials will draw my remarks to his attention when they appear in *Hansard*.

Inner-London boroughs have a higher proportion of older school buildings than outer-London boroughs. They have not been the beneficiaries of modern building programmes to the same extent as outer London boroughs.

Some 5,000 Lambeth children cross borough boundaries to attend secondary schools elsewhere — for example, in Pimlico. How is that cross-borough transfer to be funded? Perhaps the Minister of State will reply to that question. Will it stop? Do the Government intend to slam the door on the inner-city in education as they have in housing?

Other centres of excellence, such as Morley college, have been referred to by Conservative Members. Morley college is a centre of excellence for music classes and unique foreign language classes. Lambeth and Southwark together—there are facilities in both boroughs—could not possibly afford such funding.

I come to nursery education and stress once more that the birth rate is now rising in inner London boroughs such as Lambeth. The Lambeth nursery education group advises me that only 23 per cent. of three and four-year-olds enjoy nursery education, as compared with 100 per cent. in France and Belgium. ILEA has the best record in the United Kingdom, with provision for up to 40 per cent. Nursery education is non-statutory. *[Interruption.]* I have just been made an offer that I shall refuse reluctantly as representations were made to me on a range of issues at a special meeting last Saturday lasting more than four hours. I urge Conservative Members to address those issues. There is a nursery school within walking distance —a few hundred yards—of the House. Ninety-three per cent. of the children who attend that school live in council housing and more than 50 per cent. are from one-parent families. The children in that school alone speak 14 different languages. As the headmaster of that school made plain to me, the house will fall if the foundations are inadequate. It is clear from Scandinavian evidence that primary and infant teaching greatly facilitate the achievement of literacy.

Another point, which has not been raised in the debate, has been put to me by the chair of the governors of Heathbrook primary school. A unanimous resolution was passed by those governers saying that the abolition of ILEA would destroy the balance between the boroughs and their facilities and learning resources. More than that, the governors want to be concerned with education. School governors do not wish to have to take over ILEA's administrative functions. They do not want the responsibility of hiring and firing ancillary staff. They do not want to be concerned with executive management. Heads of schools do not want to become executive managers. They want to be able to teach.

On adult education, it was reported directly to me that, of the 30,000 students in the London borough of Wandsworth attending three institutes, 12,700 filled in answers to a referendum within a week, and 92 per cent. said, "Leave us alone."

I submit that on a range of grounds the Education Reform Bill is an abomination. It should not have been introduced. It will not only decimate resources and demoralise staff but do damage to the education of our children.

9.15 pm

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): I have been amazed at the Opposition's speeches during the four hours for which I have sat here and listened with great interest. The rosy pictures which they painted bore no relation to the position in inner-London schools. One would never believe from listening to them that good schools have been destroyed over the past 20 years, that subjects have been removed from the curriculum in many schools, that lack

of discipline and truancy are problems and that examination results, especially in secondary schools, are so poor.

Of course ILEA has some good points. It has been innovative in many ways and especially good in nursery provision and further education, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) told us. It will not do to hear half-truths and half the story. All of us who have been involved in education in London over many years know the true position — the deterioration in schools and standards in inner London. ILEA should have been abolished when the late and unlamented Greater London council was finally laid to rest. Just like the GLC in its day, ILEA is remote and bureaucratic. It performs functions that could be dealt with by boroughs, just as many other functions are.

I have a twofold involvement in ILEA. First, I was a governor and manager in Hackney schools in the late 1970s. I was appalled by what I found in my many visits to schools there. I have continued to keep in contact with people in Hackney, and I believe that the position is far worse now in 1988 than it was in 1979. Children in Hackney used to have good grammar schools, which gave them a passport to the future, to a good career and a better life. Unfortunately, today they do not have that opportunity.

Secondly, because my constituency is in the outer London borough of Bexley, it borders the Greenwich boundary of ILEA. The Opposition may tell us that parents do not object to the continuation of ILEA and that they want to continue to be part of it, but my postbag is heavy with mail from people from Thamesmead on the Greenwich side who want their children to go to schools in Bexley because the standards there are far better and the opportunities greater, and they want the best for their children. In the past few months, many parents have written to me in connection with the borough boundary review.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Evennett: I am sorry, but I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, who would not give way earlier to me. Time is short.

Many parents from both sides of the border boundary have written to me fearful that a change in the boundary will put them into ILEA, with all the consequences that that will have for their children's education.

We do not need the opinion polls. We have letters from parents who are worried about being in ILEA. Parents may not take this matter up with all their representatives on the Opposition Benches, because they know that they will not get sympathy. They know that dogma will rule in these cases.

In places such as Thamesmead, there is real concern on the part of parents for their children's education. They want better standards and welcome the provisions of the Government's Education Reform Bill which will raise standards and set a curriculum for the schools. We must look forward to the future of the children of London—a future that has been regrettably neglected by large areas of ILEA in the past decade or so. We cannot sit back and allow that to happen. It is not acceptable for the parents, the children, the ratepayers or the taxpayers. We must never forget that the standards we want from those who educate our children will be such as to provide them with a passport for the future. They have not been offered that in the recent past in inner London. The only way forward must be reform. I welcome the abolition of ILEA; the sooner it comes the better.

9.20 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): We have had a lively and interesting debate — interesting in the sense that every Conservative Member representing a constituency in inner London who has spoken has expressed reservations about the Secretary of State's proposals. We may not see that reflected in the Division Lobby tonight, but we shall hear their fears echoed in every house in inner London. The views expressed by Conservative Members will, I am sure, be reproduced by many other people. The Secretary of State does not have the support of his inner-London colleagues who have deigned to turn up and participate in the debate.

We have witnessed a couple of sideshows, too. There was the sideshow about who represents the militant centre of British politics. I congratulate the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) on winning that battle. I do not know whether it was a precursor of other events, but I understand that she recently refused to share a platform with the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). If so, she has at least had the opportunity tonight to speak first, rather than looking for an alternative platform, as she did on that occasion. It is lovely to see the forces of moderation working so closely together.

The other sideshow has been the battle for the leadership of the Conservative party. Some were offering odds before tonight's debate — I notice that the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) has walked in on cue — on who would succeed the right hon. Lady the Prime Minister as the next leader of the Conservative party. Two of the three contestants have spoken in tonight's debate. The right hon. Member for Henley and the Secretary of State are now offered odds that are much more favourable than before; and the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) is now regarded by the bookmakers as more of a potential favourite, merely because he had the good sense—unlike the other two—not to utter a word tonight and to be happy that he got the outcome that he wanted. If I may offer a word of advice to the Secretary of State——

Mr. Straw: Do that.

Mr. Fatchett: As my hon. Friend knows, I take a keen interest in the right hon. Gentleman's career. I notice that, recently, he has had to make one or two concessions—first to his right hon. Friends, and then yesterday to my hon. Friends in the Committee on the subject of higher education. Perhaps those concessions were also made to the world of higher education outside. I suspect that, if the right hon. Gentleman's campaign for the Conservative leadership continues in this way, he will become the political equivalent of Eddie Edwards in the winter Olympics: he will not take off, but he will get considerable publicity in the process.

Conservative hon. Members have advanced two main arguments this evening. First, they have said that ILEA has failed to provide a good education service; and, secondly, that it has failed to provide it at an acceptable cost. My hon. Friends have already discussed those arguments, and I want to examine them in detail. They

[Mr. Fatchett]

may be viewed in general terms, but it is crucial that we also examine them in an historical context that goes back a number of years. It goes back particularly to 1985, when the noble Lord Joseph decided that we should have an elected Inner London education authority. The right hon. Members for Chingford and for Henley were members of that Cabinet and supported that decision, so we have to ask whether ILEA, against those two criteria, has deteriorated substantially during the past three years.

One could come even closer than April 1985, to 1 December 1987, when the Secretary of State and the Minister of State, in the Second Reading debate on the Education Reform Bill, did not argue for the abolition of ILEA. In one of the flourishes of rhetoric for which the Minister has become so well known, she described ILEA as a model authority. She clearly believes in model building but also, eight weeks later, in model destruction. It might be useful to hear what has happened to the Minister of State to cause such a substantial change of mind. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said that the Secretary of State could not be accused of consistency, but nor can the Minister of State when she shifts her ground so noticeably in such a short time.

We have to look at the general facts, and at the changes. Virtually every Conservative Member used examination results in ILEA as the only criterion against which to judge a good education service. There was no reference to primary education, nursery education, special needs or adult education, and on all those services ILEA does well, or better than average. However, let us look at the examination results figures. If those figures are weighted for socio-economic factors, ILEA does not come 86th out of 94 or, as the Secretary of State cheaply tried to say earlier, bottom. It comes higher.

The Sheffield university figures produced in 1987 show ILEA alongside average performing local education authorities. It compares with Oxfordshire and Hampshire and, although we do not have the Under-Secretary—the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) — here, it compares with Kent. We have not heard an argument for the abolition of those authorities. ILEA also compares favourably with Bromley and Bexley. I understand why the Conservative party might argue for certain parts of the Bexley borough to be abolished, but I have never heard an argument for the abolition of Bexley local education authority. In later Sheffield figures, a third of the authorities are deemed to be efficient in examination terms, and that third includes ILEA.

These further figures have not been referred to, so I shall go into them in some detail. Since 1964, ILEA has been testing 11-year-olds in maths, English and verbal reasoning. Those results have been calculated by the National Foundation of Educational Research. They show that in the mid-1960s ILEA achieved a rating of 102, which is well above the national average. In 1970, that figure had fallen to 95. By 1980, it had again increased to 100 and it has stayed above that figure ever since. There has been no change or deterioration since the decision was taken in April 1985 to continue with ILEA. On the statistics, ILEA is not an under-performing authority. When that is taken alongside the provision in primary, nursery, adult and youth services, ILEA has a record of which it can be proud.

The other argument used by the Secretary of State and his hon. Friends is that ILEA is expensive. But they do not say and cannot argue that the overall costs have become more expensive since the Joseph decision to maintain ILEA. The figures from the beginning of this decade show that expenditure on ILEA has increased less than that on the metropolitan districts and shire counties. If the Government base their case on the figures from the early 1980s, it is not only ILEA but the shire counties and metropolitan districts that should be abolished. But one must be careful when using that sort of logic with this Government because the next Bill will abolish those districts and shire counties.

Figures also show that provision in London — a capital city with its attendant problems—will be much more expensive. We have seen that in terms of social services and the police, and we know it to be true for educational provision because of demographic reasons.

The Government give figures of costs per child. I am not surprised by the cost per child in inner London, nor am I embarrassed by it. We believe in investing in education and in our children. With all the social disadvantages that exist in a large capital city, the social policy that provides equality of opportunity is one which invests in the education of those youngsters. We are not embarrassed about that; we are proud. If we have opened up opportunities for youngsters in London, we can say, "We have achieved that and Conservative Members have resisted it."

When Conservative Members talk to us about the cost per child and say that it is too much, many London parents recognise that for the humbug that it is. That comes from a party which, almost without exception, decided on the opt-out principle in practice many years ago. Conservative Members opted out of the state system and sent their children to private schools. The sums that they spend on their children's education are much greater than those spent in inner London.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): What about assisted places?

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend mentions the assisted places scheme, and the figures prove his point. We are not embarrassed by the cost of inner-London education. If it has provided greater opportunities, we applaud and welcome it, and we will continue to fight for it.

With those two arguments, the Government's case has been threadbare. There could have been a third argument. There could have been a queue of people going to Elizabeth house, knocking on the door and saying to the Secretary of State, "We want ILEA abolished." Parents would have to do it that way because the Secretary of State does not visit inner-London schools. He has three junior Ministers and they have visited six inner-London schools in the period when he has visited one. Ministers have visited six out of 1,000 schools, so parents would have to trek to Elizabeth house to see the Secretary of State and put their argument. But there is no demand from parents that ILEA should be abolished.

Individual parents were the largest single group to respond to the consultative process, accounting for 41 per cent. of the total. How many parents objected to the Government's plans to change educational provision in inner London? The answer is 99·8 per cent. Even this Government could not rig a ballot and say that that is not

a substantial majority. There are, of course, other figures. An opinion poll from Wandsworth shows that 76 per cent. of parents are satisfied with the educational provision.

Last week we debated the rate capping of ILEA. I always believe that there is a great deal of hypocrisy on the part of Conservative Members when they talk about the costs of inner-London education to the taxpayers. They have stopped the taxpayer from contributing to children's education in London.

In the course of that debate, the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) said:

"the Government will have a political problem on their hands in trying to convince some London parents." — [*Official Report*, 10 February 1988; Vol. 127, c. 469.]

I believe that that is something of an understatement, but it is a move in the right direction. The Government will have a political problem on their hands when they try to convince a majority of parents in London that they should favour the abolition of ILEA. In this context, some equals most.

The Government talk about parent power. When are they going to consult inner London parents and when are they going to give those parents a right to a ballot on this decision? I hope that the fears of the hon. Member for Buckingham will be confirmed by such a ballot and that he will support such a confirmation.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I think that it is a little unfair of the hon. Gentleman to quote my conclusion without quoting my premises. I said that there was educational apathy in inner London and my premise was that that apathy had been encouraged by the Labour party and by ILEA. My other premise was that the low expectations of ILEA are, unfortunately, reflected in the socially low expectations among the parents. For those reasons, plus the fact that ILEA is used as a gigantic propaganda machine, I believe that it is possible that the Government will have political problems. Let us stick to the premises as well as the conclusion.

Mr. Fatchett: The hon. Gentleman is demonstrating an arrogance towards inner-London parents. If he is fearful of apathy, why does he not allow apathy the opportunity to show itself in the ballot box? If that opportunity is provided, the hon. Gentleman knows that inner-London parents will vote for ILEA.

Mr. John Marshall *rose*——

Mr. Fatchett: No, time is short and I must allow the Minister time to reply.

London parents are worried that there will not be a strategic authority to provide and plan for education in inner London. There is also the fear in all the poorer boroughs of inner London about the redistributive impact of abolishing ILEA. My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) expressed that fear earlier and also convincingly argued that the Secretary of State only talked about a formula for future grant allocation. The Secretary of State did not give a commitment — the Minister of State must give that commitment tonight — on whether the poorer boroughs will be made poorer as a result of the abolition of ILEA. The Government's record leads to one conclusion: they will take further money out of Hackney and the other poorer inner-London boroughs.

If all else fails — all else has failed in the Government's intellectual argument — the Government fall back on the simple arrogance of mandate. They say, "We have a majority and we are going to drive it through." They may try to drive it through, but they have no moral authority for the decision that they are taking. That authority is not contained in their manifesto because it contained no reference to the total abolition of ILEA. Indeed, there was no reference in the consultative document or in the Bill to total abolition. That absence was noted by the right hon. Members for Henley and for Chingford, who launched a campaign for the total abolition of ILEA. If the Bill had allowed for total abolition in the simple form, their campaign would have been unnecessary.

It is totally hypocritical and misleading of the Government to argue that they had a mandate for abolition in the first place. They have no such mandate and they have no popular support for the decision that they are taking.

There is no mandate for abolition. There are no sound educational arguments. There is certainly no blueprint for future provision at borough level — parents are being forced, without any say whatever, to accept a leap in the dark. When *The Economist* said on 30 January that

"the plan to emasculate ILEA smacks more of political spite than educational strategy".

it was right. The measure represents yet another defeat for the Secretary of State — about that we shed no tears — but, more importantly, the measure represents a defeat for the orderly provision of education in inner London. It is those children and their parents who will be the losers. To protect their interests, I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against the Government's proposal.

9.40 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): My hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Shelton) congratulated my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on his far-sightedness and reliability, and his consistent view that education should be devolved to the boroughs in inner London. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham and my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison), I am a convert to that view. Like them, I believed that ILEA, in the face of a Government who could so successfully return the powers of the Greater London council to the boroughs, would take heed and mend its ways, but sadly it did not. Seven years later, we have exactly the same failings in the Inner London education authority that we had in the years when some of us thought that it could mend its ways.

I should like to read two quotations. Mr. Steven Cowan, now the ILEA member for Westminster, North but a prospective member at the time, said, according to *London Labour Briefing* of May 1986:

"The ILEA is the most bureaucratic LEA in the country because of its double layer of officials at County Hall and at Divisional Offices . . . all too often it leads to the erection of a professional barrier between the community and elected politicians".

Those are the words of a current member of ILEA. I should also like to quote, as many other hon. Members have done, the leader of ILEA, Mr. Neil Fletcher, who told the Socialist Education Association on 30 September 1987:

"Does our system let down these children? For too many of them, if we are honest, the answer is yes. Why are working

[Mrs. Angela Rumbold]

class children still not doing as well as their middle class peers? I am doubtful as to how far we should take socio-economic background as a determinant excuse".

Those are the words of the people who are currently running ILEA.

Mr. Straw: As the Minister is quoting various people, will she quote her own words in the House on 1 December? She said:

"The Government's aim is to improve both the quality and the cost-effectiveness of education in inner london. That would not be achieved at this stage by imposing educational responsibilities on unwilling boroughs."—[*Official Report*, 1 December 1987; Vol. 123, c. 856.]

What change was there between 1 December and 4 February?

Mrs. Rumbold: A clear sign that other boroughs such as Wandsworth, Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea were making plans to become independent education authorities, so they would destabilise the current ILEA. I had serious concerns about the effect of that upon the remaining authorities. I should like to refer— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Give the hon. Lady a chance.

Mrs. Rumbold: I should like to refer——

Mr. Fatchett: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Rumbold: No. I should like to answer the debate. I do not have much time.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) made the point that we need to ensure efficiency of borough administration and administrative structures. The development plans that boroughs will be required to publish will have to set out the proposed administrative organisation. We share my right hon. Friend's view of the importance of the matter. I assure him that we shall devote carefull attention to that aspect of boroughs' plans.

The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) stated that 44 per cent. of pupils in Tower Hamlets are from Bangladeshi families. We accept that boroughs will need to continue to make provision for children whose first language is not English. That is one of the subjects that we shall discuss with the boroughs concerned.

I remind hon. Members that much of the Inner London education authority's existing provision is funded by the section 11 grant. Of course, that grant will continue to be available to boroughs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) mentioned his concern about the Horniman museum. Obviously, we recognise the quality of that museum and of the Geffrye museum, which the Inner London education authority also maintained. We shall most certainly consider the arrangements that will be most appropriate for securing the future of those museums.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury said, in relation to the unit that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has mentioned that he will set up, that the London residuary body would need to have some additional education experts seconded to it. We have established a special unit within our Department to take forward the necessary discussions and arrangements as quickly as possible. In doing that, we wish to seek the views of all those with experience in the range of education provision. We certainly look to local professionals, above all the head teachers and other teachers in the boroughs, to contribute to and to comment on the development plans that boroughs will be required to produce.

The Inner London education authority's difficulties are not of a wholly different order from those of other inner-city areas, but it still continues to spend 45 per cent. more per pupil than Manchester spends, and 83 per cent. more per pupil than Birmingham spends. Is all that money going on education in the classroom? Eased by the extent to which ILEA can achieve economies of scale that are not possible in smaller authorities, of course it is not.

Why else does ILEA have to employ two and a half administrators for every one administrator employed by the average local education authority? The quotation that I gave from Mr. Steven Cowan goes some way towards explaining that. As for devolution of education to boroughs, many educational divisions of the Inner London education authority are mirrored by boroughs. Of course, there are 10 divisions, and only three share more than two boroughs. Most of them are equal and conterminous with the divisions of the Inner London education authority.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) talked about the Metropolitan police. He said that, because of the capital city's difficulties, it is impossible to compare the costs of the Inner London education authority. He prayed in aid the argument that the Metropolitan police are much more expensive. Hon. Members should note that London's policing problems are different from those in the rest of the country. The London area has about 45 per cent. of all registered drug addicts, about 50 per cent. of robberies, and 75 per cent. of all armed robberies. On 1985-86 estimates, costs per police officer are about 38 per cent. more than the England average. The Inner London education authority is spending about 50 per cent. more per secondary pupil than the outer-London borough average. The Inner London education authority is still failing disastrously.

If overspending had been the only charge against ILEA, it would have been grave enough, but, above all, that extravagance pays no significant dividends in the classroom. That means that a better way must be found.

Opposition Members have had a great deal of fun adducing all sorts of things from the advice provided by Her Majesty's inspectorate. They appear to rely more for their judgments on the newspapers than on the hard evidence of published HMI reports. Certain phrases toll like a bell through HMI reports on ILEA's schools—for example,

"despite a generous staffing establishment"

and

"no apparent shortages of suitable apparatus and equipment",

or

"in spite of good provision in terms of staffing, accommodation, ancillary support and equipment, materials and books, and of the offer of an extensive in-service programme".

All too frequently the reports go on to reveal serious shortcomings about what goes on both inside and outside the classroom. Only last summer, there was a report of an absolute fiasco that took place because of the poor organisation of a recent Ramayana Asian festival in Battersea park. It was set up——

Mr. Fatchett: The Minister has quoted selectively from an HMI report. Will she now publish that report and allow

the country to see what it said about primary education, the youth service, special needs provision and adult education — indeed, what it said about all that ILEA does well in relation to research and provision? Will she publish that report and allow the full picture to come out, or will she continue to quote selectively as she has done already?

Mrs. Rumbold: Everything that I have quoted from HMI reports has been published. However, the hon. Gentleman quoted from a confidential summary of a selection of reports sent to my right hon. Friend. Therefore, I do not choose to quote from that. I choose to quote from the recent experience of the children——

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No — this is an ILEA debate, not a Scottish debate.

Mr. Maxton *rose*——

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda) *rose*——

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham) *rose*——

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members are interrupting from a sedentary position and it is difficult to hear.

Mr. Foulkes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Maxton: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: What is the point of order?

Mr. Maxton: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. First, may I remind you that you constantly remind us at Scottish Question Time that this is a British Parliament —*[Interruption.]* We rather resent being told that this is an ILEA debate and not a Scottish debate.

Secondly, for the Minister to say that the report is confidential, but then to quote from it is surely——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order. I ask the hon. Gentleman to look at the Order Paper, which says that this is an ILEA debate.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am sure that Scottish Members will enjoy the——

Mr. Home Robertson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It has been a good-natured debate so far.

Mrs. Rumbold: I shall continue with my story — [HON. MEMBERS: "Fairy story"] It is not a fairy story; it is a fact. I am talking about what happened at the Ramayana Asian festival in Battersea, where it is reported:

"Children were left sitting around for hours and could not see the displays. Aimed at stimulating multi-cultural awareness, it may have had the reverse effect, leaving youngsters dispirited and bored, the authority has been told.

'It seemed to us that the only well-organised part of the festival was the tent dispensing free wine and food to invited guests,' teachers, parents, and other staff from one school, Cardwell primary, Woolwich, have protested to the ILEA.

'Children worked hard for several weeks preparing their puppets and rehearsing for what should have been the exciting climax to their labours.'"

I do not deny that there is much good provision within the Inner London education authority's vast empire. Hon. Members have talked about adult education, and further education. The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) talked about her experiences as a parent of a child with special education needs. Of course, we shall look at that provision. Every local education authority is under a duty to secure adequate provision for children with special education needs. Every local education authority in the country meets that duty by co-operating with other authorities, as the hon. Member for Greenwich said.

Even the Inner London education authority does not and cannot make every form of specialised provision for every form of handicap. The practice in inner-London boroughs will reflect what happens in outer London. We regard that as a particularly important matter which we will discuss with all the boroughs and which we will expect to see dealt with in some detail in the boroughs' development plans.

I must tell Opposition Members that, in the area of crucial concern to employers and parents — the secondary age group — ILEA's provision is admittedly generally poor. The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney said that examination results are not everything and must be interpreted with great care. However, they are an important indicator for parents and employers. I can tell the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) that not long ago, when Lambeth council considered the provisions that ILEA was planning for Lambeth, a report to council members stated:

"Over one third of Lambeth's children are educated outside the Borough. The Council believes that these proposals could perpetuate the denial of accessible secondary education to large sections of Lambeth's community if steps are not taken to improve local education."

Mr. Ashdown: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mr. Holland: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Rumbold: That authority is clearly looking after the interests of its children. I have more sympathy with my hon. Friends who are concerned about authorities that may be too irresponsible to be entrusted with children's education. However, I can tell my hon. Friends that they should remember that some powerful safeguards are included in the Education Reform Bill. It includes the national curriculum and wider parental choice.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Rumbold: No. The hon. Gentleman continually comes into the Chamber in the middle of debates and always wants to intervene. I am glad to say that the hon. Member for Greenwich took advantage of his gallantry and spoke first—and about time, too.

The delegation of powers to governing bodies, heads and the right to opt out are also included in the Bill.

I want to quote again from that wonderful Mr. Steven Cowan, member of ILEA. Indeed, this is even more important, as it appears in *London Labour Briefing*. He said:

"Progress needs to be made to reduce the proportion of school places under the control of the Church. Their presence and practices are racist and segregationist. We should aim to achieve a secular comprehensive and community-based education in this country."

[HON. MEMBERS: "We cannot hear."] If you cannot hear, it is because you are not listening—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I should like to be able to hear.

Mrs. Rumbold: I apologise. Obviously you were listening, Mr. Speaker, but the hon. Members to whom I was referring were not.

I want to address a few words to my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden). I understand his concern that some boroughs may not be capable of providing an effective education service. My hon. Friend said that he remained in favour of opting out as the basis for a transfer of educational responsibilities. However, where opting out proposals are likely to receive support from a significant number of boroughs, the case for a single, clean break must become unanswerable. A rump ILEA or my hon. Friend's suggestion of some form of mini-ILEA would leave matters in a state of uncertainty and would not provide the basis for improvement that he agrees is needed. In the development plans that we are expecting, we will want to consider management structure and the nature of some of the senior appointments.

Opposition Members referred to parent power and parents' wishes. The hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) said that we should ask the parents and take their views on board. I must tell the hon. Gentleman that, in the fortnight since my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the Government's proposals, we have received about 200 letters.

Mr. Holland *rose*——

Mrs. Rumbold: We received 200 letters objecting to my right hon. Friend's proposals. The Southfields by-election in Wandsworth not long ago was fought entirely on the matter of education in London. At the time, the slogans were "Labour for education". What happened? The Conservatives won, and we doubled our majority.

The crucial point is that action should be taken as swiftly as possible to establish clear responsibilities for inner London's education service among the boroughs. That is why the Government's proposals are right, and why I ask the House to support them.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The original Question was the motion on the Inner London education authority——

9.59 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): This has nothing to do with the educational interests of the people of London. It is all to do with a couple of political shysters.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Waddington) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 219, Noes 339.

Division No. 188] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'ntn & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carttwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heller, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*

Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'da E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alun Michael and
Mr. Frank Cook.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Arnoe, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bigge-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'th's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger

Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.
Main Question put:—
The House divided: Ayes 339, Noes 220.

Division No. 186] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bigge-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ī's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombe, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*

Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Pais[illegible] N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan

Wardell, Gareth (Gower)
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael (Doncaster N)
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W. (Carmarthen)
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David (Bolton SE)

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. Alun Michael.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House notes that the Inner London Education Authority has combined profligate overspending with a persistent failure to raise standards of education in its schools; recognises the urgent need for improvements; welcomes the Government's proposals for the transfer of educational functions to the inner London councils in 1990 as the best means of building an education service of high quality for the people of inner London; and approves the decision to table amendments to the Education Reform Bill for this purpose.

Education Reform Bill (Allocation of Time)

10.28 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I beg to move,

That the Order of 1st February be varied by substituting, for paragraphs 1 and 2(1), the following:—

'Committee

1.—(1) The Standing Committee to which the Bill is allocated shall report the Bill to the House on or before 8th March 1988.

(2) Proceedings on the Bill at a sitting of the Standing Committee on the said 8th March may continue until Ten p.m., whether or not the House is adjourned before that time, and if the House is adjourned before those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion the Standing Committee shall report the Bill to the House on 9th March.

Report and Third Reading

2.—(1) The proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading of the Bill shall be completed in four alloted days and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the last of those days; and for the purposes of Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) this Order shall be taken to allot to the proceedings on Consideration such part of those days as the Resolution of the Business Committee may determine.'

I shall not detain the House long. We have already had a vigorous debate on the principles of the Government's proposals for ILEA, which have just been approved by a majority of almost 120.

As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House made clear on 1 February, the main timetable motion for the Education Reform Bill was exceptionally generous. It allowed for a total of over 200 hours to be spent discussing the Bill on the Floor of the House and in Standing Committee.

The Government recognise that the amendments that we have tabled to part III of the Bill are substantial. They amount to 25 new clauses, replacing nine existing clauses, with amendments to a further three clauses. We are therefore continuing our generous approach to allocation of time for the Bill by proposing two additional days in Committee and an additional day on Report—which is in addition to the day on the Floor of the House which we have just had—to add to the three on Report which the House has already approved.

The Opposition cannot reasonably complain — although no doubt they will—about the additional time that we are allocating. Before they try to argue that we should be pushing the reform of inner London's education into the distant future by introducing a separate Bill next Session—which I understand some would like—or the one after that, let me remind them that all Governments from time to time have found it necessary to introduce significant amendments to legislation already before the House.

There is, of course, a good Labour precedent for that —the Industry Bill of 1975. I referred to it in moving terms earlier this afternoon, only to discover that, as a civil servant, the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) had drafted the Bill. He must have done that with tremendous enthusiasm, as the Bill was a major measure and there was a major change to it while it was under the guillotine.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): When will the Secretary of State sing a new tune? He keeps telling us how expensive ILEA has been. Will he now tell us what savings he expects to make as a result of the introduction of this piece of legislation?

Mr. Baker: When one has a good tune, one should stick to it. There is, as I say, a good precedent in what the Labour Government did in 1975. As always, we have improved on their practice, because on that occasion they did not table the amendments and new clauses before they moved the guillotine motion. We have done better, by tabling them yesterday.

As a result of the motion, the amount of time that will now be provided for debate on the legislation, on the Floor of the House and in Committee, will exceed 250 hours, which is probably the most generous timetable for 20 or 30 years. I need to take advice from the Clerks on whether it is 20 or 30 years, but this is certainly one of the most generous timetables that the House has ever been given on a major Bill.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Can my right hon. Friend say how that amount of time compares with that allocated for the 1944 Act?

Mr. Baker: The amount of time spent debating the 1944 Act was 50 to 60 hours. We shall debate this Bill for four or five times as long as that. The time spent in Committee on all the education legislation introduced since 1979 does not amount to 250 hours, so the House cannot complain that the measure is not being debated fully, either in Committee or on the Floor of the House. We shall also have four days to discuss it on Report.

It is appropriate that the time allocated should be generous, because the Bill contains a major set of reforms that the education service desperately needs. That is why it should get on to the statute book as quickly as possible.

10.32 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): The Secretary of State has explained the extension of time— *[Interruption.]*—that is to be given to the consideration of the abolition of ILEA by the guillotine motion. It is better than nothing——

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Would it be possible to ask those who do not want to listen to this part of the debate to clear the Chamber?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I do not think it is right to ask hon. Members to clear the Chamber, but is is right for me to ask them to carry on their conversations in a lower tone of voice so that we can hear the Front Bench.

Mr. Dobson: The arrangement that has been agreed with the Government is certainly an improvement on what was originally intended. But what was originally intended was to introduce a limited number of amendments relating to ILEA—not the proposition to abolish it altogether.

As one of those Members elected to represent people in inner London, I do not believe that the people of inner London, or their children, have got what they deserve from the motion.

The people of inner London and their children were entitled to a separate Bill to consider the abolition of the 118-year-old education authority. They should have been consulted about whether it should be abolished, about the Government's proposals, and about the details of the

[Mr. Dobson]

clauses. They were entitled to advise the Government, if they were prepared to listen, or anyone else, of the likely impact of those proposals and to seek changes. The motion will not give them the opportunity to do that.

The electorates of inner London have not had the chance to vote on the proposition that ILEA should be abolished. No one has a mandate to abolish ILEA. No Tory Member of Parliament put this proposition in his election address. No Tory ILEA member put it to his electorate. No Tory borough council has put it to the borough council electorate. It has never been put to the people of inner London. When the question of the future of ILEA and of its record have been put to the electors, they have always voted to maintain the authority as it is, under the control of the Labour party.

When that fact was put before the House earlier, it provoked the comment from the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) — made from a sedentary position—that they must be mad. That is the basis on which the Government are going forward — that the people of inner London are unfit to decide for themselves the nature and arrangements for education in inner London.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No, I shall not give way.

Mr. Greenway *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has made it clear that he will not give way.

Mr. Greenway: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it not a convention of the House that if one hon. Member attacks another, he gives way to enable that Member to defend himself?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is a convention, but it is not obligatory for the hon. Member who makes the attack to give way.

Mr. Greenway: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has misquoted me. I did not say that the people of inner London were mad, full stop. I said that they were mad to vote Labour.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I think that the point has been made.

Mr. Dobson: I will try to get on with my speech because there are a number of hon. Members who represent people in London and who want to take part in the debate. They were kept out of the previous debate by Tories, half of whom represent seats outside inner London, and in some cases outside London altogether. The Tories cannot muster anyone from inner London who is prepared to support the proposition.

The Secretary of State said that he is introducing measures which will remove nine of the Bill's clauses, amend three others, and introduce 25 new clauses, eight of which relate to staff. That latter point is one of the reasons why people in inner London are so perturbed about this proposition. If we had a Conservative Government, they would subscribe to the traditional Conservative proposition that change is always dubious and one should proceed with change only if one can guarantee that, at the other end of the process of change, there will be substantial improvements. That is the bedrock of Conservative philosophy.

The fact is that the Government cannot guarantee any improvement whatever in educational provision in inner London. Indeed, we can almost guarantee that it will worsen. A reason why it is likely to worsen, certainly during the transitional period between now and 1992—two years after the boroughs will take over if the measure is passed—is that the vast proportion of the staff will have to devote most of their time and effort to protecting their jobs and ensuring that those jobs continue to exist.

If what has happened in the Tory reorganisation of the Health Service is anything to go by, the staff will go through a ludicrous stage of having to reapply for the jobs that they are already doing. The education of our children in inner London depends on having staff who are skilled, well trained and enthusiastic and who have a high morale. This process of change is bound to reduce staff morale, so education is bound to suffer as an automatic consequence of the process of change.

We were privileged tonight to listen to the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who made his latest prepared speech in his continuing campaign to be the next leader of the Tory party, but he seems to have sloped off home. We heard all sorts of theories about local government and the problems of the inner cities, but I should like to hear from him, the Secretary of State or any Tory present what improvements they think this measure will bring about for the children, for example, at Argyle junior mixed and infant school in the King's Cross part of my constituency.

The school has 324 children, many of whom come from poor homes, which is shown by the fact that no fewer than 274 of them are entitled to free school meals. Two hundred and fifty-nine of them come from homes where the mother tongue is not English and 63 do not come from anything that any hon. Member would recognise as a home because they live in hotels, bed-and-breakfast accommodation or other hostel accommodation at night. What improvement in the education of those children is likely to result from a period of chaos and change in the education system in inner London?

That is not an isolated case. There are more than 10,000 children living in temporary accommodation and attending ILEA schools.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Who put them there?

Mr. Dobson: I shall tell the hon. Gentleman. The right hon. Member for Henley. He is responsible because his housing measures, when he was Secretary of State for the Environment, created homelessness in London in the first place. If the hon. Gentleman is not satisfied with that, what about the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) who also served in that post and continued to perpetrate the housing policies which have left so many of the people whom I represent homeless? Unless the Government address themselves to the genuine problems of the real children of inner London, not mythical ones invented by themselves and a few Tory protagonists, the parents, children and teachers will treat the Government with contempt.

It is certain that the Government will carry any Division tonight, just as they carried the earlier Division

and just as they will manage it in Committee. They have the majority to do so. However, the Government should remember that, even within the best traditions of the Tory party, powerful people have tempered the way in which they have dealt with the poor and the helpless.

Mr. Tony Banks: Not this bunch.

Mr. Dobson: My hon. Friend is correct.

We seek the abandonment of the Government's proposals. If the Government intend to go ahead with a Bill to abolish ILEA, they should at least consult the people of inner London. They should then come forward with a well-argued, properly thought-out Bill, instead of this lousy, botched job, put together in a fortnight.

The creation of 117 years of effort by the teachers, parents and educationists of London deserves better than to be shoved aside as a result of a fortnight's botching by the Department of Education and Science under the leadership—if that is the right word—of the right hon. Member for Mole Valley.

10.45 pm

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): Perhaps we can now get back to reality.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) spoke about a large number of pupils of the Argyle school who live in hotels. I should remind him that, according to the latest figures, the London borough of Camden has more than 500 dwellings that have been empty for more than six months. Before the Opposition say that that borough has no money to repair them, I would point out that Camden has rent arrears of more than £5 million. Moreover, Camden has paid out more than £1 million to hotel owners for rooms that were never occupied.

I believe that my right hon. Friend is being too generous in the amount of time that he is allocating for the ILEA abolition clauses. We are dealing with a local education authority and not the 159th member of the United Nations. However, frankly, looking at many of the proceedings of ILEA it would appear that it is a world power instead of an education authority.

It is true that, for more than 50 years, the children of London had a good education authority in the form of the London county council. In those days, it was run by men and women who were dedicated to looking after the interests of children and not flying away with strange theories. The chairman of the county council was wholly non-political and behaved in a respectable manner. It had an outstanding succession of leaders. One of those was the man who was a political opponent of mine for many years, Ike Hayward. Ike Hayward would not have allowed half the present members of ILEA through the back door of county hall, let alone to occupy chairmanships.

Let us hear no more nonsense about the education of London's children. Since the creation of ILEA, those children have had a set of people determined to put their own partisan theories before the children's needs. Most independent experts will acknowledge that. I could not care less whether the politics of ILEA was Tory or Labour. Indeed, I remind the House that it did have a period of Conservative leadership.

I have never believed that there was a need for ILEA. If I have a slight grumble about my colleagues on the Front Bench, it is that they did not get rid of ILEA at the same time as they got rid of the Greater London council. People have said that everyone will be rising up in anger about the Government's decision and that it will be remembered at the next election. In the public meetings in my marginal constituency during the last election campaign, no one even mentioned the defunct GLC. I believe that it is absolutely right that my right hon. Friends have decided to get rid of ILEA by using——

Mr. Dobson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: In a second. I shall be more courteous than the hon. Gentleman was to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway).

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman says that no one raised the matter of the defunct GLC during the election. At any of the public meetings at the election, unique among all Tories in London, did he suggest to his electorate that he wanted to abolish the GLC?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: As I have heard others say, "Get it right, Frank." I say firmly that, unlike a large number of my colleagues, I have been on record from the beginning as saying that ILEA should never have been created. I said that when I was in local government, and when I gave evidence to the Herbert commission, and I have never changed my mind on that issue. My constituents know full well where I stood on the GLC and ILEA. They might also wish to know where I stand on the future of Hampstead heath. The sooner it goes to the City of London, the better.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: I should like to continue.

I say firmly that the real problem that we now must face is what the children will go through if demonstrations and strikes take place. Let me not hear from the Labour party that the education of London's children will be damaged by the Bill. The damage has been done over the years by the attitude of the London branch of the National Union of Teachers, the record of which has been abysmal. Those who go out on strike, participate in demonstrations and so on are harming the education of London's children. It is not the Government or the House of Commons—it is those who put their political views ahead of the needs of the children.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to speak. He has spoken once already. I think that we have heard quite enough from him for the moment. I believe that — *[Interruption.]* I was delighted to give way to a Front-Bench London Member, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). I do not think that we want to hear any more about London's education from the west country.

Those of my colleagues who have put this set of clauses through the House must remember one thing — that there will be a campaign of lying, hypocrisy and double dealing aimed at the people of London. I simply ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State this: what steps will he take to stop ILEA spending the ratepayers' money, as the GLC did, on political campaigns against the measure? He has a responsibility, which I know he will accept, to keep the limited amount of money that is there

[Sir Geoffrey Finsberg]

for London's education, limited because of the extravagance of ILEA. That money should be used on education, not on falsehoods in pamphlets. My right hon. Friend must make it clear that the stories now being put about that adult education, music education and special schools are under threat are a complete——

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: In a moment.

Mr. Bruce: It is important.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: I know it is important, but occasionally one must try to help hon. Members understand things.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State must try to get over the point that we must be certain that the truth is heard by the parents of London. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that he makes it clear beyond peradventure that those three subjects above all else—what I call the non-primary and secondary subjects—will not suffer as a result of the proposals? I do not believe that they will suffer, and my right hon. Friend does not, but the other parties in the House will try to spread those stories. I hope that my right hon. Friend will take that point on board.

10.54 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): In introducing his timetable the Secretary of State told us that he is being exceptionally generous in allowing additional time for debate. I beg to differ. The time that he is allocating for major consideration of a major change to a major Bill is grossly insufficient for two reasons. First, it fails to give parents and other people of inner London sufficient time in which to make their views known and to have their views and opinions taken while the Government draw up the details of the measure.

The Government have no democratic mandate for the proposal. The proposal was announced in public only two weeks ago. We are told that it will pass through all its stages in the course of the next four or five weeks. That is totally insufficient time properly to consult and canvass the views and opinions of parents in my constituency and in all other constituencies in inner London, to make sure that what the Government are doing, or are not doing, is in accordance with their wishes.

Secondly, the advocated timetable is grossly insufficient for consideration of the detailed and complex issues that arise out of the Government's decision to abolish the Inner London education authority. I shall give one or two examples of such considerations, because they affect my constituents and their children. They are weighty matters that should form part of the House's consideration. The next four or five weeks are not sufficient time in which to get them right. Some of them have been touched on, but not in detail, in the course of our earlier discussions today.

First, how will the financing of education in schools in my area be organised after abolition? As my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) mentioned, many boroughs — mine included — gain from the present redistributive mechanism of ILEA funding. Quite rightly and totally justifiably, ILEA has always been a mechanism whereby richer boroughs in the centre of London subsidise education in poorer boroughs. My borough benefits considerably. Its contribution to the ILEA budget is £44 million a year. However, it derives £73 million of benefit from the ILEA budget. That is a £29 million gain for the parents, children and students of Islington from the existence of ILEA.

The Secretary of State told us that there will be an assessment of the social and educational needs of each borough when an assessment is made of what sort of financial mechanism shall be established to redistribute funds among boroughs after abolition. But if the present Government's record of making assessments of need, and their record in relation to local government, with grant-related expenditure assessments are anything to go by, even Conservative-controlled boroughs in London find the grant-related expenditure assessments grossly insufficient to meet people's needs. Will the Government use the same sort of bases for establishing educational need when the Inner London education authority is abolished? We need the answers to those questions before we can properly decide on measures for abolition. So far, the Secretary of State has given us no confidence that such proper mechanisms will be in place.

Secondly, we have to ask the Secretary of State where the secondary school children will go. There has been much talk from Conservative Members about secondary school children. There are insufficient secondary school places within the borough boundaries of Islington to accommodate the needs of all the secondary schoolchildren of Islington. That means that secondary school pupils from Islington will have to be placed in schools outside the Islington area. What mechanisms will be established to enable that to happen? What guarantee do the parents of children in Islington have that they will be able to find a school place of their choice? The Government are in favour of open enrolment and I should like to know how that will operate across borough boundaries once the boroughs, rather than ILEA, will be the education authorities.

The third question to which we need an answer before we can make a final assessment of the package of measures in the Bill is, what will happen to further education establishments? I take as an example the north London college, which is based in my constituency. It provides an extremely good service to the 4,041 students who attend it, of whom only 1,615 come from the borough of Islington. The remaining 2,400 come from a variety of boroughs, mainly from other inner-London education boroughs but some from Barnet, Brent, Enfield and even from Hertfordshire.

Therefore, students at the north London college come from a wide catchment area. Who will finance the north London college? What sort of joint arrangements will be made between the boroughs to ensure the pooling of resources to provide a good quality further education service in each of the 24 further education establishments that exist in the ILEA area? What sort of pooling arrangements will there be for students to ensure that proper choice can be available to them so that they can choose the courses that are most suited to their needs?

The principal of north London college wrote only two days ago to the leader of ILEA expressing her concern about the Government's proposals and stating:

"Currently there is much co-operation between the 24 FE colleges on curricular and other levels—rationalisation and

effective allocation of resources is relatively easy. The tertiary submissions, amended, need to be re-presented on a wider than borough basis."

The importance of looking at further education on a cross-borough basis is absolutely crucial. However, at the moment there are no firm proposals from the Government to take account of that point.

The same applies to special education. I have a particular concern with special education, having been for 10 years a governor of Colebrooke school for maladjusted children in my constituency. It is one of the finest special schools — not only in London, but anywhere in the world. It has an outstandingly high reputation, as do the other two special schools that are in my constituency. All three draw pupils from a wide range of areas, not just from within the borough of Islington.

It is not good enough for the Minister of State to say as she did in a passing remark in her summing-up of the debate on the earlier motion, "We shall be looking at the question of special education." Well, I should hope so. However, before we make concrete decisions on what will be in the Bill, we need concrete proposals about safeguarding the future of special education for inner-London children on a cross-borough basis. We have no such concrete proposal from the Government at present. So long as that is the case and so long as we have only another four or five weeks of consideration ahead of us, we can have no confidence that proper arrangements will be made when the Bill leaves the House.

Doubtless the Government will reiterate, as they have done today, as they draw up plans for improvements for schools, for funding the 24 further education colleges properly and for being a world leader in standards for special education, that the Inner London education authority is being profligate and must therefore be disbanded. I beg to differ. Indeed, parents and students in my constituency also beg to differ.

Whenever my constituents have written to me, spoken to me, visited my surgery or attended public meetings on this issue, they have said that they want the Inner London education authority to stay. Of course they have criticisms of ILEA. Every education authority can be criticised on some grounds. However, my constituents see the need for ILEA's strategic cross-borough role and the need for substantial levels of spending in inner London. They recognise the need to preserve the standards that the authority achieves at the moment.

The Government's attitude reminds me of a passage in a Berthold Brecht play:

"The Government have decided that the people are wrong, and the people must therefore be disbanded."

That is precisely the Government's attitude towards the Inner London education authority. The people of inner London, and the people in my constituency do not want ILEA to be disbanded. They do not want the Government's proposals to go forward and they certainly do not want the proposals to be carried out in the unseemly rush of the next four or five weeks, which is all that the motion allows us.

11.6 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) asked what benefits the Education Reform Bill would bring to the children in a particular school in his constituency. It will result in a more successful and cost-effective education system. We have heard about ILEA expenditure. Opposition Members told us that education expenditure in inner London had to be higher because of the problems of London. However, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy figures show that ILEA is a financial juggernaut running out of all control, with a record of profligacy that is unprecedented in the history of local government in this country.

If we examine ILEA expenditure, we find that in every respect it is far greater than the expenditure in outer London boroughs. What justification can ILEA have for energy costs in primary schools that are 50 per cent. higher than those in similar schools in outer London? What justification is there for administrative costs in primary schools in ILEA being 89 per cent. greater than those in similar schools in outer-London boroughs? What justification is there for costs for premises-related staff —whoever they may be—being 95 per cent. greater in ILEA than in outer-London boroughs? What justification is there for the costs for educational support staff in secondary schools in ILEA being 250 per cent. greater than in outer-London boroughs? ILEA's whole record shows that it spends far more money than other education authorities in London.

Some Opposition Members will claim that ILEA's higher expenditure reflects in part inner-London weighting. I have examined the expenditure of the authorities that also pay inner-London weighting, such as Haringey, with which the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) was once associated, and Brent. ILEA's costs are 31 per cent. higher than Brent's, and no one has ever put Brent forward as an example of financial rectitude. ILEA's costs are also 22 per cent. higher than those in Haringey, whose high expenditure is only too well known.

The results are quite appalling. We are being told that ILEA results cannot be compared with those enjoyed by the London borough of Barnet. Of course, supporters of ILEA would not want that comparison, because our results in Barnet are so much better. But shall we compare the results of ILEA with those of areas that might be described as socially deprived, such as Sunderland, Wigan or St. Helen's? Why did only 16·2 per cent. of children leave ILEA schools with five or more O-levels, while in St. Helen's the figure is 22 per cent. and in Wigan it is 29·9 per cent.?

We were told by the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), who has now left the Chamber, that Strathclyde, not ILEA, is the largest education authority in the country. What he could have told us was that Strathclyde produced even worse results than ILEA: 25 per cent. of pupils leave Strathclyde schools with no passes at all.

It is plain that the larger education authorities are not at all successful. In the 16 years in which I was a London borough councillor, I discovered that the borough council was responsive to the needs of the ratepayers and the consumers of its services, and county hall was not. The previous Conservative Government got rid of county hall, and I believe that by getting rid of ILEA the present Government are doing a great deal for education in inner London.

Let us look at ILEA's record with its headmasters. Many left because they became tired of its constant interference with their work. Between 1981 and 1985, 137 head teachers left the service of ILEA, preferring premature retirement to the constant interference of Ms.

[Mr. John Marshall]

Frances Morrell. When Lawrie Norcross, one of ILEA's most distinguished headmasters, chose early retirement, he did so simply because he was fed up with the constant interference by its bureaucrats and politicians. He wanted an authority that put results and standards first, but he was working for an authority that put questions of racism and sexism before the results of its children.

During the general election, we heard many Opposition Members talk about the plight of the inner cities. That plight is caused by bad education. If the children of inner London are to have the future that we all want for them, they must have the basis of a decent education. ILEA has failed them. It has failed all the people who live in inner London. We want it abolished so that the children of inner London may have a chance to succeed where they have failed historically.

Labour Members tell us that the inner-London boroughs are not suitable to be education authorities. I have heard the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) make the odd interjection from a sedentary position today, but I have never heard him say that Newham should not be an education authority. I have never heard any London Labour Member say that Barking or Dagenham — which have all the social problems of Tower Hamlets and Hackney—should not be education authorities. If it is right for Newham, if it is right for Barking, if it is——

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the London borough of Newham wanted to opt into ILEA?

Mr. Marshall: That shows how misguided it can be. But we have not heard much from Labour spokesmen historically about how Barking or Newham should opt into ILEA.

We have seen other small London boroughs—such as Kingston, which is well known to my hon. Friend the Minister of State—provide a first-rate education service. I believe that the inner-London boroughs as a whole will do jolly well when they provide their own education service and get rid of the constant and unnecessary interference from county hall.

11.14 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Rarely has a Bill been less well thought out, had less consultation and had more of an attempt by the Government to rush it to the statute book. As the Bill has gone through the House, Ministers have learnt much more about education. It is sad that they have been such slow learners. Their learning curve does not fit either the guillotined time or the extra time found by way of the motion.

Anyone who has followed the proceedings in Committee will have seen clear evidence that the Government have chopped and changed and have discovered only as the Bill has proceeded what they are actually proposing. It emerged in Committee just how long it would take for the national curriculum to be in place. It will take at least 10 years, and it will not be until 2010 that pupils will be following the national curriculum for the whole of their time through school.

As for testing, the Secretary of State admitted how much he had learnt about testing in the six months since the general election. The report of the task group on assessment and testing, which I think the Secretary of State accepts, made it quite clear that it will not be possible to have Baker merit awards for seven-year-olds who do well, and it certainly will not be possible for the Boyson detention camps to be used in the summer holidays for those who do badly.

Financial devolution is laudable, but the Secretary of State has not really thought about the need to give staff a reassurance that, when financial devolution comes to schools, their conditions of service will be guaranteed. On the whole question of opted-out schools, the Minister was muddled and confused about whether schools would be able to have collections to pay for extra teachers. Even yesterday, when higher education was discussed in Committee, the Secretary of State seemed considerably confused when trying to reconcile his press handout and his careful weasel words about the concessions that he was making.

Over ILEA, the confusion has been massive. The thrust of the Government's cause is that ILEA is far too expensive. However, we had no information at all from the Government about how much money they will save as a result of the abolition of ILEA. The Secretary of State must tell us on what his financial considerations are based. How much money does he expect to save, and what will he do about the present cross-borough subsidisation? Until he can give some indication of the financial implications of the proposals, it is totally unreasonable to proceed with the legislation. A case built on the argument that the proposals will save money and in which no figures are provided is totally dishonest.

Neither the Secretary of State nor his colleagues have given any answers about what will happen over money transferred from the rich to the poor boroughs. He has not addressed himself to the chaos that will face schools in areas such as Hackney and Lambeth and in other parts of London.

Let us first consider the Education Act 1986. It will change governing bodies so that next autumn there will be new governing bodies. The staff in the schools will have to consider the implications of the national curriculum and of testing. They must start to grapple with the financial management of schools. There might even be a referendum in their schools about opting out.

Imposed on all those matters is the abolition of ILEA. The advisers that schools might turn to for guidance on the national curriculum, testing, financial management or opting out will all be uncertain about their future. For two years the Government will guarantee total upheaval in the schools, yet the whole thrust of the Bill is to improve standards in our schools. I cannot see one jot of evidence that over the next four years any of the promises to improve standards in inner-London schools can be kept. There will be administrative chaos, and parents, staff and pupils will be disillusioned.

The timetable gives no indication of how much time we will need for the Government's proposals on charges. They keep promising that the new clauses on charges will be given to the House, but so far we have not seen them. The Secretary of State says that the Opposition will be pleased with the clauses about charges. I shall be surprised if we are pleased. That is yet one further piece of evidence that the Government have not thought out this legislation before they brought it to the House.

The Government should address themselves to the problems in education, such as the need for youngsters to get off to a good start with good nursery education, which

is available to many children in ILEA but not in many other parts of the country. They should have addressed themselves to the problems facing 16 to 19-year-olds, for whom it is financially more attractive to leave school and go on to a YTS course than it is to stay at school to obtain good examination results and benefit from education. Those are the problems that should have been addressed by this legislation.

It is not adequate to offer the House two further days to debate ILEA, and two more days to sort out the mess and muddle in the Bill. It is not only time in the House that is required but time in the country. More important, it is a question of the Government having time to sort out their ideas so that they can come forward with credible proposals. At this stage, the Government should take the Bill away, delete large chunks of it and come back next year with a modest measure that would genuinely improve education standards and not produce chaos in ILEA in the short term and chaos in many of our schools for the next 10 years.

11.20 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): I would contest the suggestion that we do not give a generous allocation of time to Opposition Members. In addition to the other debates, we propose a further 16 hours of debate in Committee on the clauses relating to ILEA and a full day on the Floor of the House on Report. We have tabled our amendments in good time to allow full consideration of these matters.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) talked about ILEA's staff fighting to retain their jobs in the next two years. This afternoon, my right hon. Friend made it quite plain that over 80 per cent. of those employed by ILEA will be transferred by order to the employment of borough local education authorities. Many of the remainder will find posts with the new authorities. We are setting up a staff commission to help with this process. It is quite irresponsible of the Opposition to suggest otherwise. Sadly, that has been typical of their unwillingness to face facts.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) seems to be completely unaware of the way in which many pupils cross borough boundaries every day in outer London, as do many students attending further education colleges. Nothing will hamper that happening within inner London when the new education authorities are set up. There have been no difficulties in outer London. If anything, it gives greater choice to parents in outer-London boroughs, and I suspect it will have the same effect in inner London.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): As the Bill was first drafted, parents' rights on open enrolment would have applied to all the inner-London education area. Will those rights now simply be limited to the borough in which parents live?

Mrs. Rumbold: It will depend entirely on the locality of the school and whether the criteria that apply to those schools are different from those that exist at present. ILEA uses artificial boundaries and limits on its schools and bands children. That is something that few authorities do. Parents within ILEA will have better choice through open enrolment and there will be less discrimination against parental wishes than at present. Further education colleges will continue to cater for students from all the other boroughs in the same way as further education colleges in outer London and other metropolitan areas. They operate on a system of recruitment from various different boroughs.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) asked about the expense of ILEA. He asked how the Government could expect a reduction in expense if ILEA is disbanded and education is run by borough authorities. I should explain that the Conservative boroughs of Wandsworth, Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea all provide personal social services to their residents within the grant-related expenditure allocated to them by the Government. They also manage to reflect the extra needs of their inner-London areas. I see no reason why, when the boroughs acquire education as a service, they should not be able to provide efficient and effective education. The boroughs will certainly be much more responsible locally to the needs of the children and to the requirements of the parents. If properly managed, I suggest that the education service could be provided at considerably less expense than currently under the two-tier system operated by ILEA.

It is a very odd argument for Opposition Members to say that it is all right for boroughs in outer London to run education, and it matters not whether those boroughs are Conservative or Labour-controlled, but it would not be suitable for boroughs in inner London to run education. I fail to see the logic of that, in the same way as I fail to see the logic expressed by Liberal and alliance Members who seem to think that people in Richmond are competent to run education but people in Tower Hamlets are not, in spite of the fact that both boroughs are Liberal-controlled.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) was right to point out that a campaign is likely to be mounted against the Government's plans for the disbandment of ILEA and the return of education to the boroughs. Such a campaign would affect all the people who live within inner London. I greatly doubt whether, at the end of the day, it will be much more effective than the millions of pounds which were squandered on the scurrilous campaign run by the Greater London council——

Mr. Tony Banks: I can assure the hon. Lady that, while the campaign will be strident, it will be mounted by the parents of inner London because no parents in inner London support the Government's proposals. Of course, the hon. Lady will ignore them.

Mrs. Rumbold: It will be interesting to see what happens. If ILEA spends money on a campaign to whip up support from the parents, those who will be deprived of the benefits of that money will be the children who are being educated in the Inner London education authority area.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): While the Minister is on the subject, perhaps she will tell us exactly how much money is being spent by the Department of Education and Science on promoting the nonsense proposals to break up ILEA under the guise of so-called information. She is so good at criticising local authorities which are spending money on providing information within the terms of the Local Government Act 1985 that I think Parliament deserves to know——

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

It being one hour after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [1 February].*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Order of 1st February be varied by substituting, for paragraphs 1 and 2(1), the following:—

'Committee

1.—(1) The Standing Committee to which the Bill is allocated shall report the Bill to the House on or before 8th March 1988.

(2) Proceedings on the Bill at a sitting of the Standing Committee on the said 8th March may continue until Ten p.m., whether or not the House is adjourned before that time, and if the House is adjourned before those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion the Standing Committee shall report the Bill to the House on 9th March.

Report and Third Reading

2.—(1) The proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading of the Bill shall be completed in four allotted days and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the last of those days; and for the purposes of Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) this Order shall be taken to allot to the proceedings on Consideration such part of those days as the Resolution of the Business Committee may determine.'

Education Reform Bill *[Money]* (No. 2)

Queen's Recommendation having been signified

11.28 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): I beg to move,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Education Reform Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any sums required by the Secretary of State for defraying the expenses of the staff commission established by the Act.

The reason for the supplementary money resolution is simple. The new clauses which we have tabled in relation to part III of the Education Reform Bill make provision for the establishment of a staff commission to help with matters arising from the transfer of staff from ILEA to the inner London boroughs. As was the case with the staff commission established at the time of the abolition of the GLC, this body will be centrally funded.

The costs will not be large; the previous staff commission had a maximum of seven members of staff, and we would expect the new one to have no more, and possibly fewer. It is our intention that it should be set up in good time to offer guidance throughout the process of transfer. In this respect we want to draw on the lessons learnt at the time of the abolition of the GLC.

I hope that the Labour boroughs will also remember those lessons. If they adopt an ostrich-like attitude and refuse to recognise that this transfer will take place, they will be damaging their own interests, and those of the staff, parents and children concerned. I urge them to join the Government in early discussions about the transfer process, so that we can work together to make as effective a new start as possible for London's education service.

11.29 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I wish to ask the Minister a number of questions about the setting up of the staff commission. I have had a sense of déjà vu throughout this evening, because we had debates such as this when the Greater London council was being abolished. We asked the Government a whole series of questions about how much it would cost the ratepayers of London, how much they estimated would be saved and how many staff would lose their jobs. The Government could not tell us the exact figures at any stage.

Frankly, given the Minister's rambling wind-up speech earlier, I doubt very much whether she knows the answers; she seemed scarcely capable of reading what had been put in front of her. If I may say so, in a rather inelegant phrase, she stuck rigidly to her briefs. The fact is that she seemed to have no great knowledge of what was contained in those briefs. Can she tell us who will head the staff commission? Who will be its members? For how long will the staff commission remain in existence? How many people will work for the staff commission? Where is the staff commission to be based? Perhaps it will be based in county hall.

The Government have no clear idea of the likely economic impacts of the policy that they have enunciated on the hoof tonight. The Government clearly have no idea of the likely costs of the abolition of the Inner London education authority. They have no idea of the composition or costs of the staff commission. That comes as no great surprise to Opposition Members, because the Government had no idea in relation to the abolition of the GLC either.

This proposal, coming at the end of a series of debates on the abolition of ILEA, has nothing whatever to do with the education needs of the children of inner London or of those who attend colleges in inner London. It has nothing to do with the pay and conditions and welfare of the excellent staff who work for ILEA, many of whom can expect to receive their marching orders under this policy. How many redundancies do the Government expect to arise from the abolition of ILEA? The staff commission will be charged with the responsibility to ensure that those who find themselves declared redundant are given reasonably favourable severance terms.

We asked similar questions in respect of the abolition of the GLC. We never received a satisfactory explanation. Indeed, Opposition Members could never have been satisfied because we found the abolition of the GLC totally unacceptable in political terms, just as we find the abolition of ILEA unacceptable. We knew that the abolition of the GLC and the setting up of the staff commission had nothing to do with the efficient running of local government in London and we know that the setting up of this staff commission has nothing to do with the efficient running of inner London's education services.

I realise that it has been a long evening for Conservative Members and that a large number are being forced to stay here in case the Opposition require a vote to be held later tonight. I shall not put them out of their misery. They will have to sit here and take one and a half hours——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Three quarters of an hour.

Mr. Banks: —three quarters of an hour to debate the setting up of the staff commission. I shall not talk it out. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) has been sitting here with me throughout most of the evening, waiting to speak in the general debate on the principle of the abolition of the inner London education authority. Unfortunately, we missed the Campaign group meeting to hear this debate.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): That is the level of sacrifice.

Mr. Banks: It was not worth that level of sacrifice, because the Conservative arguments were so appalling. It was clear that, even among all the Conservative Members, they could scarcely get a clutch of GCE O-levels between them. If they had gone to ILEA schools, like me, they would have been highly academically qualified. Thanks to ILEA, I have a clutch of qualifications and degrees for which I am most grateful.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Honorary ones? Did the hon. Gentleman buy them?

Mr. Banks: Not at all. I did not buy my academic qualifications in *Private Eye*. I did not have to descend to that level of misrepresentation, as Conservative Members so often must. I got my education at ILEA schools. I am proud of that fact. If I had any children, they would also go to ILEA schools. Unfortunately, I have to spend so much time in the House that I have very little opportunity to propagate within my family. I intend to remedy that anon.

The Inner London education authority has been in existence for some 117 years. It is being abolished and a staff commission is being set up, according to this measure, to satisfy the internal politicking in the Conservative party. Neither the setting up of the staff commission nor the abolition of ILEA has anything to do with the interests of education in inner London.

The Secretary of State, who helped to preside over the abolition of the Greater London council, was hijacked by the right hon. Members for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). There was a point when he had no intention of abolishing ILEA. As my hon. Friends have said, that was not included in the terms of the 1987 Conservative manifesto. The Secretary of State knows that to be a fact. He was hijacked because he is playing for big stakes within his terms — for the leadership of the Conservative party. I am sure that the staff commission plays a minor part in his campaign for the position as the next fuhrer of the Conservative party.

The right hon. Gentleman found it necessary to listen carefully to what was said by the right hon. Member for Henley, who knows nothing about education requirements in inner London. I do not suppose that the right hon. Gentleman sent his children to an ILEA school. He knows nothing about ILEA requirements, for the simple reason that he does not represent an ILEA seat. Many of the Conservative Members who contributed to the debate do not represent ILEA constituencies——

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Neither does the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman does not represent an ILEA constituency. He is saying to me that I, too, do not represent an ILEA constituency. Of course I understood that. I did not need the hon. Gentleman to convey that information to me.

I must declare my interest. I was an elected member of ILEA from 1970, so I have some passing knowledge of its activities. I have already told Conservative Members of my experiences as a beneficiary of the excellent education provided by the Inner London education authority. Of course, I am also chairman of the London group of Labour Members, which is why I am speaking on this resolution about the setting up of the staff commission. So, although I do not represent an inner-London constituency, I am wholly qualified to speak on the subject.

I said earlier, during the speech of the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) that the outer-London borough of Newham, an education authority in its own right, wanted to opt into ILEA — something it will no longer be able to do when ILEA is abolished. Newham recognised just how good ILEA's educational provision was. Newham, the second most deprived local authority area in the whole of England, wanted to benefit from being able to tap into the enormous resources that ILEA could generate. That is why it is a scandal that the staff commission is being set up to preside over the dismantling of ILEA——

Mr. Skinner: It is a quango.

Mr. Banks: It is undoubtedly a quango, just like the London residuary body. I hope that the Secretary of State will tell us who will chair, and who will be the members of, the staff commission. What will its budget be? How long does he expect it to last? He must have some sort of time span in mind. I asked him earlier how long the London residuary body should exist. Its powers will now be extended to take account of the break-up of ILEA.

Conservative Members know that there is no mandate for setting up the staff commission, or for the break-up of

[Mr. Banks]

ILEA. The Government held a consultation exercise about what they called the reform of education and opting out of ILEA. They did not include the setting up of the staff commission in that consultation exercise. I understand that. They probably had not even thought about the need to set up a staff-commission, because so much of this idea is being spatchcocked together as the Government work out what to do on the hoof.

As I have said time and again, this proposal has nothing to do with the education needs of the children of inner London. There was a consultation exercise over opting out. The Government have never seen fit to publish its results, for the simple reason that the great majority of those who were consulted and who submitted their views said that they were not in favour of the Government's proposals. If the Government were prepared to consult over the setting up of the staff commission, they would receive precisely the same response. There is no support for the Government's proposals to disband the Inner London education authority. There is no support for it in the schools, the divisions within ILEA or the boroughs. If the Government could quote a measure of support for their proposals to set up the staff commission or to abolish ILEA, they would be on their feet doing so.

The Secretary of State knows that there is no support anywhere in London, apart from within the rabid ranks of the Conservative party and in a few Conservative boroughs, for the abolition of ILEA. The setting up of the staff commission, and the abolition of ILEA have nothing to do with the interests of educational needs of children in inner London, and everything to do with the boxing and coxing going on in the Conservative party to see who will take over from Mama Doc at No. 10 when she eventually decides to stand down. In the abolition of ILEA and the setting up of the staff commission, we are seeing cobbled together a mish-mash of joint boards, shabby compromises and Whitehall control over local services which no one outside the ranks of today's neo-Fascist Tory party wanted to change in the first instance.

If the Secretary of State thinks that I am wrong, why does he not have a referendum in inner London on the setting up of the staff commission and the abolition of ILEA? If he were to do that, and the vote went against us because there was a majority in support of the Government's proposals, we would—I say this without reference to my estimable colleagues — drop our opposition to the Government's legislative proposals immediately. The Government will not have that referendum because they know that they will never get the support that they claim they have.

Why do not the Government say that there will be one last election in ILEA on the single issue of dismantling the authority? We should stand for its retention, and the Tories could stand for abolition. Will the Government then say that they will abide by the decision of the people of inner London, exercised through the ballot box? If they could say that tonight, we could save ourselves a lot of discussion about the various ramifications attendant on abolition, including the setting up of the staff commission.

Mr. Corbyn: Does my hon. Friend recall that, during the debates on the abolition of the GLC, four Labour members of the GLC resigned their seats so that there were by-elections to test public opinion on this matter, and the Tories refused to join in that contest because they were scared, and knew what the result would be?

Madam Deputy Chairman (Mrs. Betty Boothroyd): Order. I remind hon. Members that this is a restricted debate which concerns only a money resolution that deals with the setting up of a staff commission, and arises out of new clause 64.

Mr. Banks: I have kept myself within the bounds of the debate. I have continually referred to the staff commission and the money resolution, and I will continue to do so.

I find it difficult, even after the years that I have been here—it seems like a lifetime, but it is only five years—to accept the level of cynicism that exists among Tory Members. I still find myself being genuinely outraged by what comes from them. I wish I had the cynicism of the Secretary of State, which is such that he can stand on his head at regular intervals, and deny his principles.

Mr. Corbyn: His hair does not get ruffled.

Mr. Banks: That is because he puts half a pint of Brylcreem on it. I cannot do what the Secretary of State does, because I still have certain principles. One of those is that one does not dismantle a democratically elected body and set up a quango such as the staff commission in the face of opposition from those who will find themselves most affected by the Tory proposals. The exercise before us has been dressed up in language of democracy, to camouflage a deeply cynical and politically motivated act of educational vandalism, which the Secretary of State is perpetrating on the people of inner London.

The Secretary of State is to answer this debate on the staff commission. He touts his political principles around like a tray of cheap jewellery. He was denounced by the previous leader of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) in a debate in December 1984. The Secretary of State has not one principle that he is not prepared to sell for political advantage. That is how cheap and tawdry he is. He found himself being outflanked by two political shysters—two flash Johnnies in political terms who out-tried themselves. We do not know which one tried to manoeuvre for the leadership of the party.

The Secretary of State saw that coming and decided that it would be best to cut and run, and to abolish ILEA. There is nothing in the establishment of the staff commission and——

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Gentleman to refer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) as a political shyster?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is not something that the Chair would request the hon. Member to withdraw, but it is certainly not the sort of parliamentary language that I would welcome or wish to hear.

Mr. Banks: I thought that I was being fairly complimentary to the right hon. Member for Chingford. That was the nicest thing that I could think to say about him. I could say much more to his face and I should like to say them across the Chamber, but if I did, Madam Deputy Speaker, you would require me to withdraw them, and I would not wish to risk your anger this evening.

Cheap, tawdry and unprincipled is a fairly good description of the Secretary of State and the abolition of ILEA.

Mr. Soames *rose*——

11.51 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Mr. Soames? *[Laughter.]* Mr. Corbyn.

Mr. Corbyn: We should all thank the Crawley food mountain for his speech. It is one of the best that he has ever made. If he stopped eating salmon, he might be able to grow a beard.

While introducing the guillotine motion, the Secretary of State described this Bill and the staff commission in the same way that one could imagine a hangman addressing a group of condemned prisoners about the efficiency of the rope and how it would not hurt when they had been hanged.

I have sat through this debate, the previous motion and many discussions about ILEA because I have a special interest in it. For several years I was a full-time official of NUPE, which has many members working for ILEA, and I have been involved in several campaigns to save ILEA from break-up and destruction. I should inform the Secretary of State that every one of those campaigns has been successful; the Government have not succeeded in destroying ILEA yet. The Secretary of State may smirk, but if he casts his mind back to the bellicose statements by many of his predecessors, he will remember that they have always lost because of opposition from parents, workers in the authority and teachers, and because of professional support for those campaigns.

It is significant that, although we are debating the staff commission proposal, the resolution gives no indication whatever of how much money will be involved in financing the staff commission, how many staff will be involved, how much property will be sold to pay for redundancy payments, and what the future holds for many of the 40,000 staff employed by ILEA. It is a disgrace of the highest order that the Government should force this nasty little amendment, which will curtail the livelihoods and jobs of so many ILEA staff, to a Bill which is halfway through all its stages.

There have been no consultations with the staff. The first that they heard about the proposal to break up ILEA was the early-day motion tabled by the right hon. Members for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). Other hon. Friends have already said that that early-day motion has more to do with the leadership of the Conservative party than any possible concern that those two right hon. Gentlemen may have about ILEA.

I wonder how the right hon. Member for Henley would react if we introduced a private Member's Bill to destroy the education authority in Oxfordshire and pass it over to some local quango or district council. It is a gross impertinence and interference in the democratically elected authority of ILEA for such people to promote its abolition. It is a demonstration of the Government's weakness and the Secretary of State's weakness that one puff of wind from that pair of shysters and he is on his way.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The English language is a rich one and I believe that there is better vocabulary that we can use. I remind the hon. Gentleman that I would appreciate hearing about the money resolution, new clause 64, the staff commission and how it will function.

Mr. Corbyn: The English language is indeed rich and I could make it richer if you wish, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I intend to continue to discuss the staff commission because I have a particular interest in, and experience of, the way in which the GLC was broken up, the way in which the housing transfers took place under similar staff commission proposals some years before and the years that it took to sort out those difficulties, in spite of good will on both sides.

We should give some thought to what will happen to the staff of ILEA if it is abolished. If ILEA is broken up in the way envisaged, power will pass to the local education authorities based in each borough, and problems will be caused for the ILEA staff. Figures have been quoted by other hon. Members, but I will refer to them again briefly because they help to amplify my argument.

The borough of Islington, through its ratepayers, contributes £44·3 million per annum to ILEA and receives, in return, £72·8 million. Therefore, there is an expenditure gap of £28 million. Whatever honeyed words the Secretary of State used earlier to gloss over the problems, he failed to mention two things. First, under local government legislation, the Government have virtually complete power over the level of spending in each borough council, because they can impose the rate cap at any time they like. They can also decide what level the business rate will be across London and, in effect, decide how much money will be available for inner London.

The Government have said that they will take account of the socio-economic factors when deciding the level of expenditure for each authority and the number of staff that it employs. However, if the Government use the same criteria as those used in deciding the social fund allocations, I fear for each authority. My constituency faces 40 per cent. cut in social fund expenditure, but Bognor Regis — an area of undoubted deprivation, poverty and appalling conditions—has had an increase in expenditure. Are we to trust the Government to decide how much should be spent in inner London if they cannot decide, reasonably, the levels of expenditure under the social fund? The more one considers the funding of the education authorities, the more horrifying it becomes.

School caretakers in my constituency, having seen the figures, have come to me because they know that their jobs will be on the line. They work hard and well to ensure that the schools are open, sometimes seven days a week as youth centres, and often in the evenings for adult education and other activities. School cleaners may be a matter of trivial importance to Conservative Members. It is clear from the way that they have treated them and tried to privatise their jobs that they have nothing but contempt for cleaners. However, I believe that one cannot have a school without cleaners, school meal workers or caretakers, any more than one can have a school without teachers. They are all an essential part of an educational community. All those people will suffer, and all those jobs will be at risk.

When discussing the staff commission, the Minister of State deliberately failed to go into the problems of the non-statutory sector of education in ILEA. The Secretary of

[Mr. Corbyn]

State will know that ILEA provides a good standard of statutory education. The HMI report that he suppressed demonstrates how good pre-school education and primary and some secondary schools are. It is particularly complimentary about further education and the non-statutory further education sector.

What am I to say to part-time lecturers employed at the "City Lit" or full-time lecturers employed at Morley college or Birkbeck college and all the other places that will suffer because of the destruction of the education system of inner London?

Education should be a process for life, not just for the statutory school ages or in statutory further education establishments. I am certain that, if the proposal is passed, we shall suffer the most appalling damage in the further education sector, which gives adults who have missed out on their own further education the opportunity to study and develop new skills to enrich their lives—in some cases not even because they want to exploit those skills commercially. It might seem amazing to Conservative Members, but some people believe in learning for the sake of learning and enriching their lives rather than exploiting somebody else and making money while they are about it. That is the difference in attitude between the Opposition and the Government.

What are we to say to the pensioners who use the "City Lit" or Camden college——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have reminded the hon. Member once that we are discussing a restricted motion. I bring him back to the motion on the Order Paper.

Mr. Corbyn: Indeed. I am anxious to keep to the subject of the motion, which is the staff commission, and the future of the staff. However, the proposal is so vague that one has no idea how many staff are affected, what jobs will be affected, and what the future is for lecturers at the further education institutes or any other ILEA institution. We have no idea about the future of nursery workers, nursery teachers, nursery nurses and head teachers in nursery establishments. Once again, we are considering the non-statutory provision of education. ILEA has been complimented on its pre-school provision. Is all that to suffer on the altar of the ambition of three right hon. Members to be the leader of the Tory party? That is what it is all about.

As I mentioned, there has been no consultation whatever with the staff, be they teaching or non-teaching staff. The parents' organisations have linked with the staff on the matter because they are deeply suspicious and angry. I have had nothing but letters condemning the break-up of ILEA. I have had nothing but letters from parents expressing their concern and support for the staff in their campaign to prevent ILEA being broken up.

When the parents' poll takes place, as I hope it will, I am certain that it will show an overwhelming rejection of the Government's proposals. The Secretary of State, with the contempt that he holds for the people of inner London for having the temerity to elect a Labour authority, will no doubt seek to ignore that and use his tame sheep on the Benches behind him to take the proposals through the Division Lobby.

The staff commission proposal has effects on particular areas of ILEA. I have mentioned pre-school and further education. I shall now mention the effects on the statutory sector itself. There are problems of staffing. ILEA has had a long dispute with the teaching unions, which I believe is now resolved, about the transfer of staff between divisions and schools to compensate for the movement of children from one school to another.

Another problem will now arise immediately. If the new education authorities are set up on the basis of the boundary of one borough or the other, there will be a problem. Secondary school children in my constituency do not all attend secondary schools in my constituency. For example, they go to Acland Burghley school, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). It will be in a different borough, under a different education authority.

What will be the transfer arrangements for staff? What will happen to schools that are deemed to be overstaffed or understaffed? How will staff transfer not within one employer but between two employers? That is the consequence of the staff commission proposals.

I believe also that education is not just a matter of the teaching that is done in the classroom or in the lecture theatre. It is also the quality of life that the student or child can have within the school. That means things like the quality of the cleaning that is done in the establishment, the quality of the upkeep of the building, the quality of the environment in which the school is sited, the quality of the decorations of the school, and, indeed, the quality of the food that the children eat during the school lunch break.

The ILEA has a good school meals service, with a large number of dedicated staff, all of whom have suffered badly because of the removal of the basic nutritional standards in 1980—which, I am glad to say, ILEA resisted. The staff are now to suffer also because of the break-up of the authority and the implicit threat of privatisation of the school meals service. Indeed, over half the children in my constituency receive free school meals. As a result of the Social Security Bill that is going through the House at the moment, many children will suffer, and, implicitly, staff will also suffer. How will the staff commission deal with that problem?

Once again, by the break-up of the authority into at least 12 different authorities, the possibilities of transfer from one school to another, and the possibilities of career advancement from one grade to another, will be reduced. We must examine other aspects of school life, such as school cleaning staff. Exactly the same problems arise for them. At the moment, they work for one authority. They have fixed terms and conditions that are negotiated between their union and their employer.

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend has referred to a most interesting aspect of the staff commission. With regard to the abolition of the Greater London council and the setting up of the staff commission, it was claimed that there would be a great saving of jobs—in our terms, of course, that means much higher unemployment—but the figures were never actually produced by the Government.

I wonder whether my hon. Friend would care to comment on the fact that, if jobs are to be lost, they will be lost at the level of the most basic but most essential tasks within Inner London education authority schools. I refer to the cleaners, the dinner ladies, and those who provide the ancillary services. Those at the administrative level of the authority will find that ample opportunities

will suddenly produce extra opportunities for advancement and enhanced salary projection. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, I did not realise that I was boring the House.

Mr. Corbyn: I thank my hon. Friend for his important intervention. I realise that Conservative Members are being kept from a restaurant, a bar or somewhere. They can either leave or listen. It is entirely up to them.

I endorse my hon. Friend's remarks, although I urge caution. I should not want to be party to dividing teaching staff from non-teaching staff, or administrative staff from manual workers. I am sure that my hon. Friend would not want to do that, either. He made a valid point. If Conservative Members think that these are minor matters of no importance, I urge them to examine authorities such as Barnet and others that have cut school meals and cleaning staff.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I am not trying to drive wedges between different groups of staff; I was merely trying to point out that, whenever there is a reorganisation of local government, there is an increase in the number of administrators. It is always interesting that those who are required to dismantle the service find that the first impact is an increase in jobs for those with the task of running the service down. It is not a question of driving wedges, but of pointing out that what the Government are trying to achieve will be counter-productive.

Mr. Corbyn: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Every reorganisation with which I have been involved, either of local government or of health, always results in greater administrative costs—usually a loss of manual jobs on the grounds of efficiency, and an overall increase in the cost of running the service. Ministers know that that has been the result every time that the Health Service has been reorganised. They know that that has been the result of local government amalgamation, and they know that it will be the result on this occasion. If the Ministers came clean about the real cost of the break-up of the GLC and of the staff commission that was established following its break-up and which has now apparently been given a permanent life, and included the inflated salaries of Sir Godfrey Taylor and a number of other people who are there to destroy jobs in London, we would get a bit nearer to the truth—which, of course, they do not want to come out with.

Mr. Banks: The Government do not have the foggiest idea of the savings that they claim will come from the abolition of the Inner London education authority, just as happened with the abolition of the Greater London council and the setting up of the staff commission there. It will cost the ratepayers of London more for the abolition of the Inner London education authority than for its continuation, just as happened with the abolition of the Greater London council.

Mr. Corbyn: There is a lot of evidence that abolishing ILEA will cost more than keeping it going, but the Government will not admit that tonight. The Government have never bothered to look into the way in which ILEA is run, what it actually does or the problems it faces. Contemptibly, over the past three years, nine months of detailed consultation and negotiation within ILEA have been vetoed in a 90-minute debate in this place as the Government put through the rate precept order for ILEA as they do for transport authorities and everything else —turning this place into a sort of glorified county council chamber. We are witnessing the disgraceful process of the destruction of local government.

The provisions for the staff commission are so vaguely worded and general that we do not know how it will fit into the wage and salary negotiating structure and what its relationship will be with the small number of people who come under the Whitley council, the Burnham committee, the Greater London Joint Council for Manual Workers and those affected by the craftsmen's conditions. What will its relationship be with those negotiating bodies? What guarantees will be given to staff who transfer across the local authorities? Indeed, if they were asked to——

It being three-quarters of an hour after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted Business).*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That, for the purpose of any Act resulting from the Education Reform Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any sums required by the Secretary of State for defraying the expenses of the staff commission established by the Act.

Rate Support Grant (England)

12.13 am

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move,

That the Rate Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) (No. 4) 1984-85 (House of Commons Paper No. 253), a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th February, be approved.

I would ask the House to take at the same time the other motion:

That the Rate Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) (No. 3) 1986-87 (House of Commons Paper No. 254), a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th February, be approved.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think that the Minister said, "No. 2," but it is No. 3.

Mr. Howard: No, I think that I said, "No. 3." If I did not, I certainly should have done, but I think that I did.

As the House will be aware, I had hoped to move the approval of a report for 1983-84 also. It has emerged, however, that a number of the figures shown in the formula for calculating grant-related expenditure assessments in that report were incorrect. Although the GREs for individual authorities were shown correctly, and hence the grant entitlements were correct, we decided that we should withdraw the report. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has made a new report which will be laid before the House as soon as it is printed, I hope by the end of the week.

The last time that I came before the House to seek its approval for a supplementary report was in July. I forecast then that there would be more to come, and this evening my prediction comes true with the supplementary reports now before us.

The two reports before us differ from the one that we discussed in July. Whereas that supplementary report and the one preceding it, which was approved shortly before the general election, were additional to the normal cycle of reports in that they were concerned with the extra grant that we provided for teachers' pay, these supplementary reports, and the one to follow later, are all part of the normal cycle of adjustment as further information is received on local authorities' expenditure.

The 1984-85 report reflects audited returns of expenditure in those years. The 1986-87 report deals in the main with provisional outturn returns sent direct to the Department by chief finance officers. It follows that, whereas there is at least one further supplementary report to make for 1986-87, the earlier report should be the last for 1984-85 and I am sure that the House will be grateful at least for that.

Not only do the reports take account of the latest expenditure information, they also bring up to date our calculations of authorities' grant-related expenditure assessments or GREs. As the House will appreciate, some components of GREs are based on actual expenditure. Precepts paid to water authorities for land drainage are one example, and mandatory grants paid to students are another. The reports reflect the latest expenditure figures in these components. Other components of GREs are revised to reflect, for example in 1984-85, the latest estimates of average interest rates paid by local authorities and the final cost of the police pay awards.

Many right hon. and hon. Members will appreciate that the system now known as grant recycling applied to the years that we are considering. That means that the parameters of the block grant system are adjusted in each report to distribute the whole of a fixed total of block grant and I will say a word or two about grant abatement in a moment. Cognoscenti of the block grant system will know that, as new expenditure figures come in, changing the amount of block grant being claimed, the amount that authorities are assumed to collect from their ratepayers —the national grant-related poundage—is lowered or raised to ensure that the aggregate of grant payable does match the total available. The supplementary reports before the House tonight carry out this complex process by specifying new national grant-related poundages at GRE and the related amounts for each tier of authority.

In 1984-85 the Government issued expenditure guidance to local authorities. The then Secretary of State specified in the main report for that year a scheme for abating the block grant of authorities which exceeded their targets. Grant abated in this fashion was not recycled to other authorities: it was retained by the Treasury.

In 1984-85 the amount abated is now £15 million less than in the third supplementary report, but it is still the case that, taking 1983-84 and 1984-85 together, of the £17,350 million block grant made available by the Exchequer, £542 million, over half a billion pounds, was lost to local government because of overspending.

No expenditure guidance was issued for 1986-87. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, when he was Secretary of State for the Environment, abolished the system for expenditure guidance and grant abatement in that year. To maintain the downward pressure on spending, he sharply increased the amounts that authorities were assumed to raise from their ratepayers as their expenditure increased. That caused most authorities in England to lose block grant if their expenditure increased. Conversely, they could increase their grant if they were able to reduce their expenditure. Any grant that was lost by authorities which increased their spending above the levels assumed in the settlement was not returned to the Treasury. It was returned, or recycled, to all other authorities by adjusting the national grant-related poundage at GRE.

I hope that I have now given the House a reasonably brief account of what these supplementary reports do. I turn now to several particular features of them which the House will wish to consider—first, the so-called deficit financing of special funds. The House will know that one of the principal characteristics of the present system is that block grant depends upon expenditure—in fact, on what is known as total expenditure, which is calculated according to certain statutory rules.

Over the whole life of the present system, many authorities have legitimately presented their total expenditure in such a way as to maximise their grant entitlement. One way of doing this has involved the use of special funds. In anticipation of a harsher block grant regime in a future year, authorities have paid sums into special funds. Such transactions increased total expenditure for block grant purposes, and some block grant was lost. They then withdrew the sums in a later year, so reducing their total expenditure for grant purposes. This increased their grant in the following year by a larger amount, thus benefiting the authority overall.

This use of special funds is not illegal; nor is it necessarily in conflict with good accounting practices. It can been seen as authorities legitimately using the rules for total expenditure to their best advantage. However, during 1986 the Department became aware that some authorities had taken the practice a stage further, causing us considerable concern. They were showing in their books transfers to special funds of moneys that they did not possess: the transfers were causing deficits on the rate fund account. In theory, there was no limit to the amount of such transfers. The practice was clearly an attempt by a few authorities to manipulate their total expenditure figures, and gain an unfair grant advantage at the expense of other authorities and of the Exchequer.

Those circumstances, together with consideration of another anomaly in an authority's expenditure return, led us to conclude that we needed the provisions that have been enacted in the Local Government Finance Act 1987. These provisions, together with the specifications that we have made under the Act, have put the traditional practice for calculating total expenditure on a firm statutory basis, and have made it clear that deficit financing and other anomalies cannot be included in total expenditure. It was those measures that delayed the 1983-84 supplementary report.

In making the reports before the House tonight, we have made use of new specifications under the 1987 Act, which re-established the definitions of total and relevant expenditure and rendered ineffective the practice of deficit financing of special funds, at least in regard to the block grant system.

Secondly, there is a minor matter concerning 1984-85. One authority, Gateshead, has drawn our attention to a change in the amount of unoccupied property in its borough. Although we did not appreciate it when the report was made, it has since been made clear that it ought to be taken into account when its grant is calculated once the report has been approved by Parliament. We shall therefore do so. But, so that the total of grant to be paid out matches the amount specified in the report, we shall use the power in section 62 of the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980 to reduce all authorities' grants very slightly—by £2 in every £100,000.

The 1986-87 report honours the undertaking made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science that we would increase provision for expenditure by local education authorities on books and equipment for GCSE courses. In fact, the report increases education GREs by £4·2 million for that purpose.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): Is my hon. and learned Friend aware that our right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for the Environment made the commitment that Norfolk—which is a prudent, low-spending authority—would have a fair deal in the years ahead?

In the last financial year, it had a very fair deal. Is my hon. and learned Friend aware, however, that the GREA for Norfolk—which, I gather, is the amount that the Government states that it is reasonable to spend to match the services that should be provided—is £312 million for 1988-89? The assumed spending level is £285 million. The budget that Norfolk has had to set is £299 million, which is a reasonable increase if, for instance, inflation and wages rises are taken into account. But Norfolk will lose £5·7 million as a result of the Government's policy.

Does my hon. and learned Friend not agree that it is very unfair to treat Norfolk as a high-spending authority when it is, in fact, a prudent low-spender—indeed, the third lowest-spending shire authority in the country? Will he look at the matter again?

Mr. Howard: The grant loss to which my hon. Friend refers relates to the rate support grant settlement for 1988-89. In fact, under the two supplementary reports that are before the House tonight, and the third one that is being remade, Norfolk will gain £3 million. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that those two reports can mean nothing but good news for Norfolk.

Finally, I should mention the "Bromley error". My right hon. and hon. Friends representing affected areas will know that it remains uncorrected in the supplementary report before the House tonight. We have consistently made it clear that we will correct the error, despite the attempt by the London borough of Greenwich, which gained from it, to prevent us from doing so. However, that cannot be done until my right hon. Friend has wider powers to change multipliers in supplementary reports. Those powers will be available when the Local Government Finance Bill reaches the statute book. He will then bring forward a further supplementary report for 1986-87, and for the other years affected by the error, to honour our promise.

In asking the House to approve the supplementary reports, I am particularly conscious of the shortcomings of the present rate support grant system. The supplementary reports alter local authorities' grants for financial years which will have long been closed. The 1986-87 supplementary report causes significant movements of grants away from many authorities in England because of spending decisions in other authorities over which they had no control and which they had no means of predicting.

The reports contain language of daunting complexity and legalistic and other arcane jargon. I can well appreciate that they are of limited help in understanding why in some local authorities grant entitlement may have changed. These are some of the reasons why we are scrapping the present system and replacing it with a fairer and simpler one. I commend these supplementary reports to the House.

12.25 am

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I thank the Minister for his detailed and concise explanation of the reports. I freely admit that I am not and do not want to become a cognoscente of the block grant system. However, I can assure the aficionados of parliamentary procedure that the Opposition have studied the reports in some detail, realised that they are unamendable, and checked the arithmetic, which looks satisfactory. We did not know about the Norwich problem and, what is more, we did not know about the Gateshead problem. We were unaware of the number of empty properties in Gateshead that have been drawn to the Minister's attention. This kind of procedure would be a big switch-off for television, so I am not surprised that it is put on late at night.

I do not share the Minister's view that all will be rosy under the new system. However, as we are to debate the new system proposals in Committee, I have no doubt that we shall have a few hours between now and Easter to compare the new system with the present system. The

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

orders come before the House under the affirmative procedure, and the Minister will know that I am the last one to knock that. It is a good procedure and, when it is needed, it is vital that the scrutiny by the House of delegated legislation and ministerial decisions is fully carried out. On the other hand, there are occasions when the time at our disposal does not need to conform to Parkinson's law. Therefore, I propose to say no more.

12.27 am

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): I took the opportunity to speak in a similar debate about three years ago. On that occasion I used the gobbledegook in the book to try to explain the difficulties that lay people have in understanding what the Minister admits is complex. No one knows the reasons that determine rate support grant in certain areas.

I want to bring to the attention of the House a simple matter that I can understand. Therefore, I am sure that the Minister can understand it. Last year, a deputation from Langbaurgh came to see the Minister's predecessor. We were promised that certain aspects of the rate support grant would be borne in mind when setting the rate for the following year. It did not happen, so we sent a deputation again this year. We were told, "Do not worry, we have taken the points on board again and we will look at it for next year." On current form, I imagine that Langbaurgh will send a deputation at about the same time next year when we have probably had another ministerial change and another set of promises that will not be kept.

Why is Langbaurgh persistent and consistent in this matter? It is because we believe that we are being cheated out of a certain element of GRE by the force of nature. In my constituency there are very large tracts of uninhabited, derelict, useless land. When the complex formula to determine GRE is worked out, this area of land is calculated on the density available in the Langbaurgh region. It is simply not usable land. To suggest that it is on all fours with usable land in other areas is totally wrong.

To his credit, the Minister admitted to the Langbaurgh delegation that he was befuddled by this, but nothing could be done about it. If Ministers cannot do anything about it, who else can? If they leave civil servants to run everything and to write the speeches that they read so fast one cannot follow them, why do delegations bother to come down? What promise is being held out to those worthy people in local government who give up their time and energy to represent people and who travel 300 miles to meet a Minister, only to be given promises, which are then reneged upon, and are given further promises for the forthcoming year, which will also be reneged upon?

Cleveland county council's rate this year is 282p, which is the highest shire county rate. If one adds the district rates for Langbaurgh, which are worse in the half of my constituency near to Middlesbrough, and the parish rates, one need not wonder why people find it so difficult to set up business enterprises in the area. The Government could

I was interested to hear my hon. and learned Friend say that this is an adjustment order. If the Government can make an adjustment order because of the cock-ups that they have found, why cannot they make an adjustment order to put right the anomalies that have been brought to their attention by the local authority? If they were to do so, we would not have such swingeing rate increases. The local authority is not a whingeing authority. It is a hung authority in which all three parties must play their part to make the borough work at all.

There are acres of land in the area that should not be taken into account in the GRE calculation. Hardly anyone understands the calculations involved. But when one sees the gobbledegook involved—

$$\text{"GRP} = \text{GRP at GRE} + 0{\cdot}6\text{p} \times \text{threshold amount} + 0{\cdot}75\text{p} \times \left(\frac{\text{total expenditure} - \text{GRE}}{\text{population}} - \text{threshold amount} \right) \text{"}$$

that is not surprising. That is the sort of fog behind which everyone hides.

Mr. Rooker: It is a formula.

Mr. Holt: I accept that it is a formula.

I challenge my hon. and learned Friend to answer the question that I put to his predecessor when I spoke in a similar debate three years ago: who starts with the lump sum? Is it the Treasury? Are these formulae worked out by someone playing with computers who finds, lo and behold, that every one of those X−Y over 3−Z calculations happens to come out exactly at the Treasury figure? Or is the Treasury figure worked backwards to find the formulae to fit it? I suspect that it is the latter, but I have no confirmation one way or the other.

I wonder what would happen if somebody found that these figures and formulae did not work out to what the Treasury had said and that there was a little bit over or under? Presumably, the computing system would have to be rewritten. We do not want that in Langbaurgh. We are simple people. We want what is right and fair; we want a recalculation of the GRE to take account of land on which not even the pigeons will sit.

12.34 am

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): This is one of those very rare occasions when I find myself in agreement with the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt). One of the problems with the present system is the formula and the way in which it has been compiled. In regard to the Minister's final remarks, I do not want to debate the new system that he believes will solve the problems of local government finance. I am totally opposed to the poll tax. We have heard many times over the past eight years that the Government have got the system right, but I do not have the same confidence as the Minister that they have got the solution this time.

I have always accepted that, whatever party is in power, the Government have the right to determine the amount of money which they are prepared to contribute as their share of local government expenditure. Local government has a right to argue that the amount is insufficient. Certainly Opposition Members may argue that the Government should give more to local authorities. When the Government have determined the figure I do not accept that they should prevent local authorities from

spending additional amounts if the ratepayers are prepared to provide the money. The Government should not penalise ratepayers by rate capping.

As to the formulae, I have often referred to the formula that sets the amount of money that local government is allocated for art galleries and museums. That is a good example of how stupid the present system is. I am sure the Minister will agree that if the system is based on GRE the basis must be right if it is to work. The basis for determining the amount for galleries and museums is the area of shop floors within the local authority. Therefore, a local authority with a large floor space in its shopping centre will get a bigger allocation for museums and art galleries even if it does not provide a service, whereas a local authority with a small shop floor area may provide a much better service but will not get the same allocation.

In the report there is a revised method for calculating indicator E7, which is a big factor in the GRE calculation for housing grant. I will not deal with it in detail because it covers two pages in the report and is extremely complicated. The Government have still got it wrong, because the base year of 1980-81 is crucial to the calculation. Local authorities may still be penalised because of what happened in 1980-81. That is wrong. My local authority has been heavily penalised for many years, to the detriment of the ratepayers. Many other local authorities are in a similar position. As a Member of Parliament, as leader of the council before I was elected to the House, and as chairman of the council's finance committee, I have met Ministers and civil servants, but none of them could justify the formula.

I hope that, in any further changes, the Government will recognise that different parts of the country cannot be judged on a standard base. We need a system that takes into account local needs and many other factors on a better basis than we have achieved so far—even with the present revision. Even with the latest supplementary report for 1984-85, local authorities have been penalised and the costs have had to be borne by rent and ratepayers because the Government's system has been wrongly based. If the foundation is wrong, the system cannot possibly work.

12.40 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West): I shall not detain the House. I take great comfort in the Minister's remarks. We hope, pray and trust that the new system of grants for local authorities will not be as complicated and difficult to comprehend as the present system. I do not want to talk about the formulae set out in the document. On one occasion I heard my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State say that he was the only person in England to understand the system.

I wish to draw attention to the arrangements as they affect Derbyshire and its district councils. In 1984-85, the GRE for Derbyshire county council was £316,420,000. In 1985-86 it rose to £354,705,000—an increase of about £38 million. Nearly all the districts in the county of Derbyshire have witnessed increases in GRE over that period. For Amber Valley the increase was £17,000 , for Bolsover it was £200,000, for Chesterfield it was £1,137,000, for Derby it was £2,537,000; for Erewash, £259,000 and for High Peak, £94,000. However, in the same period north-east Derbyshire witnessed a reduction of £67,000, south Derbyshire a reduction of £11,000 and Derbyshire Dales—the district to which I wish to refer in particular—a reduction of £111,000.

Derbyshire Dales district council has been a prudent and well-run council, yet it seems from all the figures and evidence that it is the Derbyshire council most penalised under the present system. Derbyshire Dales GRE assessment has been reduced by 4·9 per cent.—£150,000 — between 1980-81 and 1988-89. During the same period, all other Derbyshire district councils have had an increase in their GRE of between 0·03 and 58·3 per cent. During the same period, the county council's GRE has risen by 54 per cent.

I take the point made my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) about Cleveland, but at the moment Derbyshire county council levies the highest rate in the country at 262p, and we do not yet know what is in store for next year. Although Cleveland may be leading us, it will not have that pleasure—if pleasure it be—for very long.

The Audit Commission's cluster of authorities similar to Derbyshire Dales—there are 34—shows that only three councils have lost GRE in that period. Derbyshire Dales leads the table at 4·9 per cent. My message to the Minister is that we do not like systems that seem continually to penalise good, prudent authorities while allowing spendthrift, wasteful authorities to get away with continuing to spend as though there were no tomorrow. Authorities that are prudent and look after their finances are penalised all the time.

I realise that my hon. Friend the Minister may not be able to say much in response to me, but I ask him to shout a little more about the way in which we intend to change the system so that it becomes much more fair and so that the future levels of grant to councils, without a complicated formula, are more obvious to people——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I hesitate to interrupt, but the debate is about the past. I hope that the hon. Member will not tempt the Minister into discussing the future.

Mr. McLoughlin: I take your point, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are talking about the past. We should draw lessons from the past to ensure that what has happened does not happen again in the future. What has happened in the past seems to have penalised authorities that have been prudent and that should have been able to reward their ratepayers. Instead, those ratepayers have had to bear the burden of the system.

12.45 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I have two general questions and propositions to put to the Minister and then I want to raise some Southwark-related matters arising directly out of the two reports.

First, I should like to confirm that by these measures the definitions of "relevant" and "total" expenditure are for the first time amended, as there is power to do under the Local Government Finance Act 1987, which was passed because of the discovery of errors in calculation. I understand that it is possible for the Government to take out transfers to special funds which give rise to a deficit on the rate fund revenue account and which are not in respect of specific liabilities, or transfers back to the rate

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

fund account of sums transferred — the "deficit financing" transfers. I did not hear the Minister address that matter.

This appears to be a retrospective change. The 1984-85 and the 1986-87 rate support grants were made on the basis of one set of terminology and definitions, and therefore calculation. This appears to be the first time that we have a retrospectively introduced redefinition which, clearly, in some cases is disadvantageous. What are the budgetary implications of the change?

Secondly, and more simply, when we debated the first supplementary report for 1986-87, the Government guaranteed that at least £500 million of grant would be recycled. However, the expenditure for 1986-87 is now seen to be lower than originally estimated. I understand, therefore, that the grant recycled is now between £400 million and £450 million. If that is right, it is at least £50 million below the undertaking. That means that there is less money around to be distributed to local authorities. I should like to be put right if I am wrong, but if I am right I should like confirmation that the original guarantee will be upheld and that we can have the £500 million through the grant recycling process.

I should now like to put a question to the Minister which has not arisen before in this debate and on which I admit ignorance, after trying to check the details through reports and figures. It has been put to me that the reports also deal with a correction of data errors in social services grant-related expenditure. Those revisions will be to the substantial detriment of a range of authorities. Newham loses £1·1 million; Wandsworth and Waltham Forest £1 million; Hammersmith and Fulham £700,000; and Kensington and Chelsea £400,000. The biggest losers of all are Lambeth, with £2 million, and my authority — Southwark—with £2·5 million.

I have heard nothing about that. I see nothing that refers to that specifically in the text accompanying the statistics in the reports, so perhaps the advice I have been given is incorrect. I should be happy to hear that it is. If it is not, however, Southwark—the area I know best—will lose £2·5 million because of a recalculation of social services grant-related expenditure, which would be a severe blow.

I want to discuss the figures for Southwark, in the knowledge that tomorrow we shall debate the rate limits under the relevant order—including one for Southwark. Southwark appears to have suffered considerably as a result of the supplementary reports and revisions in the grant-related expenditure assessment. I make a last minute plea to the Minister on the basis of the facts and figures. Southwark deserves to have its rate limit—as set out in tomorrow's order—revised if its expenditure limit is still not to be revised.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are debating the approval of reports of the past. I do not think it would be right for the House to anticipate a future debate.

Mr. Hughes: I accept that entirely, and I think I can satisfy you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by turning now to the outturn figures dealt with in the orders.

Southwark has now been rate-capped for four consecutive years. The figures for the outturn of the budget are as follows. The budget in the first two years —1984-85 and 1985-86— was £108·437 million. Then, with the ex-GLC services added in for 1986-87 and 1987-88, and again for the coming year, the budget has been fixed at £134 million. But the reports show that for 1983-84 there has been a loss on the final report of just over £2·5 million as a result of revisions. For the 1986-87 report, there is a loss of £3·035 million. Southwark will be liable to make cash payments for those losses if the reports are approved. They amount to more than £5 million for those two years alone. In three of the past four years— 1983-84, 1984-85, and 1986-87—the loss has been more than £7 million.

I accept that, to some extent, there is budgetary provision for this. However, the losses result not from Southwark having acted outside budgetary restraints, but from the reduction in grant-related expenditure assessment as a result of factors that influenced all authorities, but bit Southwark particularly hard. If, as expected, another £4 million must be paid for the financial year 1985-86, there will be massive problems.

If I am right in thinking that one of the alterations is to the social services GRE, that is a specific area in which Southwark is desperately short. it is a known fact that social workers employed by Southwark but working in the Maudsley hospital had to take out an injunction to stop their transfer to fill gaps in one of the borough's area social services teams. The imposition by these orders of what appear to be substantive additional bills will make it impossible, with any further rate-cap limit as may be imposed tomorrow, plus the budgetary constraints on expenditure limits cumulatively over the last four years, for Southwark to meet its obligations.

Last year, on behalf of and with Tower Hamlets, I asked for an increase in its expenditure limits, and that was granted. I am not saying that happened entirely as a result of my request. Southwark asked for more, and was not granted it. The evidence shows that it should have been granted. The real screw on Southwark appears to be the additional sums which these reports require Southwark to pay. Are these figures right? I am happy tomorrow to work with the Minister's officials if this request cannot be dealt with now.

There is evidence that the burden of the formula and its application in these two years bites uniquely hard on Southwark, particularly on its key services. That may mean that the Government's calculations in relation to the need for Southwark in the coming year should be looked at again, even at this late stage. There is a precedent for figures being revised at a late stage, and parts of an order can be withdrawn, debated later and put back, as the Minister accepted in relation to one of the orders originally laid before the House. The figures in the report which are uniquely prejudiced against Southwark should be revised.

12.57 am

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am grateful for an opportunity to ask my hon. and learned Friend the Minister to clarify one or two points in connection with the supplementary reports for 1984-85 and 1986-87. In general, I support the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin), and I do not wish to take up time repeating those points.

Between 1984-85 and 1986-87, the grant-related expenditure for Norfolk county council has been increased from £232 million to £269 million, and total expenditure has increased from £217 million to £239 million. My

understanding of those figures is that in 1986-87, Norfolk county council spent £30 million below its grant-related expenditure, which was much lower in relation to GRE than in 1984-85. In spite of that, the grant payable to Norfolk county council went down. Therefore, I hope that my hon. and learned Friend will explain why, if one spends below one's GRE, one is penalised.

I then looked at the figures for Broadland district council, and found the same situation. Its GRE has been reduced from £3·98 million to £3·9 million, rounding the figure down significantly. Total expenditure went down from £2·96 million to £2·75 million, and once again, the amount by which the council was below GRE was better in 1986-87 than it was in 1984-85, but again, the grant payable was reduced.

I hope that I am being helpful here, because I know that Ministers attack this rate support grant system, say that it is unacceptable, and that they want to get rid of it as soon as possible. I hope that they will help me by explaining those discrepancies.

For Norwich, the GRE figure between 1984-85 and 1986-87 increased from £7·8 million to £9·6 million, yet for Broadland district council the GRE decreased from £3·983 million to £3·895 million. I shall not speak at great length on that, although I could. Could the Minister address that particular discrepancy and explain it to me so that I can explain that extraordinary difference in treatment between Norwich and the lower spending shire district to my constituents in Norfolk?

I support my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West in his strictures on the treatment of low-spending councils, and I hope that my hon. and learned Friend will explain those figures.

1 am

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I should like to end this tortuous debate on a happy note by placing on record on behalf of the people of the Isle of Wight our thanks to my hon. and learned Friend the Minister and his advisers for their solution to the rating of Crown property. It would have caused considerable difficulty if we had to find the arrears asked of us which go back for many years, some of which are referred to in these supplementary reports.

1.1 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): We have had an interesting debate which hon. Members have been listening to with rapt attention.

My hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) raised many issues which are not new to me because I had the privilege of visiting Langbaurgh last year and I met a recent deputation from the council to explain the present position and the limited way in which the Government could assist. After the last deputation, I wrote to my hon. Friend and told the council that I understood its anxiety and would be happy to meet it again this spring before we start on next year's settlement.

I share my hon. Friend's anxiety that the ratepayers of Langbaurgh are faced with a proposed rate increase of 30p by Cleveland county council. Such an increase can only be an unnecessary burden on them. My hon. Friend is particularly concerned about the definitions on density. The density factor measurements are based on definitions set out by the ordnance survey and applied to all authorities. The area of an authority covers all land, mountains, towns and derelict land. This measure is reasonable for the purposes for which it is used within the grant system. As I told my hon. Friend when he brought the deputation, we are looking for a much simpler grant system under new arrangements, but that will not be in place until 1990. I am sure he will be pleased to know that as a result of the supplementary reports, Langbaurgh benefits to the tune of £670,000.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin thought that Derbyshire county council was receiving beneficial treatment at the expense of Derbyshire Dales. The dales under these supplementary reports benefit to the extent of £86,000 while the county council loses to the extent of £2·896 million. I am sure that my hon. Friend thinks that that illustrates the justice of the situation. Once again my hon. Friend has drawn attention to the gross extravagance of Derbyshire county council and the relative prudence of the Conservative district councils.

The hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) raised the vexed issue of E7. I believe that it is too late to explain exactly how E7 is calculated, but the hon. Gentleman seems to have as good an understanding of it as most people. As a result of the supplementary reports that we are discussing tonight, Burnley benefits by £71,000.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) discussed a social services error, but I should point out that that error was contained in the supplementary report for 1983-84. Southwark gains more than £10 million from the reports under consideration and that for 1986-87 gives the authority £12·4 million. Those factors have been taken into account in the Secretary of State's proposals for the rate limit. I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman's figures are right, as they relate only to grant changes as a result of GRE changes. In 1986-87 Southwark gained £13 million of grant as a result of changes in its total expenditure and that gives the overall gain of £10 million from the two reports.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about recycling. It is always made clear that the guarantee of a certain amount of recycled grant would apply only to the first supplementary report. When there were subsequent supplementary reports it was inevitable that there might be a different outcome. That was no surprise to the local authorities concerned. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for the Environment made it perfectly clear in a letter to the local authority associations that there was no intention of increasing block grant further in subsequent supplementary reports.

Mr. Simon Hughes: What about the redefinition of two terms under the Local Government Finance Act 1987?

Mr. Chope: In the welter of detail before me, I do not have an answer for the hon. Gentleman, but I will write to him about it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broadlands——

Mr. Patrick Thompson: It is important for my constituents to realise that I cover both Norwich city and Broadlands and that, therefore, my constituency is Norwich, North.

Mr. Chope: I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson). He has frequently come to see me with councillors from Broadlands, so I mistook his constituency. In visits and in correspondence

[Mr. Chope]

my hon. Friend has tried to explain how Broadlands suffers under the present system. Broadlands is a low-spending, prudent local authority and it has much lower rates than Norwich. If my recollection is correct, I believe that this coming year the district rate in Broadlands will be about half that of Norwich. That reflects the different spending policies of those councils. Under the existing system, it is inevitable that when a council increases expenditure it forfeits grant. That applies to Broadlands and to Norwich.

We are introducing a new grant system that will be much clearer and simpler. Certainly it will be helpful in increasing accountability in local government.

I said that I would write to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, but perhaps it would be easier if I told him that none of the specifications are in a strict sense retrospective, as they apply only to supplementary reports made after the specifications have been made. In the light of new information, it is normal practice to make further supplementary reports for a financial year well after that year has passed. I think that that answers the hon. Gentleman's point.

I hope that the House will approve the supplementary reports.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Rate Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) (No. 4) 1984-85 (House of Commons Paper No. 253), a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th February, be approved.

Resolved,

That the Rate Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) (No. 3) 1986-87 (House of Commons Paper No. 254), a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

Patent Office (Relocation)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

1.10 am

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I wish to raise at this late hour the proposed relocation of the Patent Office from London to south Wales, but in doing so I say to my hon. Friend the Minister, whom I welcome to the Treasury Bench at this uncivilised hour, that the present Government's policy in seeking to challenge perceived norms and accepted wisdom is one that I strongly applaud. It is right that no idea or arrangement, no matter how well-established, should go unexamined or unquestioned.

The decision in recent years to consider the relocation of Government departmental offices to regions outside London is one that I welcome, and I hope that when future relocations are considered, the marvellous facilities offered in my constituency of Macclesfield will not go unnoticed by my hon. Friend, or for that matter, the excellent opportunities provided by the north-west region as a whole.

However, I am not arguing now for the relocation of the Patent Office from its present home in central London to my constituency or the north-west. Indeed, I hope to convince my hon. Friend that he should reconsider what can only be described as a hasty, if well-intentioned, decision to move the home of the Patent Office to Newport in south Wales.

It is not that I have anything at all against Wales or the people of that excellent Principality. I am in favour, as I said, of the dispersal of Government offices from London and the south-east. The reason why I am arguing against the move to south Wales is simply that the proper home for the Patent Office is in London. During the whole of the period of more than 100 years that a modern patent system has been in existence, the Patent Office has been located in the Chancery lane area of central London. That is almost certainly because the function of the office is to grant rights — patents, trade marks and registered designs — which are enforceable at law. It is logical to locate the office close to the High Court, the Inns of Court and specialist counsel, solicitors and patent agents who are concerned with obtaining — and, I remind the House, enforcing — such rights.

The Patent Office currently comprises approximately 1,100 members of staff, headed by the Comptroller-General. Two thirds are administrative, clerical and support staff, while the remainder are highly qualified technical examiners. A patent application is accepted and granted only after a technical evaluation and search carried out by one of the examiners to determine whether the application is directed to novel and inventive subject matter. To perform that important function, an examiner must have a thorough grasp of the area of technology with which the application is concerned.

Taken as a whole, the examining corps is highly qualified and greatly experienced across a range of disciplines covering the full technical spectrum and patent law. In short, they are a highly valuable and specialised asset to our country, in enabling us to make the best use of that great British flair for invention and entrepreneurship.

As my hon. Friend knows, the White Paper published just two years ago on the subject of intellectual property and innovation says:

"a nation such as the United Kingdom relies heavily on getting value from its intellectual property. We have a limited raw material base and a small home market, but we have a good education system, a tradition of world-leading inventions and of involvement in international trade."

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Winterton: I shall not give way. I have much to say in a short time.

The White Paper continues:

"The ability to claim ownership of ideas is a vital step in securing a profit from them."

The same White Paper argued that the Patent Office should be made a statutory non-departmental body, to make it more responsive to the needs of innovators, free it from the traditional Civil Service framework, and ensure that it should be self-supporting from fees, and free to finance investment programmes.

I make these remarks about the White Paper to remind the House, which can all too often become too detached from such things, of the real practical value of the Patent Office to British industry and, in particular, to the small company or self-employed individual from whose invention a whole industry could ultimately grow. I make these remarks also to remind my hon. Friend the Minister of the ideas contained in the White Paper. It appears that the excellent proposals have now been shelved. I urge him once again to turn his attention to these matters, albeit that they are now not the main subject of debate.

What is of specific concern is the proposed relocation of the office to south Wales and the impact that that move could have on British inventors.

First, I shall comment briefly on the rather casual manner in which the decision was announced. The first that many of my contacts in industry and in the patent world knew of the matter was a passing reference in a speech by the Comptroller-General of Patents at the annual dinner of the Chartered Institute of Patent Agents on 30 October last—although, with all respect to my hon. Friend, I understand that reference was also made to the decision in another place on that very day. I stress that the decision was announced. It was put forward not for discussion or consultation with those concerned, but as a fait accompli.

At no time prior to the somewhat informal announcement did there appear to have been any consultation with the professional organisations that will be most affected — the Chartered Institute of Patent Agents and the Institute of Trade Mark Agents. Nor had there been any consultation with individual users of the patent and trade mark system or with organisations such as the Confederation of British Industry or the Trade Marks, Patents and Designs Federation, which represent industrial users of the systems.

Concern about the total lack of consultation was registered with my hon. Friend in a letter from the Trade Marks, Patents and Designs Federation on 3 February. The CBI wrote earlier to the Comptroller-General, endorsing the federation's concern at the decision, and the lack of consultation that went before it.

That absence of consultation is of all the more concern, bearing in mind that the standing advisory committees on patents and trade marks have been in existence for some years. Surely a proposal of this kind is clearly a natural candidate for consideration by such committees. Therefore, I urge not the abandonment of the idea of relocation — as I said, all new ideas deserve consideration — but, rather, that such consideration should be comprehensive and constructive, and should include full consultation.

Mr. Flynn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member to refer to my constituency, when I am not allowed to speak, and refer to a matter that has nothing to do with his constituency?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): It is a matter that relates to the normal courtesies of the House. It is not a point of order.

Mr. Winterton: Therefore, I ask my hon. Friend to refer the detail of the decision to the standing advisory committee before it is ultimately implemented.

Secondly, the proposal seems to have arisen out of a report that was conducted by Price Waterhouse, a firm of considerable reputation but with no experience of patents. It is my suspicion, and certainly that of many concerned individuals and organisations who have contacted me about the matter, that the decision to move to south Wales arose simply because empty facilities exist there, due to the decision of another Government Department not to relocate in that area, as had originally been planned.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Winterton: I have already announced that I shall not give way. Opposition Members did not approach me before the debate to seek my permission to intervene.

Therefore, if my suspicion is true, such consideration is not the right basis upon which the Government should make commercial or policy decisions. The best interests of the British economy should be the overriding factor in a matter such as this.

Thirdly, in a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Neubert), my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster argued that the basic reason for the relocation was to limit the anticipated increase in Government fees which would need to be charged to users if the office were retained in London, with high accommodation costs and a prospective fall in patent registrations.

I challenge that argument. The latest financial statement concerning the position of the Patent Office appears as an appendix to the annual report of the Comptroller-General. The report for 1986 clearly shows that the total accommodation costs for the fee-earning services of the Patent Office amounted to only 18 per cent. of the total expenditure of the office and that receipts over expenditure amounted to almost £4 million—that is to say, there was a profit of £4 million. Even if accommodation costs were to treble, for example, in the future, they could be met within an overall increase of fees of less than 40 per cent. in 1986 terms.

The fees would still be low compared to those in other European countries. More particularly, it should be recognised that the users of the Patent Office's services almost invariably use professional assistance and that Government fees represent a relatively small proportion of the costs incurred. Consequently, it is expected that the increase in professional fees and ancillary costs to

[Mr. Winterton]

applicants for patents which will result directly from the move out of London could substantially offset any possible savings in Government fees.

Fourthly, I urge my hon. Friend to consider once again the impact of the proposed move on the competence of the office to handle patent applications. As I said earlier, that depends crucially on the retention of the corps of technical examiners and any move that results in a diminishing of that corps through reticence to move to that most desirable area of south Wales would be detrimental to the service offered to British industry.

From the letter that my hon. Friend wrote to the Trade Marks Patents and Designs Federation on 20 December last, it is clear that the Government are not only expecting, but hoping for, a reduction in this corps, since he says:

"Central London locations not only mean high rental but also significantly increased staff costs. By relocation away from London substantial savings are possible."

In short, the Government would save money by employing local people in Wales at lower rates, but those people would clearly not have the experience or expertise of the long-serving London personnel. Therefore, that would be a false economy and could lead to a further fall in the number of patent applications because of a lack of confidence, a fall in standards and the resultant inability to enforce patents granted and registered. One reason why we have such a fine reputation in this country is because we can enforce the patents that have been granted and registered.

I should also put on record at this stage the alarm expressed by those who would be affected by the knowledge that the Government are reported to have inquired whether the European Patent Office could handle the examination of United Kingdom patent applications in apparent ignorance of the fact that that would have resulted in a sevenfold increase in fees for patent applications—a level of fees which would effectively rule out many smaller companies from taking out patents. That is strangely inconsistent with the concern that my hon. Friend and his Department have expressed for fee increases simultaneously used to justify the Patent Office move to south Wales.

I seek an assurance from my hon. Friend this evening that that approach will not be pursued now that the European Patent Office has refused to handle the business because of its own backlog of work. The British Patent Office is currently dealing with over 31,000 applications each year. Surely that is a sign of a healthy and entrepreneurial economy, and that the Patent Office is providing a valuable service, at its present location, to British industry.

I want to draw the attention of the House to one final area. I understand that the United Kingdom is currently asking the EEC to locate the Community Trade Marks Office in London. The Government's proposal to move the Patent Office to south Wales is likely to be regarded in Europe as a reflection of a lack of interest in the United Kingdom about intellectual property, and much will be made of that by the Spanish, Dutch and Germans who are the other prime contenders for the location of the Community Trade Marks Office. Such a move by the Patent Office could effectively sabotage the bid for the Community Trade Marks Office.

Considerable advantages could flow from the location of the CTMO alongside the Patent Office in London. It would provide close liason and a pool of professional advisers both within and independent of the offices. The proposal to move the Patent Office out of London should be reviewed immediately and steps should be taken quickly to reassure industry of the Government's commitment to support intellectual property rights and its innovative ability, which should rightly be seen as the basis for the continued regeneration of United Kingdom industry.

A Patent Office providing industrial property services at senior level is surely of vital importance to industry and should be accessible from all parts of the country. I believe that that can be ensured only by locating the head office —albeit a residuary head office—in the capital city to which inevitably the most efficient communications are provided.

In conclusion, I want to thank my hon. Friend the Minister most sincerely for receiving me and representatives of those concerned—Mr. Ralph Walter of the CBI, an ex-employee of Unilever, Mr. Tony Gibson the president of the Trade Marks, Patents and Designs Federation, Mr. David Votier, president of the Chartered Institute of Patent Agents and Mr. David Tatham, also of the Trade Marks, Patents and Design Federation, a senior executive of ICI—in his office at the Department of Trade and Industry on Monday afternoon. We had a full and frank exchange of views and I know that those who accompanied me appreciated my hon. Friend's understanding of the problems and the sympathetic hearing that he gave us.

1.27 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. John Butcher): May I begin by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) for the manner in which he has pursued his arguments tonight and on previous occasions. I respect his sincerity and strength of feeling on this issue. In the course of my observations, I will try to deal with the very important points that he has raised.

I am grateful for the opportunity presented by the debate to explain more fully the reasons behind our proposal to relocate the Patent Office in south Wales, and — I am bound to say — to rebut some of the misunderstandings that have appeared in the press recently about our plans for the Patent Office.

To begin with, it is necessary to step back and take stock of the changes that are occurring in this area. This country and a number of other European states joined together in 1977 to establish the European Patent Office. Under the system administered by that office, a company seeking broad protection for its inventions may file a single patent application in Europe as an alternative to going to each of the member states individually. This system is very successful and the European Patent Office is now the major office in Europe. Our national office has correspondingly declined over the same period. Input is down 30 per cent. over the past five years and looks set to decline by a similar amount over the next five years. The European system is particularly attractive to large companies, with the result that applicants to the United Kingdom Patent Office are increasingly drawn from small and medium-sized enterprises.

On the other hand, the work of the trade marks registry of the Patent Office is increasing by leaps and bounds

following an amendment to the trade marks legislation in 1986 permitting service industries to register their marks and logos. As a result, trade mark applicants face long delays as the registry seeks to obtain sufficient staff and train them in the necessary skills.

The patents branch also faces similar problems in obtaining and retaining staff in central London, and both branches attract frequent complaints from the professions about the level of service provided. It is worth bearing in mind that, in the general service grades, the staff turnover in the Patent Office is over five times what it is in the Companies Registration Office and the Business Statistics Office in south Wales.

I shall come to the questions of the comparative labour and salary costs, but the accommodation costs in central London are spiralling upwards and in 1988 are expected to exceed £8 million, an amount borne on the patent side by fewer and fewer applicants as the input declines. It might be thought that, as the input declines and the staff with it, the office will need less space. But that is not the whole story. The patent search files consist of over 4 million documents and grow each year, so that the office's requirements for space cannot simply be adjusted in line with input. Overheads are set to climb steeply if the office remains in London.

It is reasonable to ask ourselves whether the situation should be allowed to continue unchecked, or whether we should take positive steps to put the office on a sounder basis so that it can provide the continuity of services that its customers rightly expect, at prices they can reasonably afford. The answer is plain. We would be failing in our duty to industry and commerce if the situation was allowed to drift out of control.

The first question that must be asked is: would it be cheaper to transfer all the patent work to the European Patent Office? It is clear that the European Patent Office has not the capacity to take on extra work from the United Kingdom Patent Office. Even if it had, the charges would be higher than the cost of doing the work in our own office. Moving the office to cheaper accommodation in south Wales would move the costs of our own operations out of the range of the European Patent Office. There are therefore no plans to transfer functions of the United Kingdom Patent Office to the European Patent Office. I would like to underline that statement, because recent press reports suggesting the contrary have caused some anxiety to the staff of the office.

Nor would I like to give the impression by anything I have said that the Patent Office is declining at such a rate that it is about to disappear through lack of customers. We would not be taking so much trouble thinking about the future of the office if that were the case. Even at its lower level of activity, the office is still a major division of the Department of Trade and Industry. Currently, it receives over 30,000 patent applications a year, over 30,000 applications to register trade and service marks and over 8,000 applications to register designs.

If the office were moved to south Wales, accommodation charges would fall from £8 million per annum to under £3 million. Staff costs were, I noted, the subject of a sedentary intervention. A further £1·5 million would be saved in London weighting, which would be a genuine saving. But the salary grants are the same, and the salaries paid, London weighting excepted, would be, grade for grade, the same in south Wales as in London.

In the context of a budget of £35 million, those figures cannot be ignored. South Wales is preferred, because the Department of Trade and Industry already has two large establishments in the Cardiff-Newport area, and it makes operational sense to place the Patent Office in the same region. The case for decentralising the office looks overwhelming.

While officials examine the implications of a move, talks have already started with the professions to consider what needs to be done to ensure that users would not be inconvenienced by a move away from London. I know that my hon. Friend feels strongly about that. A major part of the patent and trade mark profession is located in London within easy reach of the Patent Office in High Holborn. Plainly, its costs could rise considerably if its members had to spend their time travelling backwards and forwards between London and Wales to file their applications, or attend hearings. Likewise, members of the patents bar could be seriously disadvantaged if their time was divided between the Patents Court in London and the comptroller's court in Wales. Clearly, it would defeat the whole purpose of a move if the costs of the Patent Office were reduced at the expense of the professions, because at the end of the day it is the users who bear the costs of both.

In order to maintain a convenient service to users, the Patent Office plans to retain an office in London employing 60 to 70 people who would receive patent, trade mark and design business. This office would have on-line computer links with the relocated main office to give access to register information and would provide facilities so that ex-parte and inter-parte proceedings could be conducted in London.

We have previously debated the importance of the new data highways, the new broadband networks and telecommunications links. This is a classic case of taking advantage of such technology.

Some talks took place on 5 February with the Chartered Institute of Patent Agents, the Institute of Trade Mark Agents and the Trade Mark, Patent and Design Federation to ensure that the necessary facilities are available in London for the efficient conduct of their business should the proposd move take place. We would of course need to ensure that sufficient numbers of skilled staff needed for the proper continuity of services transfer with the office. Staff have been informed about the possibilities under consideration, and more detailed talks with staff representatives will begin in the near future. It is also important to appreciate that a move of an important office like the Patent Office would provide valuable new job opportunities in south Wales. A move would create at least 500 jobs locally.

Some agents have asked where such a decision would leave our bid to host the Community Trade Marks Office in London. The issues of the location of the national Patent Office and the Community Trade Marks Office are unconnected. The Community institution will not depend in any way on the United Kingdom Patent Office. I am determined that the United Kingdom bid stands in its own right and on its own independent merits. Our bid for the Community Trade Marks Office has always depended upon the advantages of London itself, its links with the other Community states, the United States of America, Japan and other countries, and on the wealth of trade mark expertise available. This is still the case and our claim

[Mr. John Butcher]

to that office is still unrivalled on any objective basis. We shall press strongly on the Commission and others those objective critera.

My hon. Friend has spoken of the need for consultation and has expressed the view that more consultation is necessary before any proposal to relocate the Patent Office out of central London is entertained. I hope he is aware that I am sensitive to his comments not just in this debate but on previous occasions. Consultation with users about the future operation of the Patent Office is necessary. However, the overall management of the Civil Service, of which the Patent Office is a part, is a matter for the Government. We have a manifesto commitment to improve public services, to make them more effective and to reduce their costs. It is for Government to be satisfied that these goals will be achieved. For the Patent Office, the financial savings to be derived and the operational improvements that can be attained by a move to south Wales make the case conclusive.

Having made a decision on financial and operational grounds, I readily agree with my hon. Friend that there is thus a need for consultation about its implementation. We shall carefully examine the record of this debate to pick up the sensitivities about which my hon. Friend feels consultation is in order. As I have said, this process of consultation has already begun. The Comptroller-General has offered further meetings to the Chartered Institute of Patent Agents, the Trade Mark Patents and Designs Federation and the Institute of Trade Mark Agents to discuss the sort of services that they would like to see provided by the London office and the links that that office might have with the main office in south Wales. That is a very important form of consultation, but I cannot accept that Government should have consulted on the basic question of how to manage and locate the Patent Office. This is an issue of central Civil Service management and it is an issue for Government.

A transfer will enable the Patent Office to provide a better service through the greater availability and continuity of staff, a cheaper service for the benefit particularly of small and medium-sized enterprises, and a more secure future away from the high costs of London.

Mr. Winterton: Would my hon. Friend be prepared to consider the appointment of the head office in London——

The Question having been proposed after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 18 February 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRIGHTON AND PRESTON CEMETERY BILL

Read a Second time and referred to the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills.

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT BILL *(By Order)*

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on consideration [10 December], That the Bill be now considered.

Debate further adjourned till Thursday 25 February.

TEIGNMOUTH QUAY COMPANY BILL *(By Order)*

YORK CITY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time upon Thursday 25 February.

HAMPSHIRE (LYNDHURST BYPASS) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time upon Thursday 25 February at 7 o'clock.

ASSOCIATED BRITISH PORTS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

CARDIFF BAY BARRAGE BILL *(By Order)*

CITY OF LONDON (SPITALFIELDS MARKET) BILL *(By Order)*

FALMOUTH CONTAINER CARGO TERMINAL BILL *(By Order)*

NORTH KILLINGHOLME CARGO TERMINAL BILL *(By Order)*

ST. GEORGE'S HILL, WEYBRIDGE, ESTATE BILL *(By Order)*

SOUTHERN WATER AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time upon Thursday 25 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners (Remand)

1. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are currently on remand; what proportion this represents of the total prison population; and what steps he has recently taken to advise magistrates on remand policy.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): On 31 December 1987 the unsentenced prison population was about 10,480, not counting 474 mostly unsentenced prisoners held in police cells. That was just over 22 per cent. of the total prison population. My right hon. Friend cannot advise magistrates on their decisions on bail, which they take under the Bail Act 1976. He has called attention to the desirability of reducing the remand population and of providing information to magistrates in making decisions on bail.

Mr. Coombs: My hon. Friend will be aware of the seriousness of the position, given the figures released yesterday showing the number of people held on remand in police cells. Is he aware that, on a visit to Wormwood Scrubs prison two weeks ago by the all-party penal affairs group, we were told by an officer that one person has been remanded in custody on the charge of not possessing a bus ticket? What plans has my hon. Friend for a feasibility study within his Department to discuss tagging as an alternative to remanding in custody for non-convicted prisoners?

Mr. Patten: It is not for me to comment on an individual case. The interpretation of the 1976 Act is a matter for the bench or the judges involved. However, my hon. Friend has made a very interesting suggestion, which my right hon. Friend and I will consider.

Mr. Steinberg: Does the Minister agree that it is appalling that many prisoners held on remand who will eventually be found not guilty and released from prison are living in the most horrific conditions, with three in a cell, and having to slop out? Would it not be possible for the Home Secretary to examine the Scottish experience? In Scotland a prisoner must be brought to court within 110 days, or be released.

Mr. Patten: That is exactly what we are doing. My right hon. Friend has initiated some important experiments over the past year or so. We hope that by 1 April 1988 there will be limits on the length of time for which a prisoner can be remanded, which will apply in the whole of Wales and in most of England. We also hope that within the next two years we shall have covered the whole of England.

Mr. Gale: In the light of the figures that my hon. Friend has given us, what consideration is the Department giving to the private building and management of remand prisons?

Mr. Patten: We are greatly constrained by the law in this respect, but we are very interested in the suggestion pur forward by my hon. Friend, and we are considering it.

Mr. Pike: What does the Minister think will happen when the poll tax legislation is introduced? Those who are found guilty will be able to obtain a refund for the time they were on remand, while those found innocent will have to pay the poll tax for the period during which they were in custody awaiting trial.

Mr. Patten: That question would probably be better addressed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Association of Chief Police Officers

2. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met representatives of the Association of Chief Police Officers; and what was discussed.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hurd): I met the president and senior officers of the Association of Chief Police Officers on 25 January. We discussed the problems caused by the need to accommodate prisoners in police cells and also crime prevention initiatives.

Mr. Leigh: Did my right hon. Friend convince chief police officers that calls for more manpower in the police, as in other public services, can be tolerated only in the context of greater efficiency and effectiveness and more modernisation and rationalisation?

Mr. Hurd: Chief officers are well aware of that fact. They know that, although we are in the middle of a further stage of expansion of police numbers in England and Wales, which are already a record, the applications that police authorities put in will be judged on the criterion that my hon. Friend mentions—whether they are making the best use of existing resources, for example, by employing civilians in jobs which they can do at about half the cost of a police officer.

Mr. Boyes: Nevertheless, is the Home Secretary aware that Northumbria's chief constable has carried out an exercise on his manpower needs and has determined that he needs an extra 529 police officers in order to police my constituency and those of my hon. Friends in Tyne and Wear? Does he also realise that if the chief constable uses the measure of serious offences per police officer, he needs an extra 800 police officers? Will the Home Secretary let me take a message back to the chief constable that he will agree to an extra manpower quota?

Mr. Hurd: The problem in Northumbria is not so much the manpower levels but the precept which the House approved on 8 February. I have looked into the matter, because I have had various representations about it. The maximum precepts for the four joint police authorities concerned, which the House approved on 8 February, should enable them broadly to maintain their present level of service if they get their sums right and take wise decisions.

Mr. Conway: When my right hon. Friend was discussing manpower requirements with the chief police officers, did he urge them, as he has done in the past, to make greater use of special constables, particularly in rural areas, because they can play a useful part, particularly in street patrols, and so ease the burden on regular police officers?

Mr. Hurd: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. That issue did not come up at the meeting, but we believe that possibility to be so important that we held a special conference, presided over by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, designed to bring home to chief officers and others concerned the fact that special constables can be a real asset, and, in many places, are still under-used.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: When the Home Secretary next meets the chief constable of West Yorkshire, will he put it to him that there is a responsibility placed upon him to stop the leaks, from the West Yorkshire constabulary of smears—such as the one in the *Yorkshire Post* in an article written by Mr. Roger Cross—against Mr. Stalker by linking him to the death or murder of a Sergeant Speed? Will he tell him to stop the leaks because they are unfair on Mr. Stalker?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman is in no position to lecture anybody on smears and insinuations. The chief constable of West Yorkshire has handled himself with high distinction and professional care throughout the whole business and I reject any insinuation directed either at him or the members of his force.

Prison Services

3. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish his response to the fourth report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, Session 1986-87, on contract provision of prison services.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hogg): We hope to publish the response just before or shortly after the Easter recess.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: In view of the high cost of keeping prisoners in police cells, will my hon. Friend give us some idea of his current thinking on keeping prisoners on remand while awaiting trial?

Mr. Hogg: It is highly undesirable that remand prisoners should be kept in police cells and we are doing our best to prevent that happening. We are tackling the problem in a variety of ways, including bail hostels, the building of new prisons, speeding up the process of trial and reminding courts, where proper and appropriate, of the provisions of the Bail Act.

Mr. Soames: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in view of the increasingly feckless and irresponsible action of prison officers, the only way that they will learn what we expect from them is if we take away their right to hold prisoners in custody? Therefore, will he consider carefully the great opportunities that are open for the privatisation of certain prison services?

Mr. Hogg: It is quite right that we should increase civilianisation where possible, and there are a number of functions ancillary to the prison service that can doubtless involve the private sector. There is already substantial private sector involvement in the construction of prisons. I would wish to postpone the wider issue of the management of the prisons until the response to the Select Committee has been made.

Immigration

4. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the proposal to end the right of intervention by hon. Members on immigration cases.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Tim Renton): I have received a few representations from Opposition Members since my right hon. Friend's announcement on 16 November during the Second Reading debate on the Immigration Bill. We believe that many hon. Members find the present arrangements unsatisfactory. We are therefore seeking a new arrangement which would provide a better service to hon. Members and their constituents. I hope within some weeks to put forward proposals for change, on which right hon. and hon. Members will, of course, have the opportunity to comment.

Mr. Dunnachie: I thank the Minister for that reply. Does he realise that the right of MPs to intervene in such cases represents the last appeal for many families wishing to be reunited in this country? Hon. Members on both sides of the House, including me, have brought justice to individuals who have every right to enter this country.

Mr. Renton: Yes, of course I understand that, but it is precisely to provide a better service for MPs and thus for their constituents that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I are examining the possibility of bringing new proposals to the House. I remind the hon. Gentleman that there are two sides to the coin. In answer to his letter of 14 October we have twice asked for further particulars —on 6 November and 11 February—so that we can trace the case. So far, the hon. Gentleman has not replied.

Mr. Hanley: When I was a member of the Home Affairs Committee I visited Lunar house and the ministerial correspondence unit at Harmondsworth. It became clear to me that, with more than 12,000 letters received by the Minister last year, he is being overburdened with unnecessary correspondence from hon. Members. Is it not inherent in hon. Members' responsibilities that they should not act merely as a filing tray or rubber stamp, but should consider carefully applications on immigration cases—particularly before they write to the Minister on routine matters?

Mr. Renton: I thank my hon. Friend and recognise his expertise in these matters. I would say seriously that if we can reduce the casework backlog at Lunar house it will help MPs, because they will have fewer representations from constituents wondering what has happened to their cases.

Mr. Vaz: As there are 200,000 items of unopened mail at Lunar house, is it not undesirable that Members of Parliament should be made to deal with Croydon and face delays? Will the Minister tell the House that he will go out into the cities and provinces to speak to organisations that deal with immigration before he puts any proposals on this issue before the House?

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman has already done enough damage to Lunar house by arriving 45 minutes late on Monday last week for a meeting there which he had asked me to arrange. No sooner had he left Lunar house than he was running to the national newspapers to tell them about difficulties there. I shall not anticipate the details of the proposals that we shall put before the House, the aim of which is to provide a better service for Members of Parliament, including the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Sayeed: Is my hon. Friend aware that constituents of mine are most grateful to him for the able and considerate way in which he has responded to their problems and exercised his discretion?

Mr. Renton: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the staff at Lunar house, who have to cope with literally hundreds of thousands of pieces of correspondence every year.

Mr. Randall: We look forward to the Minister's proposals for improving services to MPs. However, may I make it absolutely clear to him that MPs guard their rights jealously and that if those rights are weakened it will be immigrants who will lose, rather than MPs? Will the Minister be increasing the number of staff and the building space at Lunar house as part of the review to make sure that adequte services are provided to MPs?

Mr. Renton: I have many powers, but it is beyond me to increase the building space at Lunar house. The building is there and I cannot increase its size.

The Labour party must stop facing in two directions at once on this issue. Opposition Members cannot lecture us about the delays at Lunar house and, at the same time, vote against the changes that we introduced three weeks ago to remove 40,000 cases a year from Lunar house. That is sheer hypocrisy.

Mr. Favell: Is it not a fact that those rights, which are so jealously guarded by Opposition Members, have caused enormous problems because Opposition Members have intervened on the flimsiest possible evidence in many immigration cases?

Mr. Renton: That is obviously correct. Of course we shall preserve the rights of Members of Parliament, but we wish to arrive at a better procedure to enable everyone —Members of Parliament, Ministers and Lunar house— to concentrate on the really urgent, difficult and, at times, desperate cases.

Salema Begum

5. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will announce his decision on the request by Salema Begum, daughter of Mr. Gura Miah, to remain with her parents in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Renton: I wrote to the hon. Member on 12 February to say that following the satisfactory conclusion of inquiries by the immigration service, I have decided to allow Salema Begum to remain in this country with her parents.

Mr. Lamond: I thank the Minister for that answer. Although the case was lengthy—I think necessarily so—and the girl concerned and her family were put under considerable strain, I should, nevertheless, like to give my personal thanks to the Minister for exercising his discretion in that way and also put on record the thanks of the family.

Mr. Renton: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks, which I shall certainly pass on to the officials in my office and at Lunar house. However, I hope that the

hon. Gentleman can persuade some of the Cassandras on his Benches to realise that the Home Secretary and I are trying genuinely to improve immigration procedures.

Mr. Randall: Although my hon. Friends and I welcome the Minister's descision on that specific case, is he aware that it was based on DNA testing? When will the Minister stop dragging his feet and start to introduce a DNA testing service, which we believe should be free of charge to the poorer in our society?

Mr. Renton: I am aware that the result was based on DNA testing, because I took the decision myself. As I said to the House two days ago in the debate on the Immigration Bill, we now have the report on DNA in draft. We are showing it to the experts involved and once we have their approval of the detail, I shall lay a copy in the Library of the House.

Firearms

6. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of present controls on the import of firearms into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In the light of our review on firearms controls the Firearms (Amendment) Bill contains a provision whereby visitors to Great Britain will be required to obtain a permit if they wish to import a firearm or shotgun.

Mr. Atkinson: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Will he confirm that we have harsher controls for the exporting of personal firearms, for use in international shooting competitions, for example, than we have for the importation of firearms? Should it not be the other way round?

Mr. Hogg: We thought that there were shortcomings in the legislation regarding the importation of firearms into this country and we have tried to cure those shortcomings by the Firearms (Amendment) Bill.

Mr. Frank Cook: The Minister will be aware of my personal anxiety about the Common Market Council directive, approved in September last year, which affords member states — [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] I am refreshing my memory — which affords member states the requisite guarantees for them to agree to abstain from police checks for the possession of weapons when internal Community frontiers are crossed. The Minister will also be aware of my concern that the Council's definition of firearms encompasses portable grenade launchers, portable rocket launchers and flamethrowers. Will he give the House an assurance today that Her Majesty's Government will not support that kind of directive in any way?

Mr. Hogg: The Government's view is that the proposed directive is misconcieved, not amenable to drafting improvements, and needs to be withdrawn or rejected.

Mr. Colvin: Is my hon. Friend aware that police man hours required to administer the Firearms (Amendment) Bill will double in the first year of its administration to 1,550,000? Will he ensure that if the Bill reaches the statute book in the way proposed resources will be made available to the police to administer its implications?

Mr. Hogg: I am afraid that there is no sound basis for supporting the calculation of hours put forward by my hon. Friend. It is undoubtedly true that our proposals are broadly welcomed by the police service and by the House.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Is the Minister satisfied that the proposals to which he has referred will not constitute an obstacle to those who wish to import weapons into the United Kingdom for legitimate purposes such as target shooting and game shooting?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. and learned Member makes a sound point. It is important that any checks that we impose should take account of legitimate sporting and commercial interests. In my judgment, clause 12 is correct in both regards.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Is my hon. Friend aware of the concern about the importation and sale of stun guns? Can he say whether any action by the Home Office is envisaged?

Mr. Hogg: The Bill will make a stun gun a prohibited weapon to which section 5 of the Firearms Act 1968 applies.

Chorley Forensic Laboratory

7. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will name the scientists sacked or compulsorily retired from the Home Office laboratory in Chorley since 1979, giving the dates in each case.

Mr. John Patten: No scientific staff at the Home Office forensic science laboratory at Chorley have been dismissed or compulsorily retired since 1979.

Mr. Hood: Will the Minister investigate the allegations made in the House this week during an Adjournment debate that Dr. Skuse and Mr. Reade, two of the principal witnesses in the Birmingham pub bombing appeal, conspired together during that appeal and even met in Mr. Reade's house?

Mr. Patten: Some extraordinary and bizarre allegations were made during that Adjournment debate earlier this week. The hon. Gentleman has referred to some of them. There were also attacks on individual named members of the judiciary, and even a most extraordinary suggestion that somehow I have been involved in covering up for the police and the judiciary for many years.

Mr. Lawrence: Is it not a disgraceful abuse of parliamentary privilege for Opposition Members to accuse forensic scientists and those who serve the state of conspiracy to pervert the course of justice, when such accusations have no justification whatsoever?

Mr. Patten: Those who come to the Chamber and make unfounded allegations should follow the sensible old rule of coughing up or shutting up. I entirely agree with my hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. McCartney: Dr. Skuse is one of my constituents, and a near neighbour of mine. I am also concerned about the allegations in relation to the evidence at the trial and the subsequent allegations made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), who is an honourable man who has taken a great deal of care to investigate the allegations

Whatever the Minister says, Dr. Skuse was dismissed from his employment. Is it not in the best interests of Dr.

Skuse and those who have been convicted on his evidence as a principal witness at a number of trials, for that evidence to be investigated to clarify the position for Dr. Skuse and for those who were charged and may have been wrongly found guilty? It is only fair, given the nature of the Birmingham trial and other significant trials——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is asking questions, but he is taking a rather long time.

Mr. Patten: Briefly in reply, I set out the circumstances surrounding Dr. Skuse's early retirement on the grounds of limited efficiency in my response to the Adjournment debate on Tuesday. Otherwise, I think that the extraordinary tissue of allegations and suggestions put forward by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) should not be considered worthy of the attention of the House.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my hon. Friend agree that although any hon. Member rightly should pursue issues in the House, using character assassination to pursue an issue is immoral, improper and unjust? Dr. Skuse, like anyone else, deserves justice. Just because some people rightly have been convicted after a 28-day appeal, for any hon. Member to try to use Dr. Skuse to get the case reopened is absolutely improper and dishonourable.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The Court of Appeal had before it all the evidence. Indeed, Dr. Skuse was a witness before it and gave evidence for some three and a half days. I believe that some Opposition Members should be extremely cautious before they make totally unfounded allegations.

Mr. Mullin: Is the Minister aware that on 29 November, while the appeal was being heard, Doctor Skuse was to be found at the home of another principal crown witness, Superintendent George Reade at Rugeley, Staffordshire? Dr. Skuse was 80 miles away from his home in Wigan. What does the Minister think that they were discussing if it was not the trial? Was it a football match or the weather?

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman is becoming more and more bizarre. He made those allegations in his speech during the Adjournment debate on Tuesday night. It has been a consistent theme of the hon. Gentleman to make allegations without evidence and without foundation.

Prisons (Riot Costs)

8. **Mr. John Townend:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total cost to Her Majesty's Government, including staff overtime and damage to buildings, of riots in Her Majesty's prisons over the last three years.

Mr. Hurd: The total estimated cost of the damage that occurred during the riots in April and May 1986 was about £5·5 million. Other serious disturbances by inmates in 1986 and 1987—at Risley, Wymott and Dartmoor—resulted in damage of about £45,400. Information on staff overtime costs arising as a result of serious disturbances is not readily available.

Mr. Townend: I think that it is regrettable that the Government do not know the total cost of the prison riots. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the known cost is a significant sum and is a waste of taxpayers' money that could be better spent on the Health Service? In future, will my right hon. Friend get tougher at an earlier stage with rioters, in order to limit damage? Is he aware that when prison rioters got on the roof of the prison at Hull—they did more than £1 million worth of damage—the water hoses were not used because, in the words of the governor, they were frightened about injuring the prisoners. Surely prisoners who take such action should be aware that if they do not come down when instructed they face injury.

Mr. Hurd: I believe that my hon. Friend is a bit hard in criticising me for not giving him the figure that I have just given. Of course, my hon. Friend is right that prisoners who escape, attempt to escape or riot should be subject to disciplinary action. As regards the money, I believe that my hon. Friend would agree that prisons should be kept secure and that prison staff need to work in decent conditions. Any idea that, in general, prisoners are kept in a cossetted or comfortable state is well astray.

Mr. Barry Field: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is nothing short of a national scandal that A and D wings of Parkhurst prison are still unoccupied since the riot of 1979?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend and I discussed this matter when I visited the prison and, as he keeps in close touch with this matter, he will know that plans are going ahead to bring that area back into occupation, and he will know why it has taken so long.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Does the Home Secretary take seriously the letter that was sent to him from the Prison Officers Association warning that Brixton will burn to the ground and that prison officers will be seriously injured or even killed unless he takes urgent action to improve the staffing levels? What does he intend to do about that unprecedented situation?

Mr. Hurd: I take seriously the representations from Brixton and we are in close touch with the local branches of the POA in several London prisons and nationally on that matter. The short answer to the hon. Lady's question is that I propose to recruit 1,360 additional prison officers in 1988-89.

Official Secrets Legislation

9. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give an exact date for the publication of his proposals to change the offical secrets legislation.

Mr. Hurd: I hope to lay a White Paper before Parliament in June. At this stage I can give no more precise commitment.

Mr. Dykes: I am grateful for that answer. As the proposals made in the other place by Lord Bethell fit in very well with that putative timetable, will my right hon. Friend please give maximum encouragement to those proposals, bearing in mind that they reflect some of the utterances and expressions of opinion made some weeks ago in this House on the proposals of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd)?

Mr. Hurd: I note the noble Lord's intentions. The management of business in the other place is, happily, not

something for me, but I am sure the noble Lord will also notice the timetable that my hon. Friend has elicited from me.

Mr. Stokes: Although this subject is liable to be a political minefield in view of the legislation that my right hon. Friend is thinking of, will he comfort himself with the thought that this subject is not of great interest to the man in the street, and is of interest mainly to media people and journalists?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend has made that point effectively before, as he has done today. There is much truth in what he says.

Concessionary Television Licences

10. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has revised the guidance given by his Department about concessionary television licences for pensioners in the light of recent litigation.

Mr. Renton: Revised guidelines about the application of the regulations governing the concessionary licence scheme were issued to the national television licence records office in April 1987.

Mr. Beith: Does the Minister accept that in the light of recent court decisions it is now open to local authorities, by providing appropriate services to tenants, to ensure that many more elderly people can have concessionary television licences than do now? Will he place any obstacle in the way of that being done?

Mr. Renton: I stress to the hon. Gentleman that it is not only a matter of appropriate services; nor is it only a matter of a communal facility having to be provided. The accommodation must also be part of a group and specially provided for. Since the Kirklees judgment we have had a great many applications for concessionary licences, and they are being carefully considered in the light of that judgment.

Mr. Latham: I thank my hon. Friend for helpfully receiving a deputation on this matter. Is he aware that hundreds of my constituents who are pensioners have been waiting 11 months for his departmental decision on the issue? Will he please give that decision early priority?

Mr. Renton: I am aware of that. I was pleased to receive the deputation brought by my hon. Friend the other day. There have been a great many applications since the Kirklees judgment, and we shall proceed to a decision on them as quickly as we can.

Mr. Madden: Does the Minister not recognise that pensioners do not want revised guidelines? They want an urgent Government announcement that all pensioner households will receive free television. Does he recognise that the Government's record on pensions is scandalous and that many pensioners are being robbed of £8 to which they are fully entitled? A decision by the Government to give free television to pensioner households is long overdue.

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman should sometimes think before he speaks. He should realise that if every pensioner received a free television licence, it would cost about £360 million a year. That means that the cost of everyone else's television licence would go up by about 50 per cent. Those who are on low incomes, but are not pensioners, would also have to pay that higher price.

Mr. Ward: I appreciate what my hon. Friend has said about blanket subsidies, but is he aware of the sense of unfairness felt by many people living in private sheltered accommodation, who believe that those who live in council-run accommodation are a privlieged group? Will he bear that in mind in future?

Mr. Renton: I fully accept what my hon. Friend has said. The difficulty is that the present scheme is unsatisfactory and gives rise to serious anomalies. Improvements were made to it in 1984, but we have not yet found a way of further improving the scheme without either unacceptably increasing costs or producing more anomalies.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Will the Minister give an assurance that no action will be taken against pensioners who do not have television licences now and believe that they fall into the category of exemption because of the grey area that has arisen since the Kirklees judgment? Is he aware that many pensioners in the Kirklees area do not have television licences because they think they are covered by the exemption scheme? If the Minister makes the ruling retrospective, they could be prosecuted in the interim for not having a television licence.

Mr. Renton: I thank the hon. Lady for giving me the opportunity to make the position clear. Until the concessionary licence is granted a full licence is required by law. If a concessionary licence is granted, it will be back-dated to the date of application. Anyone eligible who bought a full licence after that date can obtain a full refund, and no prosecution will be initiated against anyone for whom a concessionary licence application has been made while it is outstanding.

Crime Prevention

11. **Mr. Thurnam:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received about the effects of the operation of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act on the fight against crime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: I have received a letter from the Conservative Association in my hon. Friend's constituency suggesting that the Act has been a handicap to police efforts to deter crime. I am not persuaded that that has been the case, but I have recently set in hand a review of the codes of practice made under the Act and I shall be consulting a wide range of interested bodies, including the police.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Act is helping to streamline court procedures by eliminating vexatious claims that the police have not been following proper procedures?

Mr. Hurd: It is certainly bringing down substantially the amount of vexatious argument about what happened in a police station. If, as we plan, tape recording can be implemented effectively throughout England and Wales by 1991, it will be an enormous step forward in the direction that my hon. Friend wants.

Mr. Hayes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the suggestions made by the Labour party that the Act was unworkable and unfair have proved completely groundless? Will he be encouraged by the fact that, according to

a report published today, juvenile crime has decreased by 23·3 per cent. over the past 10 years? Will he continue to encourage the police in the practice of cautioning?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend is quite right in his latter point and I agree entirely with him. If we had listened to the proposals and accepted the amendments of the Labour party, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act would have been infinitely more cumbersome and paper-ridden.

Mr. Worthington: Has the Secretary of State learnt anything from the visit of the Minister of State to France? Is he aware that that country has demonstrated that it is possible to turn down the crime rate if one acknowledges that crime rates are altered not by the number of police but by the conditions under which people live? His constant denials of the link between unemployment, living conditions and crime have been shown to be untrue in France.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend came back from France with some useful ideas about French crime prevention proposals. We have plenty of initiatives for crime prevention up our sleeves for the spring, and as they unfold I hope that they will have the hon. Gentleman's support.

Mr. Cash: Will my right hon. Friend note the letter that I sent to him recently from the chief constable of Staffordshire in the wake of the Bingley Hall riots? Will he consider whether the code of practice — which is currently associated with the provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act and designed to ensure that organised violence can be sought out and eliminated before it takes place — should be incorporated in the Act?

Mr. Hurd: I shall certainly take Staffordshire's suggestion into account when we look at the code of practice, but I have no plans to amend the Act at present. Staffordshire has taken notable initiatives, through the Staffordshire police, to try to keep young people in particular out of crime during the summer holidays.

NHS Demonstration (Police Conduct)

12. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis about the conduct of the police in the area around the Houses of Parliament and Whitehall during the demonstration in support of the National Health Service on 3 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the commissioner that the actions of the police on 3 February were taken in pursuance of his general duty to ensure the free passage of the highway and the requirement placed on him by sessional orders to keep the streets leading to the House free and open.

Mr. Canavan: Will the Minister investigate reports that people who took part in what had been a fairly peaceful demonstration, including some young nurses in uniform, were jostled, punched and kicked by policemen, some of whom behaved like animals? Does the Minister realise that nurses and Health Service workers would not have had to take to the streets if the Government had given them the same generous pay increases as they have handed out to the police in recent years?

Mr. Hogg: That question is typical of the Labour party in that it is a discreditable one. No complaint has been made against the police. It is interesting to note that only four were persons arrested, and of them only one was a nurse. What is intolerable is that the Labour party assists in the passing of these sessional orders and then complains when they are operated in a fair and reasonable manner.

Mr. Bill Walker: When my hon. Friend meets the Commissioner of Police, will he convey our thanks for the splendid job that the police carry out every time the House sits, for the protection that we receive from them, for their courtesy and for the fact that they handle all the demonstrations that take place with the kindness and diligence that we expect of them?

Mr. Hogg: When I next see the commissioner, I shall make sure that he is aware of my hon. Friend's point. One of the things that I expect to hear from him is his deep disquiet at the unfounded attacks on the police service from the Labour Benches.

Mr. Heffer: Although the Minister appears to be satisfied in respect of the National Health Service demonstration, is he satisfied with what happened to the Christians — priests, nuns, laity and monks — who went to the Ministry of Defence yesterday and were arrested because they took the decision — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This question is about the sessional order referring to this House.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Sir John Farr: Although I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, may I ask her whether she will take time today, in her busy schedule, to consider the sixth report of the Home Affairs Select Committee relating to criminal evidence, which was compiled in 1982 under the chairmanship of Lord Eden and comprised a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House? One of the Committee's recommendations was that a committee should be established to assist and advise the Home Secretary in cases of appeal. I should like my right hon. Friend to consider whether that is right. It is important to note that the House has not yet had a chance to discuss the recommendation. Will my right hon. Friend do something about that?

The Prime Minister: My answer to my hon. Friend has to be in the negative, because the Government's response to that recommendation was set out in the Government reply to the sixth report from the Home Affairs Select Committee, Session 1981-82. The reply concluded that, as a matter of principle, priority should be given to improving and enhancing the part played by the courts in considering alleged miscarriages of justice. I have nothing further to add to that reply.

Mr. Hattersley: Did the speech by the Secretary of State for Social Services to Young Conservatives last weekend represent official Government policy?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I went all the way through the speech. It was excellent.

Mr. Hattersley: Having been all the way through the speech, the Prime Minister will be able to confirm the Secretary of State's view on the resources that he was allocated for spending on the Health Service this year. His view was:

"I didn't think that was enough".

Does the Prime Minister endorse that view, or does she repudiate the Minister?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has left out a part of the sentence. It read:

"I didn't think that was enough, in terms of the changes . . . all of us would like to see so far as the primary health care service is concerned."

My right hon. Friend went on to explain where the extra resources for those primary health care services were to come from. The misreporting occurred in one newspaper, but the matter was reported quite accurately in another paper.

Mr. Hattersley: Let us continue our textual analysis of the Secretary of State's speech. He went on to tell the Young Conservatives— I read the sentence in its entirety:

"I wanted to see additional resources above and beyond those that I've secured."

As far as I can make out, all the country wants to see additional resources except the Prime Minister. Why does she not provide them?

The Prime Minister: That sentence referred to primary health care services. My right hon. Friend went on to say that he was going to get those extra resources from charges which have already been before the House, of which in fact the right hon. Gentleman disapproved. The fact is that the right hon. Gentleman has asked his question on a false supposition, because he did not read the speech. He disapproves of the place from which the extra resources are coming. My right hon. Friend went on to say:

"It was . . . a Labour Government first started the introduction of charges in the field of optometry in spectacles and dental care, in league with all of these areas."

Extra resources over and above that are coming next year. They have been in the public expenditure paper. They are the biggest cash increase the Health Service has ever known—£1,100 million.

Mr. Summerson: In view of the Labour party's opposition to the Prevention of Terrorism Act and to the British independent nuclear deterrent, does my right hon. Friend agree that the Labour party has abrogated——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member's question must refer to the Prime Minister's responsibilities.

Mr. Summerson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the British independent nuclear deterrent is part of the Government's responsibility, which has been thrown away by the Labour party?

The Prime Minister: Yes. The British independent nuclear deterrent is vital to the security of our people today and to generations in the future. The nuclear deterrent is a fundamental part of NATO's strategy. I also agree with my hon. Friend that the Prevention of Terrorism Act has been a tremendous help to police both here and in Northern Ireland. Those who really wish to fight terrorism should support that Act.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Flynn: Is the Prime Minister aware of the widespread fury at the pig's breakfast her Government have made of the ex gratia payments for the retail prices index error? Tens of thousands of war pensioners, the disabled, invalids and other pensioners have been cheated by the chaos. Nearly one in 10 of all those with combined pension books have lost out and many of them have been advised by Government offices to combine their books. Will the Prime Minister give us a guarantee today that all those who have been short-changed by the system will be compensated?

The Prime Minister: As I indicated to the House on Tuesday, there was no legal requirement on the Government to make those payments. We, however, calculated that the total estimated social security underspend was £109 million, of which special payments of over £101 million have been made to over 12 million people. — *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would listen. A very small group have been under-compensated, out of 12 million.—*[Interruption.]* Out of 12 million, 175,000 have been undercompensated, and the under-compensation is £1 million. Over 2 million people who have lost nothing by the error, but nevertheless receive an £8 special payment, which of course comes to £16 million. *[Interruption.]* It was necessary to do it that way in order to get the payments there very quickly, so the under-compensation has been about £1 million and the over-compensation has been about £16 million for 2 million people. Nevertheless, that is not the whole story. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman can contain himself in patience, if he has any to contain himself with. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made available a further £7 million, which is to go to voluntary charities specifically to help people in low income groups. Therefore, the under-compensation has been about £1 million against the extra £7 million available.

Mr. Haselhurst: Will my right hon. Friend take time to consider whether there should be a review of the compensation paid in relation to major public works developments such as roads and airports? Is she aware that people who may not have any land taken suffer a substantial loss of amenity and loss of value of property simply because their houses are near to where the development is taking place?

The Prime Minister: We have no major review of that kind planned. There have been times when an airports authority or an air company has purchased property which is affected. If there are any cases, I suggest that my hon. Friend pursues that course of action.

Mr. Hume: As the person ultimately responsible for national security, will the Prime Minister tell us whether she was consulted by the Attorney-General before he made his statement of 25 January on the Stalker-Sampson report, and whether she approves of the principle which

he enunciated that day, that the interests of national security transcend the rule of law even in cases where there is loss of human life?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept the description which the hon. Gentleman put in his question as accurate in any way. The Attorney-General made a full and complete statement in discharge of his duties. I have nothing to add to that statement. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, in this country prosecution is not a matter for Government; it is for the prosecuting authority.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Will my right hon. Friend ignore the simulated hysteria on the Opposition Benches about the National Health Service? Will she join me in congratulating West Dorset health authority, which is removing more than 50 of the 152 administrative posts so as to be able to apply the resources to greater patient care? Will my right hon. Friend join me in recommending other health authorities to follow that example?

The Prime Minister: I know that a number of health authorities have done precisely the same as the West Dorset authority. Indeed, there has been much more effective use of resources through cutting out waste. It normally amounts to about £150 million a year, which goes straight back into improved patient care and is one of the reasons why the number of patients who have been treated in the Health Service has gone up steadily. I understand that there is still a good deal more in terms of efficient use of resources to be got out of the Health Service, and I expect that the number of patients treated, the number of operations performed and the satisfaction with the Health Service will continue to rise.

Q3. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Lloyd: Can the right hon. Lady explain carefully to the House how she can justify the policies of her Government which allow massive tax breaks to the already rich to plant trees and destroy the environment in Scotland when she will not fund an adequate pay rise for low-paid nurses?

The Prime Minister: Nurses have had an increase of 30 per cent. in real terms under this Government, contrasting with the cut of 20 per cent. which they suffered under the Labour Government. The hon. Gentleman raises a matter of taxation. That is not yet for me. It is to be discussed in the Budget. I notice that the Labour party was singing a very different story in 1986, before the election, when the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said:

"An election victory would be followed by a massive increase in taxation, as it was in 1979."—[*Official Report*, 17 December 1986; Vol. 107, C. 1253].

Q4. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Burns: Would my right hon. Friend care to comment on the latest unemployment figures which show, once again, that seasonally adjusted unemployment has fallen, and does she agree with me that these figures, together with the White Paper on training that was published earlier this week, show that the Government's economic policy is working and that prospects for lower unemployment in the future are excellent?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. Today's figures are more good news and show that unemployment has fallen for 18 months running, and by over 500,000 in the past year, that all regions have shared in that fall and that employment is still rising, with more than 1,500,000 more jobs since 1983.

Moreover, my right hon. Friend's statement on training indicates that as we shall need more and more skilled workers we are making provision to ensure that they get that training. That is a great tribute to the stewardship of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his management of the economy.

Civil Service Management

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on management in the Civil Service.

I asked the efficiency unit to report to me on the progress of management reforms in the Civil Service. It has produced a report, "Improving Management in Government: The Next Steps". The report finds that many Civil Service managers want to see further changes to give more room and flexibility for the exercise of personal responsibility. The report recommends, first, that to the greatest extent practicable the executive functions of Government, as distinct from policy advice, should be carried out by units clearly designated within Departments, referred to in the report as "agencies". Responsibility for the day-to-day operations of each agency should be delegated to a chief executive. He would be responsible for management within a framework of policy objectives and resources set by the responsible Minister, in consultation with the Treasury.

It recommends, secondly, that the Government should commit themselves to a progressive programme for attaining this objective; thirdly, that staff should be properly trained and prepared for management of the delivery of services whether within or outside central Government; and, fourthly, that a "project manager" at a senior level should ensure that the programme of change takes place.

The Government have accepted these four recommendations, which will set the direction for further development of management reform in the Civil Service. Each agency will be accountable to a Minister, who will in turn be accountable to Parliament for the agency's performance. These agencies will generally be within the Civil Service, and their staff will continue to be civil servants. The Government will develop a continuing programme for establishing agencies, applying progressively the lessons of the experience gained.

The Civil Service unions will be consulted about the setting up of particular agencies. They will also be consulted if any change in terms and conditions of civil servants is contemplated.

The centre of the Civil Service must be organised in a way which is helpful to bringing about change. A permanent secretary in the Office of the Minister for the Civil Service will be responsible, through the Head of the Home Civil Service, to me for managing the process of change needed to implement the recommendations.

I have placed copies of the efficiency unit's report, together with a list of executive functions that appear to be promising candidates as initial agencies, in the Library and copies are available in the Vote Office.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): May I first assure the Prime Minister that the Opposition believe that a continuous review of the functions and performance of the Civil Service is necessary to improve its efficiency, its accountability and the service that it gives to the general public. In many respects, we have the best Civil Service in the world, but that does not mean it is beyond improvement. What the Prime Minister has announced today is, after all the press speculation, an anti-climax. It is no more than what Fulton recommended 20 years ago, although no doubt it creates the illusion of ministerial activity.

The important questions concern not what the Prime Minister has announced today but what she intends, and therefore I ask her three questions based on the guidance notes issued this morning to senior civil servants which contain the suggestion that they should be read alongside the Prime Minister's statement and the document put in the House of Commons Vote Office.

In paragraph C2 of the guidance notes, these words appear:

> "In a few cases it may be appropriate to set up executive agencies outside the Civil Service, eg by setting up private limited companies."

If the Government are contemplating turning part of the Civil Service into private limited companies, was it not the Prime Minister's duty to tell the House this afternoon?

Secondly, we are told in paragraph F3 that MPs are to be encouraged to approach agency management in the first instance. Since that is a clear erosion of parliamentary responsibility, was it not the Prime Minister's duty to tell that to the House of Commons this afternoon?

Thirdly, paragraph J3 says that reductions in Civil Service numbers have not reduced the services that the Civil Service provides. Has the Prime Minister never heard of the queues at DHSS offices, and is she not aware that there are now 200,000 unopened letters in Lunar house?

Finally, on the principle of what the Prime Minister says, since it is only of any real importance for what it presages for the future, about which there have been so many hints but so little action, let me ask her this. If there is to be a radical review of the Civil Service, can we be promised that changes will be preceded by discussions with all parties in the House? The Civil Service is not the property of any one Government and, to maintain the confidence in its impartiality and efficiency, changes in its organisation have to be made by consensus, not by confrontation.

The Prime Minister: I will take the right hon. Gentleman's points in order. First, I am not responsible for speculation in the newspapers. It gets wider of the mark every single day, as we all know.

Secondly, generally the executive agencies will be set up within the Civil Service, but on some occasions they will not. That is why I said "generally". There are occasions when it will be better to set them up outside the Civil Service. *[Interruption.]* I said "generally", not in each and every case. If the right hon. Gentleman looks, he will see that that is quite clear. So some of them will be set up outside and there will, of course, be consultations with the trade unions when they are set up.

Thirdly, on agency management, hon. Members quite frequently write to the manager of a local social security office or to an income tax inspector, because frequently they get a much quicker reply that way. There is nothing unusual about that and right hon. Gentlemen, when they were in power, would have advised hon. Members to write to managers when they possibly could because otherwise it takes very much longer. The right hon. Gentleman is fully aware of that.

Fourthly, the numbers in the Civil Service have indeed fallen. The figure is now some 588,000 — the lowest figure for the Civil Service since the war. But numbers in particular Departments, including parts of the DHSS, have of course been increased as the need has arisen.

I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for what he said about the Civil Service. For our part, we pay tribute to the Civil Service, of which the nation has a right to be proud.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: May I remind the House that following this statement we have business questions then a debate on the three prayers on the social fund and then a motion on which I am required to put the Question at 10 o'clock. I shall allow questions on this statement to go on until 4 o'clock and then, I am afraid, we must move on. I ask for brief questions, please.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): In view of earlier reports of the Treasury and Civl Service Committee on the accountability of Ministers and civil servants, can my right hon. Friend confirm that it is not in her mind that there should be any change in the relationship between Ministers, civil servants and Select Committees?

The Prime Minister: There will be no change in the arrangements for accountability. Ministers will continue to account to Parliament for all the work of their Departments, including the work of the agencies. Departmental Select Committees will be able to examine departmental agencies' activities and agency staff in the same way as they examine Departments now. The new approach does not affect the work of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. The establishment of departmental agencies will not affect the powers and responsibilities of the Public Accounts Committee. It is expected that when the permanent secretary, who is usually the accounting officer, goes to such a committee he will take with him the executive chairman of the agency and they will, therefore, both be available to answer questions.

Mr. Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the Prime Minister accept that, whereas we would welcome any developments in organisation that allowed civil servants to exercise more personal responsibility, we would be strongly opposed to any attempt to prevent Members of the House from tabling questions on matters dealt with in the agencies that affected the fundamental rights of their constituents?

Does the right hon. Lady realise that both her reference to the performance of the agencies rather than to the matters with which they deal and suggestions in the yellow book carry the implication that the rights of Members on behalf of their constituents will be diminished? Is it not likely that, if that aspect of the matter is not corrected, we shall end up with Ministers continuing to exercise power but not being answerable to the House for what they are doing?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can have listened to the answer to the last question, which covered his point. I repeat: there will be no change in the arrangements for accountability. Ministers will continue to account to Parliament for all the work of their Departments, including the work of the agencies.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that most people agree that it is a good idea to split the functions of the Civil Service between the policy units and the agencies? Is she personally satisfied that the streamlining of the Civil Service will lead to better value for money?

The Prime Minister: That is its purpose, but, as my hon. Friend will see from the report presented to me, a considerable number of people in the Civil Service want an arrangement that will give them more responsibility. Many of them are well aware that, as my hon. Friend seems to suggest, there has been too much splitting between the duties of those concerned with making policy and those concerned with management. We feel strongly that those concerned with making policy should know from experience how that policy is implemented, and we hope that there will be very much more overlap in the duties of civil servants, with a part in management and a part in policy making, than in the past. The point, as my hon. Friend has said, is to obtain better value for money through personal responsibility.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): Does not the Prime Minister appreciate that one of the reasons for the very low morale in the Civil Service is that she has appointed so many confirmed Thatcherites to some of the best jobs? Does she not think that it would be very damaging for the country if she were now to embark on an attack on the Civil Service comparable to the attack that she has already carried out on the universities, the National Health Service and local authorities?

The Prime Minister: I totally reject what the right hon. Gentleman has said. He will have had occasion to know as a Minister that the service received from civil servants is fundamental to the Civil Service, irrespective of any personal political views that civil servants hold. I am served every bit as well as the right hon. Gentleman has been served, and he does the House and the Civil Service a great disservice in some of his suggestions. This is a response to a report not by us, but to us, on improving management in government.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the proposals for a less centralised and less archaic system of financial control and management in Whitehall are thoroughly welcome and, indeed, long overdue? Does she recall that I urged the same course on Lord Wilson of Rievaulx 20 years ago in the House, when I put the proposition to him after the Fulton committee reported that such an approach should be adopted? My right hon. Friend will also recall, however, that we made little progress at the time. Will she now accept warm congratulations that the initiative has been seized in the introduction of a system that will increase accountability, job satisfaction in Whitehall and the efficiency of the public machine?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I remember my right hon. Friend's views at that time, and the views that he has strongly pressed on us since then. He will be the first to be aware that this is the latest advance in greatly improving management in the Civil Service. The savings from the efficiency scrutinies are rising to £325 million a year, and total £1·3 billion so far. There has been greatly improved value for money in purchasing, saving £290 million a year. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State put in a system of management in parts of the Civil Service called MINIS, which is also producing greatly improved efficiency. This

[The Prime Minister]

is the latest of a number of steps that have already done a considerable amount to improve management efficiency in the Civil Service.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Will the proposed management reforms apply to Northern Ireland? Will the Prime Minister ensure that there will be adequate consultation with the Northern Ireland Civil Service before any final decisions are made? Further, will she assure the House that it is her intention, as far as possible, to avoid conflict between Northern Ireland Ministers and managers? Finally, has consultation taken place through the Anglo-Irish Conference on the implementation of the report's recommendations?

The Prime Minister: On the last point, no. On the earlier point, the reforms will apply to the Civil Service throughout the United Kingdom. I do not think that the initial list of 12 contains any agencies from that particular Department, but the reforms will apply throughout the entire Civil Service. The executive managers of the agencies will operate within the framework of objectives and resources laid down in consultation with the Minister and the Treasury.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I welcome my right hon. Friend's response to the report, but will it give the greatest scope in the Civil Service for performance-related pay and for some measure of decentralised pay bargaining — two important aspects that need to be encouraged?

The Prime Minister: It is intended that there should be more flexibility in pay in the agencies and also that there should be performance-related pay. As my hon. Friend is aware, we have already introduced a range of pay for a particular grade so that we can take into account people's performance. That range of pay for particular grades applies throughout the Civil Service. Yes, we believe in benefiting and rewarding excellent performance.

Mr. Michael Heseltine (Henley): Will my right hon. Friend accept our strong support for what is a limited but further reform of the Civil Service and her commitment to its excellence? But in establishing executive agencies, will my right hon. Friend recognise that the logic of that is that there should be contracts for those in charge of the executive agencies so that there is full personal accountability? Will she consider a progressive extension of recruitment to the Civil Service by contract as opposed to permanent life tenure?

The Prime Minister: The majority of agencies will be established within the Civil Service, although, as I said previously, that will not be exclusively so. I shall consider what my right hon. Friend has said in relation to those that are not established in the Civil Service. If there were to be any fundamental changes in terms and conditions of pay in the Civil Service, they would have to be in conjunction with, and after consultation with, the Civil Service. As my right hon. Friend knows, we must recruit to the Civil Service under the established rules. There is provision for late entrants and we benefit greatly from those who have had experience outside the Civil Service who join us later.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Is the Prime Minister aware that, as the Fulton committee pointed out, policy changes are often the result of experience of implementation? How will she ensure that there is a proper interchange between the agencies and the Government Departments? Will she confirm that the National Audit Office will continue to be able to audit all the agencies and so present the Public Accounts Committee and the House of Commons with the inside information that is so essential? Finally, what legislation will be required?

The Prime Minister: In so far as the agencies are within the Civil Service, the National Audit Office arrangements will, of course, continue to apply. In so far as they are set up outside, that would not be the case, as far as I am aware. [HON. MEMBERS: "That is not what the right hon. Lady said."] It is what I said before. I said that, generally, the agencies would be set up within the Civil Service. That does not mean that they will be in all cases. In so far as they are within the Civil Service, the normal rules of accountability and audit continue to apply. *[Interruption.]* No, I am sorry. In so far as they are in the Civil Service, they will be accountable precisely as they are now. They will be set up in conjunction with Ministers within a framework and a resource allocation negotiated with Ministers and the Treasury.

I do not anticipate that legislation will be required for the proposals that I have announced.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Prime Minister talks about accountability to Ministers through the House. Has she given special consideration to the Scottish Office, in which we have a Solicitor-General who is a former but defeated Member of this House and a Minister for agriculture who is a non-elected Member of another place? Will this new system improve accountability to Scottish Members?

Will the right hon. Lady comment on how the chief executives will be appointed? Will it be by patronage or will it involve other members of the Civil Service through a process of election?

The Prime Minister: The executive managers of the agencies will usually be appointed in the usual way. If we secure someone from outside as an executive manager, that will have to be through the usual competitive rules — the ordinary Civil Service rules. He could not be chosen without that.

The Secretary of State for Scotland answers all the hon. Lady's questions very well indeed.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. I assure her that the service that I get from civil servants in my constituency, especially at the Department of Health and Social Security offices, is first-class and often better than one can expect from Ministers. Nevertheless, will she bear in mind that it is important that hon. Members should have access at reasonable times to the Secretary of State in charge of a Department where it is not possible to get a proper answer from the Civil Service in one's own area?

The Prime Minister: Yes, of course. I am grateful to my hon. Friend. One knows full well from one's own experiences as a constituency Member that if one writes to the manager of the Department directly concerned one frequently gets a swifter reply than is possible by sending letters from one Department to another and down to the agency. There will continue to be access to Ministers. Indeed, if anything, the number of letters has continued to increase — not only to other Ministers but to this one, too.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): My constituents at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre in Swansea, which may become a public limited company, fear that they are likely to become involuntary guinea pigs in an ideological experiment. Will the Prime Minister assure us that the proposal is not a certain intended device to decouple local wage rates from national Civil Service rates and that even the hived-off operations will have the same safeguards for their staff as civil servants at the DVLC have now?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is correct that the Swansea vehicle licensing office is one of the first of the 12 agencies proposed. It will be set up in consultation with the unions. On pay and recruitment and terms and conditions, we intend the agencies to be allowed some flexibility within the framework set by the responsible Minister, although there will need to be controls to safeguard public expenditure. The degree of flexibility can differ from agency to agency, depending on the requirements of the job to be done. Staff and unions will be consulted in the normal way if any changes in terms and conditions of service are contemplated. Quite apart from the proposals that I have announced, we have already made provision for a range of pay for any particular grade to enable us to take account of different circumstances and of merit.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Can my right hon. Friend suggest any areas in which she considers that an agency might be more effective outside Government? Has she received any advice that enables her to suggest to the House how that might proceed?

The Prime Minister: At present, no, but we are not excluding the possibility. We have put in the Vote Office a list of the 12 that we consider would be the first suitable executive agencies. From then on, it will be up to Ministers in their Departments—indeed, the 12 have come from Ministers — to identify functions and administrative services that are right for an agency, and to put forward those for future agencies.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Does the Prime Minister agree that the aim of the proposal is simply to cut the pay of civil servants outside London? Does she also agree that that will inevitably lead to a lessening of ministerial accountability to this House because our constituency cases will be the responsibility of the heads of quangos—some private—rather than the responsibility of Ministers? Does she realise that she has started something that her party may come to regret — the wholesale appointment of political appointees to the heads of executive agencies?

The Prime Minister: I have said that, where the agency remains within the Civil Service, appointments will continue to be made under all the present Civil Service rules.

There is now a range of pay for grades—deliberately to give extra pay for extra performance. I am astonished that that meets so much hostility from the Labour party.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that her statement will be warmly welcomed by many hon. Members? In choosing those functions that might happily be turned into agencies, will she confirm that it will be presumed that agencies with partially or mainly commercial functions will be those that would properly be outside the Civil Service? Furthermore, will she consider the possibility of some of the existing agencies, such as the Property Services Agency, being candidates for being put outside the Civil Service?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend is aware, the Property Services Agency is a Government Department with extensive responsibilities. We already enable Departments to choose to go to their own advisers rather than to use the Property Services Agency, if they think that they can get better value for money. Although it has not yet been proposed that the Property Services Agency be used in that way, we have a review of that agency and how best to reform its activities.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. Insofar as there could be agencies outside the Civil Service, I accept that it would be best to deal in that way with those that are essentially commercial services.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Is the Prime Minister aware that Cumbernauld new town, in my constituency, contains a large Inland Revenue collection office? Is she further aware that my constituency suffers from high unemployment and low pay? Therefore, will she give an assurance that such areas will not be subject to change in the conditions of service and employment, that nationally agreed wages bargains will continue, and that the intention of this proposal is not to create conditions where the poor remain poorly paid, but rather that national pay negotiations will continue to determine what applies in the Civil Service nationally?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman said that the Inland Revenue had an office in his constituency. I think that he will find that the Inland Revenue Staff Federation has accepted the new arrangements for range pay. Perhaps he will kindly check that.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): In spite of the continued ministerial responsibility for policy, will my right hon. Friend confirm that sufficient ministerial responsibility and answerability for action will be devolved, as that seems to be the only way in which vast areas of service to people in this country can be entirely depoliticised?

The Prime Minister: The purpose of the change is to give more responsibility to the manager of the agency, but the manager will be accountable to his Minister and the permanent secretary will continue to be the accounting officer to the appropriate Select Committee. The whole purpose of this, in response to a report presented to us, is to reply to the desire of many people in the Civil Service to have more responsibility and the wish of the Government to have an organisational arrangement that will increase efficiency and the effective use of resources.

Mr. Hattersley: Will the Prime Minister clarify one doubt about one area of responsibility and accountability? Will areas that may become or—as the Prime Minister confessed — will become independent and private be accountable to Ministers and through Ministers, and will the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration be responsible for any maladministration in those agencies?

The Prime Minister: In so far as they can become totally outside the Civil Service, they will not be accountable because they are totally outside the Civil Service. However, in general, they will be within the Civil Service and there will be no change in the arrangements for accountability.

Business of the House

4.1 pm

The Lord President of the Council and the Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the business for next week:

MONDAY 22 FEBRUARY—Timetable motion on the Local Government Finance Bill.

Remaining stages of the Dartford and Thurrock Crossing Bill.

TUESDAY 23 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the British Steel Bill.

Motion to take note of EC documents on the steel industry. Details of the EC documents concerned will be given in the *Official Report*.

WEDNESDAY 24 FEBRUARY—Debate on a motion to take note of the Government's expenditure plans 1988-89 to 1990-91 (CM 288).

Motions on Scottish Housing Support Grant Orders. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

THURSDAY 25 FEBRUARY—Motion on the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts 1978 and 1987 (Continuance) Order.

Motion on the Criminal Injuries (Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Order.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

FRIDAY 26 FEBRUARY—Private Members' motions.

MONDAY 29 FEBRUARY—Oppostion Day (9th Allotted Day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject for debate to be announced.

[Debate on Tuesday 23 February

Relevant European Community documents

(a) 8560/87	*Steel industry: Community*
(b) 4127/88	*policy*
(c) 8803/86	*EEC-USA steel*
(d) Unnumbered	*arrangement*
(e) Unnumbered	*Compensatory measures against United States restrictions on steel imports*
(f) 8993/86 + COR 1	*State aids to steel industries: 1984-85*
(g) Unnumbered	*Spanish and Portuguese steel: delivery levels*
(h) 10013/87	*Steel Industry: Report of the "Three Wise Men"*

Relevant Reports of the European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 43-iii (1987-88) para 22 and HC 43-viii (1978-88) para 3
(b) HC 43-xv (1987-88) para 2
(c) HC 21-xxvii (1985-86) para 5
(d) HC 21-xxv (1985-86) para 2
(e) HC 21-xxvi (1985-86) para 2
(f) HC 21-xxviii (1985-86) para 6 and HC 22-iii (1986-87) para 3
(g) HC 43-iv (1987-88) para 5
(h) HC 43-xi (1987-88) para 11

Debate on Wednesday 24 February

The draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1988

The draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order 1988

The Housing Revenue Account Rate Fund Contribution Limits (Scotland) Order 1988.]

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I thank the Leader of the House for his statement. At the same time, I should like to register our regret that the limited time available today for the debate on the social fund has been further reduced by the time taken by the Prime Minister's statement, which clearly could have been made on any other day.

Will the Leader of the House tell us when the membership of the Select Committee on televising the proceedings of the House will be decided? When can we expect it to begin its work?

When can we expect a debate about the need for reskilling and retraining for young people and adults?

When are we to have a debate about the Stalker-Sampson report?

Finally, is the Leader of the House aware that the all-party Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments has ruled without dissent that the Paisley grammar school order is badly drafted, technically defective and in breach of the rules of the House? Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that that preposterous order is withdrawn, and will he ask the Prime Minister to abandon her attempt at personal rule in Scotland before even more people in Scotland feel that their proud country is being treated as a banana republic?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman asked me five questions. The first was about today's debate on the social fund. I regret that there will be some curtailment of the debate because of the statement, but statements are important and sometimes they have to be made.

With regard to the Select Committee to consider the experiment on televising Parliament, discussions are going on through the usual channels. We shall set up the Select Committee as soon as we can and will bring a motion before the House. I hope that there will not be long delay on that.

With regard to the debate on training for employment in the White Paper announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment earlier in the week, I suggest that this matter can be discussed through the usual channels. That is the best way to proceed.

With regard to the Stalker-Sampson report, subject to your views, Mr. Speaker, I should have thought that the matter could be raised in the course of the debate on the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 and 1987 (Continuance) Order on Thursday.

The Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments' report on Scottish schools regulations has only just been received and will be very carefully considered, but I understand that the regulations themselves remain valid.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my right hon. Friend accept that, although hon. Members realise that he is responsible for getting Government business through, he is equally responsible for Members of the House and the defence of their rights? An announcement has been made that we shall debate a timetable motion on the Local Government Finance Bill on Monday. There is no motion for that timetable motion on the Order Paper; it will not be on the Order Paper until tomorrow morning. That gives hon. Members only five and a half hours in which to consider, draft and get in order any amendments they might wish to table to the motion.

Friday is a day when many hon. Members have parliamentary duties outside the House.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): We have heard that one before.

Sir Peter Emery: Some of us have constituencies to look after.

Will my right hon. Friend consider ensuring that at least two clear days' notice is given of timetable motions because Mr. Speaker has ruled that manuscript amendments cannot be accepted which give directives to the Committee?

Mr. Wakeham: I appreciate my hon. Friend's interest and expertise in procedural matters. I should be sorry if he were prevented from having the opportunity to amend the motion if that is what he wishes to do. I am arranging for it to be tabled later this afternoon so that it will be available in the Table Office later today and can be amended then. However, I hope that when my hon. Friend sees the motion he will agree that it allows a generous amount of time to enable all parts of the Bill properly to be discussed.

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): Is the Leader of the House aware that the statutory instrument to which he refers, dealing with Scottish education, has humiliated the Secretary of State for Scotland as it was imposed against his will, and has abused almost every rule of the House? The Select Committee on Statutory Instruments has described it as vague, but there has been a failure to comply with the Statutory Instruments Act 1946. In any other sphere of activity it would be regarded as ultra vires and illegal. It is only the technicality of the House and its sovereignty that have prevented the House from being condemned to 10 years in gaol for its maladministration and illegality.

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman's language is a bit rich. I am glad that he confirms that the regulations remain valid. As I said to his hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), the Committee's report has only just been received and will be carefully considered.

Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): Will my hon. Friend arrange for an early debate on the Geneva convention which, as my right hon. Friend will appreciate, forbids the use of the Red Cross logo on any document except its own? The Labour party pamphlet "Turn Budget Day into NHS Day", one million of which have been printed, infringes the law about which Opposition Members are so concerned. Would it not have been better for them to spend their money more charitably?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot promise my hon. and learned Friend an early debate. I should have thought that the contents of the pamphlet were the most objectionable feature of it.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): Does the Leader of the House appreciate that his reply to the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) about the procedure is quite inadequate? The right hon. Gentleman is truncating the rights of the House. A simple solution is available to him. Last week, he announced that the steel debate would take place on Monday. If he stuck to his original announcement, we could have a debate about the guillotine on Tuesday and we would then have time to decide whether to amend it. It is ridiculous for the Leader of the House to say, "Wait and see whether you like it when you see it." We want the right to amend that motion properly and in order and it is possible for the Leader of the House to ensure that that is done if he wishes.

Mr. Wakeham: Such a question is surprising from the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), given his expertise in moving five guillotine motions in one day. I suggest that he should listen to the answers that I give. The motion will be tabled this afternoon and will be available in the Table Office. It will be possible for anyone to amend it this afternoon.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for at last providing time for a discussion of the European documents relating to the steel regime of the Community along with the Second Reading of the British Steel Bill. I remind my right hon. Friend that the House has not had an opportunity to discuss the agreement reached in Brussels by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Will he arrange for a proper full day's debate of those very important discussions and their implications for this country and the Community for the next four to five years?

Mr. Wakeham: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House earlier this week, when, and only when, the decisions on the control of expenditure have been translated into firm and legally binding texts will the Government recommend a new level of own resources to the House. The House will then have a full opportunity for debate since the new level of own resources cannot be implemented without its agreement.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Has the Leader of the House noticed that more than 150 right hon. and hon. Members have now signed early-day motion 543 on New Zealand's food exports to the United Kingdom?

[That this House affirms the right of British consumers to continue to buy butter from New Zealand in the same quantities as now; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to ensure that there will be no diminution in New Zealand's butter exports to the United Kingdom.]

Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for a statement to the House next week on the Government's intentions with regard to that motion?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot promise the right hon. Gentleman a statement next week. However, the Community will have to take into account a whole range of factors, including budgetary costs, the views of consumers, its stance on trade policy issues in general and the pressures on the dairy industry resulting from quotas. It would be premature to discuss the Government's approach before the Commission has made its proposals.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Will my right hon. Friend allow time for an early debate regarding a report broadcast today on "Woman's Hour" that hospitals all over the country as far apart as Leeds, Portsmouth, Colchester, Northampton, Hackney and Sunderland are denying women their statutory right to a termination at 12 weeks or more except in the case of extreme medical emergency? Those hospitals are under great pressure, as this House has been, from lobbies that are trying to alter the course of law in this country without going through the correct statutory channels.

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot promise my hon. Friend a debate on this matter next week, but I will refer it to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): Has the Leader of the House noticed that the managing director of Land Rover admitted yesterday that he had given the names, addresses and telephone numbers, including ex-directory telephone numbers, of people working at Land Rover to an outside organisation in an attempt to obtain information that he could use against the trade unions in industrial disputes? Will the Leader of the House make time available for a debate, as soon as possible, on such intrusions into privacy and abuse of personal information?

Mr. Wakeham: I am unable to confirm what the hon. Gentleman has said and I am not absolutely certain of the ministerial responsibility in that matter, but I shall refer it to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have an early debate on the great distress that is being caused to widows, widowers and members of families in various parts of the country whose deceased relatives have been buried in cemeteries that are now being sold off by local authorities as a means of saving money on their maintenance? Will my right hon. Friend particularly note the case of Hanwell cemetery in west London in which people have been buried as recently as this year but which has now been sold? There are now proposals to build on that consecrated land and that is causing huge upset to families, widows and many others.

Hon. Members: Ask Shirley Porter about it.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question was to the Leader of the House.

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise the concern expressed by my hon. Friend. I cannot promise him a debate next week, but I wonder whether the subject he has raised might form the basis of a useful Adjournment debate, should he be lucky in the ballot.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I remind the House of what was said from the Front Bench? This is a day on which there are two extremely important debates, and I ask for brief questions. I shall call those hon. Members who have been seeking to ask questions.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): The debate on the renewal of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts 1978 and 1987 provides an opportunity to discuss the Stalker-Sampson report, the changed role of the Army on the border and so on. Has the Leader of the House noticed that, on that day, a high proportion of the Unionist Members from Northern Ireland will be in gaol? I believe that that debate is important to them and to us. It might be unusual, but I would like to know their views on the matter. However, they propose to be in gaol. Could we alter the timing of the debate?

Mr. Wakeham: I should be extremely sorry if any hon. Gentleman had another engagement on that day. I do not think that I can alter the business of the House on that basis.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): Now that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has made a statement about the Royal Ulster Constabulary, will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on the prayers put down by the leader of the Liberal party dealing with the disciplining of and complaints about the RUC?

Mr. Wakeham: I believe that the Stalker report and related matters can be debated next week. The question of time for prayers is a matter for the usual channels.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): When can we expect to have another debate on parliamentary procedure? I am particularly concerned about the selection of the statements that are made in this House because they do not necessarily bear any close relationship to their importance in the great cosmos of events. They seem to relate to narrow, Tory party interests. On Monday, for example, the Prime Minister chose an extremely good day for her to come back to tell us about the surrender regarding the common agricultural policy. Today we have had a statement that delayed an important debate about social security. Yesterday we had an extremely long statement that shut out the debate on the abolition of the Inner London education authority. How does the Leader of the House select those statements?

Mr. Wakeham: Before the hon. Gentleman goes too far down that road, I suggest that he has a word with his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, because I believe that he requested some of the statements to be made.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): When is the inquiry into the fate of the British commandos — this matter was dealt with during last week's business questions — likely to report? When did the interrogations occur? Who was involved and what happened afterwards? Would it be possible for the Leader of the House to arrange for a statement to be made about what records were available to the British Government at the time when Waldheim was to be appointed Secretary General of the United Nations? This is an important matter in view of the fact that Waldheim, as the Leader of the House is aware, is a suspected war criminal.

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was extremely forthcoming in her answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) earlier in the week. She said that the Government were reviewing the results of the investigation carried out in 1986 by the Ministry of Defence in the light of the report of the International Historians Commission. I believe that the best thing is to wait for that investigation to be carried out. I shall refer the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Will the Leader of the House ensure that Monday's debate on the Dartford and Thurrock crossing Bill will have adequate time to explore the implications of the Government's response to the Select Committee's recommendations? That is important for two reasons. First, after 21 days of detailed study, the Committee, by a 5:1 majority, decided that its first priority was public safety and convenience and therefore a windshield should be erected on the bridge. The Government have rejected that recommendation. Their first priority is their cosy relationships with Trafalgar House.

Secondly, the whole Select Committee system is undermined if, after hon. Members on both sides of a Committee have agreed to a series of recommendations,

they are then tossed out by the Government who wish to ensure that the contract with Trafalgar House is maintained.

Mr. Wakeham: I do not accept for one moment what the hon. Gentleman says. I shall say two things to him: first, I believe that the points he raised will be relevant to the debate on Monday. There will be adequate time for the Government to make their case and for others to reply. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman is in error if he thinks there is any conventional rule of the House that the House is bound by a decision of a Select Committee. The House always has the right to examine reports of Select Committees and decide for itself.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Prime Minister to be brought back to the Chamber at 10 pm to make a further statement on her attack on the Civil Service, which is contained in the yellow report I have with me, and to say why there was no consultation with the trade unions that represent 600,000 civil servants before she accepted the recommendations in the report? She will then be able further to clarify what seems to be the main aim of the exercise—privatisation and hiving off—as outlined on page 27 of the report and hinted at in some of her answers to questions. That privatisation and hiving off will mean the end of national wage conditions and bargaining for the Civil Service in this country, and the living standards of civil servants outside London in areas such as Coventry will be severely cut. Is that the answer of the right hon. Gentleman and of the Prime Minister to the industrial relations problems in the Civil Service, especially on a day when the whole of the Department of Employment and the DHSS in London are on strike against wage cuts?

Mr. Wakeham: The answer is, "No, Sir." I shall not pass that message to my right hon. Friend, and I shall not ask her to come back here. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman uses the time profitably by reading and trying to understand the report. He will see from the list of agencies suggested for consideration that none of them involves privatisation.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Mr. Gekas, of Edinburgh, the alleged Nazi collaborator, has asked to be put on trial? Is it not time that we had the opportunity to debate this principle, recognising that many Fascist sympathisers in this country have been welcomed here by the Tory Government? Surely, instead of leaving that to the press, we should be discussing it here. Is it not time that the Government said exactly what they intend to do about it?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman follows these things, apart from when he is speaking, but he may recall that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary told the House of the way in which the Government are proceeding in these matters. What is more, if I remember rightly, his general approach was supported by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), which is a sensible way in which to proceed.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement or debate before Budget day on the subject of subsidies by the Chancellor of the Exchequer through the Inland Revenue to the top four banks in Britain? Has he read today that the Midland bank made a loss of about £500 million—and Lloyds will follow in the next few days? The truth is—this is why we need a debate—that the money those banks lost as a result of setting money aside for bad debt provision will be bailed out by the British taxpayer to the Inland Revenue. If, as it seems, the top banks have lost about £1,000 million in this bailing-out process, we should have a debate before Budget day so that some of us can say that if that sort of money is going spare it should go to the National Health Service and other projects.

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman has asked questions in similar terms more than four times before, and has shown a woeful ignorance of how the tax system works. So, although I cannot promise him a debate before the Budget—it would be improper to do so—I shall write to him and try to educate him before then.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the groundswell of opinion in this country, much of it Conservative and church-going, which strenuously objects to the vindictive and vicious statements of the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, against people in the Church of England—prominent bishops, archbishops and clergymen? Is it not time that the Minister of State was reined in and told that he must stop it? He is bringing Parliament into disrepute and doing damage to the Government and their supporters.

Mr. Wakeham: I find it interesting that the hon. Gentleman, who considers himself one of the most outspoken Members of the House and, indeed, of the British community, seems to object when someone else expresses his view. My right hon. Friend expresses his view, he will continue to do so, and I suggest that he is more in touch with public opinion than the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): Is the right hon. Gentleman in a position to inform the House of any progress that has been made in setting up the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs?

Mr. Wakeham: A little progress has been made. I am awaiting a letter from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). When I have that letter, I hope that it will be a substantial move in the right direction. I expect it at any time.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): The Leader of the House will be aware that the Director General of Oftel has made a statement to British Telecom about the now infamous Talkabout service which is offered to teenagers. I believe that the British Telecommunications Act 1984 has put the whole business of telecommunications beyond the reach of the House of Commons. The Talkabout service and other services are so base and out of touch with public morality that we should bring the matter back to the House so that suitable amendments can be made. Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for a debate?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot promise a debate. I understand that the position is that British Telecom has been given two weeks to agree to the proposals announced by Professor Carsberg, the Director General of Oftel, earlier this week. My right hon. and noble Friend is aware of the concern about the possible abuse of these services, and expressed his serious concern to the professor last month.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May we be educated about the answer to early-day motions numbers 228, 253, 272, 273 and 286? It would be helpful if we had one of those educative speeches from the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan), giving his version of events.

[That this House notes in the book, Campaign, by Rodney Tyler, the Selling of the Prime Minister: from behind the doors of Downing Street and Conservative Central Office—A unique inside account of the Battle for Power that the author on page 1, chapter 1, paragraph 1, sentence 1, states 'It was an extraordinary turnaround in fortunes from the moment on 27th January 1986 when Mrs. Thatcher secretly confided to a close associate that she might have to resign . . .' and on page 3 that 'On the eve of the crucial Westland debate she herself felt shaky enough to doubt her future' though some around her later sought to dismiss this as late evening anxieties of the sort that had disappeared the following morning). It is certainly true that if Leon Brittan had chosen to, he could have brought her to the brink of downfall, by naming the real culprits inside Number 10. Instead, he chose to remain silent', and calls on the Prime Minister to give a full account of what transpired between 3rd January and 27th January 1986, at Number 10 Downing Street, in relation to the selectively leaked Law Officer's letter concerning the Westland Affair.]

[That this House notes that the Member for Aldershot on page 136 of his book Heseltine: the unauthorised Biography, states in relation to the Westland Affair that 'John Wakeham issued an order of the day which contained the trite, if effective message, that it was time for all good men to come to the aid of the party. We did and calls on the Leader of the House, The Right Honourable Member for South Colchester and Maldon, to explain when he first knew the role of the then Trade and Industry Secretary, The Right Honourable Member for Richmond, Yorks, in the matter of the disclosure of a selectively leaked Law Officer's letter.]

[That this House notes that in his book Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution, published this week by Jonathan Cape and Co., Mr. Peter Jenkins writes, on page 200 'Brittan himself refused to enlighten the Select Committee on any point of substance. However, he is reputed to have told close friends subsequently that not only has she known perfectly well what had happened but that, on the day following the leak, had expressed her satisfaction to him at the way things had been handled. However at that time, the downfall of Heseltine had not been achieved . . . He (Mr. Brittan) might point the finger at her (Mrs. Thatcher). Potentially he now had the power to destroy her'; and calls on the Prime Minister to give the House a full account of her conversations with the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the Right honourable Member for Richmond, Yorks, over the period from 3rd January and 27th January 1986, in relation to the selectively leaked Law Officer's letter concerning the Westland Affair.]

[That this House notes that in The Thatcher Years—A decade of Revolution in British Politics, published by BBC Books, Mr. John Cole, on page 170, considering the selectively leaked Law Officer's letter in the Westland Affair, writes 'why did he (Sir Robert Armstrong) not give her a quick interim report when he discovered that the leak was an inside job, authorised by her office? Why did Leon Brittan not tell her? Or the private secretary concerned? Or his chief, who sits in the same room? Or her press secretary? And why did she never ask?'; and calls on the Prime Minister to inform the House of the answers to these questions.]

[That this House notes that, in the book 'Not with Honour—The Inside Story of the Westland Scandal', on page 142, Magnus Linklater and David Leigh write that 'Instead, following Havers's complaint, she spoke privately to Brittan about the leak. Although this is something the Prime Minister has failed to disclose, to widespread disbelief, the evidence comes from an authoritative source, who told us: "The Prime Minister knew about the leak. She was pleased it had been done. There was a meeting between Brittan and her after the complaint from Mayhew. Only the two of them were present . . . Brittan assumed she knew of [the leak's] origins. You must draw your own conclusions." One of Brittan's friends adds, "Nobody thought it was a problem. The complaints were out of the public domain and any inquiry was expected to be a formality. Leon wasn't worried at all about it."'; and calls on the Prime Minister to give a full account to the House of the meeting between herself and the Right honourable Member for Richmond, Yorks, referred to therein.]

Secondly, may we be educated next week on how on earth it came about that, on 5 February, vital parts of the hull of a Trident submarine tumbled off the deck of a Bahamian-registered ship with an uninvestigated crew aboard? Apparently, name tickets have been placed to mark where the stuff has fallen into the sea. On 6 February, having learnt nothing, the crew of the ship then lost more parts of the Trident. May we be told what action was taken by anyone between 5 February and 6 February? Oscar Wilde had something to say on these matters: losing parts of Trident a second time really does require parliamentary explanation.

Mr. Wakeham: The educational process requires two people: one to make the statements and the other to listen to the answers. I fear that the hon. Gentleman does not like the answers that he has been given many times in the past about the matters dealt with in those early-day motions. I have nothing further to add to what has been said about them many times.

As for the saga of the bits of Trident that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, I do not have the details here. I shall see what the Ministry of Defence has to say, and will write to him. If there is any more information that I can give him, I shall be happy to do so.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): When are we likely to hear the promised statement from the Chancellor on Britoil, given the uncertainty facing the company and its workers? Does not the right hon. Gentleman believe that it would be much better for the House to have a full debate on the issue so that we can fully examine the promises made in 1982 and compare them with the performance of 1988, to establish whether the Chancellor still believes that it is

"important to protect the character of Britoil as an independent company, responsible for its own management and business strategy"?—[*Official Report*, 31 March 1982; Vol. 21, c. 334.]

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman is labouring under a misapprehension. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made a statement — *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman says that he was not present at the time, but I am not aware of that. My right hon. Friend did

not say that a further statement was necessary. He did not promise a further statement, but if one is necessary it will be made.

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead) *rose*——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that the hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Dr. Glyn) or the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) heard me say 15 minutes ago that I would call hon. Members who had been standing. If they will be very brief, I shall call them. I shall call the hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead first, but I hope that he will be very brief.

Dr. Glyn: The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), among others, raised the matter of certain British prisoners of war who were tortured and murdered during the war. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this issue should be dealt with expeditiously because it is giving rise to long-drawn-out discussions in the press? The sooner that we deal with it, the better.

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with my hon. Friend. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that she takes these matters very seriously. They will be dealt with as soon as possible.

Dame E. Kellett-Bowman: Will my right hon. Friend take note of early-day motion 449?

[That this House welcomes the 1987 Employment Act which introduces legislation that will significantly reverse closed shop arrangements, but notes that hundreds of thousands of students will still have no choice over whether or not they join the National Union of Students; and hopes that the Secretary of State for Education and Science will take action to rectify this anomalous position as soon as possible.]

Many hon. Members do not like students being obliged to join any union, not least the National Union of Students. We should like a debate on the matter, and for the membership of unions to become voluntary so that they have to earn their membership, not just collar it.

Mr. Wakeham: The National Union of Students is an affiliation of student unions; students' unions may elect not to affiliate. However, I recognise that my hon. Friend has raised an important matter. With her customary ingenuity, she might be able to find a way of raising the matter when the Education Reform Bill comes back to the House. I know from the timetable motion that a lot of time is available for discussing important matters.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was not present earlier, but I understand that my hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House raised the question of the Scottish education statutory instrument. What concerns me is that any discussion of that instrument, which has been reported by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, is at the discretion of the House. When a report is made, following flagrant abuses of the procedures by the Government, it is at the Government's discretion whether a debate takes place, which is unfair.

There is a rule in the House of Lords that if the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments has not examined an instrument it cannot be debated in the affirmative procedure — there is no parallel for the negative procedure. The Procedure Committee should examine the procedure so that if the Select on Joint Committee report an instrument to the House, and a prayer is laid, a debate should be held at the discretion of the House, not the Government. Clearly the Government have a vested interest in not subjecting their abuse of procedure to the light of debate. Therefore, I ask you, Mr. Speaker, how best we can ensure that the Procedure Committee looks at this issue speedily.

Mr. Speaker: The best thing that the hon. Gentleman could do would be to put the matter to the Procedure Committee when it has been set up; it is a relevant point.

Social Fund

4.33 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Social Fund (Application for Review) Regulations 1988 (S.I., 1988, No. 34), dated 14th January 1988, a copy of which was laid before this House on 18th January, be annulled.

I understand that it will be for the convenience of the House to debate at the same time the other two motions:

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Social Fund (Recovery by Deductions from Benefits) Regulations 1988 (S.I., 1988, No. 35), dated 14th January 1988, a copy of which was laid before this House on 18th January, be annulled.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses (General) Amendment Regulations 1988 (S.I., 1988, No. 36), dated 14th January 1988, a copy of which was laid before this House on 18th January, be annulled.

Mr. Speaker: If that is convenient for the House, so be it.

Mrs. Beckett: This will probably be the final debate before the new social security structure comes into force in April. It focuses on the issue of the social fund, which consists of a set of proposals which are universally condemned outside the ranks of the Government, particularly by those whose job it is to advise on our benefit and pension structure, such as the Social Security Advisory Committee and the charities, which are appalled at the way in which they will be expected to pick up the pieces of what is nothing more or less than a demolition job.

The social fund will be a cash-limited fund that will offer the only source of help from the DHSS for extra or exceptional needs over and above those that can be met from weekly income for not only the 8 million people who are on supplementary benefit, but a wider group who might under the new system apply for a crisis loan or community care grant.

To meet the exceptional needs of over 8 million people, the social fund has the princely sum of £60 million, which is £300 million less than was paid in the last full year of the present system, which covered fewer people. In addition, £140 million of recirculated money can be given as loans. Indeed, so restricted is the budget, and so manifestly unjust and unworkable is the scheme, that to bring it into being the Government were forced to abolish rights of appeal that have existed for over 50 years. There is, despite regulations that deal with a system of review that is now before the House, no independent appeal against the decisions to be made under the social fund. An independent appeal would mean an objective decision on the facts of each case and the budget could not conceivably then hold.

It is hardly surprising that the first thing that present Ministers did when they saw this scheme was to try, unsuccessfully, to ditch it. In fact we are seeing a U-turn. In 1980 the Government, with general consent, published rules for the single payment scheme because the previous discretionary scheme, which had secret guidelines, was in complete disrepute.

Unfortunately, the Government could not resist making substantial cuts at the same time. The then Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton) said in Committee in 1985, with uncharacteristic bluntness, that the restrictive nature of the rules that the Government had sought to introduce meant the virtual abolition of clothing grants. No one denies that there are serious problems with the present system. However, they do not stem from the existence of rules, but from the way in which the Government have steadily tightened the rules to save money, which has led to obvious problems and anomalies.

I shall give two examples of the problems that are occurring. The British Association of Social Workers has quoted a case where a family had to be moved out of an infested council house and had their furniture and clothing destroyed because fumigation had proved unsuccessful. The family were moved temporarily into a hostel and were then rehoused, but they were refused bed, bedding and other items because they had claimed for those items in the past three years. The only regulation under the existing rules that could be used was one that involved a serious risk to health. The payment was refused because, in the judgment of the adjudication officer:

"the lack of bedding could be avoided by the family 'sleeping in their clothes.'"

I shall give another example of a case in which an application was made for a cooker. The claim could not be considered because, although a cooker is regarded as an essential item, the person who claimed had not been on supplementary benefit for 12 months or more. The decision in this case was that the need was not exceptional or serious enough, because although there were children in the family they were of school age and there was no suggestion of a health problem for which cooked food was essential for any of the family. The adjudication officer said:

"We are advised that for people in good health there is no medical necessity for cooked food and that nourishing meals can be prepared without cooking."

Hence, a claim for a cooker was disallowed.

No one is arguing that there are not serious problems with the present system, but those are the kinds of problems that have arisen, particularly since the cuts that were made last year to pave the way for the social fund. They are not due to the existence of rules for payments.

The universal maternity grant, which was replaced this year by the social fund payment, is available only to the most needy. It is available now as the only replacement for a single payment, which was made previously under rules. Although the mechanism for the payment is now under the social fund, the payment was cut from a possible £190 under the regulated single payment system to a maximum of £85 under these regulations. The cost of having a child cannot have changed since last August, but the amount of money that the Government are prepared to make available has changed. Again, it is clear that it is not the nature of a discretionary or regulated system that is at fault, but the size of the budget. The present system has been so far from ideal that it cannot have been easy for the Government to find a way of making it worse.

The Government have kept the regulation under which those, particularly pensioners, who save towards their funeral — I am told by a funeral director that the average cost of a funeral is now about £600—are likely to be debarred from help because there is a £500 capital limit for claims under the provisions of the fund.

The Government have made many changes. They claimed that, because so many people were excluded, despite obvious need, under the system that rules, they

would institute a totally discretionary and flexible new social fund as the answer. Initially there was a degree of somewhat wary acceptance of that basic premise, but, meanwhile, the ground of the debate was steadily shifting.

For decades there has been agreement across the board and in all parties that those at the income levels of supplementary benefit or income support could not be expected to provide from their weekly income for major items. In its 1986-87 report the Social Security Advisory Committee said:

"A family with growing children cannot reasonably be expected to purchase extra items of this sort by deductions from weekly benefit without seriously reducing their disposable income."

The committee went on to say:

"some expenses cannot realistically be budgeted for from within present benefit rates."

In their efforts to cut costs, and as the number of casualties of the Government's economic policies increase, the Government have begun to deny that basic and self-evident truth. They have begun to talk about abuse of the system of single payments, when they really mean use of the system. Citizens exercising their rights in law have been described as if they were committing a fraud, all to justify those cuts.

In June last year the Social Security Advisory Committee, when commenting on the draft proposals for the social fund, said:

"problems about routine expenses are a normal consequence of living on a supplementary benefit budget, not caused by unusual events, nor affecting unusual people."

The committee went on to say:

"the illustrative rates for income support, personal allowances and premiums"—

in other words, the whole package of changes for basic income put forward by the Government—

"do not indicate a sufficient increase over weekly supplementary benefit rates for the majority of claimants to justify a more stringent approach to the provision of lump-sum grants."

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the hon. Lady have experience in her constituency, as I have in mine, and as no doubt other hon. Members have in theirs, of young, single parents trying to set up a household for the first time and being allocated a council house or flat, but being unable to take up the offer because they cannot obtain the necessary equipment to sustain life in that accommodation? Is that not an outrageous reflection of the Government's values?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is perfectly correct. It is outrageous and it is a problem which, sadly, is likely to increase under these provisions.

When the Social Security Advisory Committee made the observations that I have quoted, it had before it only the Government's illustrative figures for the likely rates of income support. Since then the real figures of income support have been published, and it has become plain that £150 million has been cut from the underlying rate of income support. The figure of some £300 million that the committee gave for a minimum budget for the social fund is itself too low, although it is certainly preferable to the figure of £60 million, which is the only extra cash available from the Government.

The starting point of the Government's claim to detect abuse was the increase in the level of single payments to about £400 million some two or three years ago. The Government claimed then, and still maintain, that that level of payment could not be justified as being related to the level of unmet need. The Government's own figure for the shortfall in basic income for the underfunding of the long-term unemployed alone is at least £500 million. That is the Government's figure for the cost of paying the long-term unemployed the long-term rate of benefit, which exists to meet the day-to-day needs of those on long-term benefit.

That is an extra sum that the unemployed fail to receive only because they are unemployed and because the Government have always said that they cannot afford it, even when they used the same sum of money to help those with investments of £70,000. To this day the Government have never denied that that award would be justified to give the long-term unemployed at least a subsistence level income. If the unemployed alone are underfunded by £500 million, it is not surprising that a single payment scheme, which also covers the sick and pensioners, begins to run at £400 million when rights and entitlements are clearly laid out for all to see.

These proposals for the social fund are not about unjustified misuse of the single payments scheme. They are about saving money at the expense of those in need. We have only to consider the attitudes revealed by the guidance for the Government's flexible friend. Only £60 million is available for community care grants, and that is available only to those who have special one-off, once-in-a-lifetime needs, such as leaving an institution or a violent marital home. It is pretty plain from the way in which the guidelines are drafted that there is no chance for second thoughts, whether for someone coming out into the community, or for someone leaving a violent home after a marital break-up.

People may be entitled to grants only when they have shown that there is no other way of meeting a need and that they have approached—not simply that they could approach—relatives or charities for help. In December the Spastics Society issued a statement which said:

"The Society is desperately concerned that it will be inundated by applications for help from disabled people who may have to approach us before they can get help from the fund . . . We will not have the resources to help such applicants. Government measures have not only taken away the rights of disabled people but also put charities in an impossible position."

Age Concern draws attention to the fact that a widow who finds herself with essential roof repairs to make would be unable to qualify to apply for a grant unless she fell into the appropriate priority group, defined as elderly people, particularly those with restricted mobility or who have difficulty performing personal tasks. Grants for minor repairs can be allowed to such people provided that the social fund officer is satisfied that, unless repair or maintenance work is carried out on the home, the person is likely to be taken into residential care. As we have already seen the kinds of judgment that are made on what is really a serious risk, we can scarcely have much confidence in something so qualified.

That is the most generous part of the fund. That is the part where people might get a grant if they satisfied all the criteria. The other £140 million of recirculating money is only for loans. Even under the discretionary scheme, which the Government claim will remove the difficulties faced in the scheme with rules, 15 separate items are specifically excluded and cannot be considered for a budgeting loan. Such items include the cost of mains fuel consumption, work-related expenses and deposits to

[Mrs. Beckett]

secure accommodation—the very things that it would be sensible for the Government to provide to help people to achieve their independence.

If a loan is given it must be repaid within a maximum of 78 weeks, perhaps exceptionally at the rate of 25 per cent. of someone's income support, but normally at 15 per cent., or perhaps less, for small loans. Age Concern points out that a widow of 68, with the same essential roof repairs, would have to pay £6·09 per week from her subsistence level income. She would therefore live to that extent below her subsistence level income for 66 weeks.

A family with two children, meeting the normal repayment terms of a loan, may find themselves facing repayments of £11·68 per week. If they have a smaller loan and lower repayment terms, the figure will still be £7·90 per week. That is about the price of a pair of children's shoes every week of the year, yet the possibility of a loan may be the only chance of the family getting anything for other essential items.

It is interesting to consider the Government's view of how easy the expenses are to meet. From the draft manual — the incoming Minister removed it from the final manual, and one can well understand why—one can see the Government's view of how people normally budget their income. They say that people make temporary readjustments as necessary so that they can meet food bills, fuel bills and so on and

"unplanned or unexpected expense, eg. a higher than expected fuel bill, clothing which unexpectedly needs replacing, a cooker which suddenly breaks down, etc."

That comment — discreetly removed from the final version of the manual, but there on the record as the Government's attitude — clearly indicates, as has been said by many commentators on the proposal, that the Government consider this from the point of view of people who have always had a reasonable income and have always found it reasonably possible or easy to repay a loan. They have no concept of how difficult it is for families on benefit to meet the same concerns.

That attitude can be contrasted with the remarks of the Social Security Advisory Committee, which said:

"But when it becomes essential to replace a large item the repayment rate on a social fund loan will only be achieved at the expense of a reduction in the resources available for the weekly essentials of food, fuel and clothing . . . the single payments system exists to meet exceptional needs."

The committee cannot see how these needs can be met from weekly rates of income.

We talked first about those who might get a grant, and now we are talking about those who might get a loan. It is possible that there will be people who will not get even a loan. If the local office runs out of money—let us not forget that the fund is cash-limited — some people will get nothing. They will not even be allowed to reapply for another six months, no matter how desperate the need; nor is the office allowed to keep a waiting list. That is a clear indication that the Government know that there will be cases of proven real need that should be met by any objective standards, but will not be met, only because the money has run out. If that were not likely, there would be no need for that restriction. There is no doubt that offices will run out of money.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that in those cases where there is a genuine need and applicants cannot be paid because the social fund has been exhausted, we should encourage them to bring their cases to us and we should write direct to the Secretary of State so that he will know that people are being penalised because the social fund has run out?

Mrs. Beckett: I entirely agree with everything that my hon. Friend has just said. The Government have abolished the right of proper independent appeal, and there will be no real opportunity to get a judgment from the Secretary of State. All that we can do is to see that full pressure is brought to bear by hon. Members of all parties. I hope that people in Conservative constituencies will approach their Members to exert such pressure.

There is no doubt that the fund will run out of money. Grants of £60 million will be available to replace expenditure previously running at £340 million to £400 million, and only 17 to 20 per cent. of the income disbursed by local offices in the last full year of payments will be available.

The Government accept only one circumstance in which the money may run out. If there is some totally unforeseen disaster, such as a hurricane, they agree that local offices might have needs for which they have not been able to budget, so the Government have generously provided a contingency fund to which any office can appeal if such a disaster should occur. That contingency fund will contain the princely sum of £2 million. One office in Glasgow—not even the whole of Glasgow—has lost more than £2 million from its grants budget alone, so we can see how valuable the contingency funding will be. The money will run out and people will not even be offered loans, but they will be offered money advice.

The Government have managed to find a way of adding insult to injury. It is possible to manage one's money only if there is enough to manage. If income is totally inadequate, all that can be done is to stagger from one disaster to another. I quote to the Minister the words of the Family Welfare Association, describing the position today, before we get into the mess that we will be in with the social fund:

"Economies on food are frequent. In the FWA we are regularly astonished by the small amounts that applicants have to spend on food when all other commitments have been met and we are very aware that such small sums cannot really provide a nourishing diet. The rising tide of deficiency diseases among children is good evidence of the results of these kinds of economy."

The association speaks about the increased suffering that poor families are likely to experience.

It is revealing to consider the tone in which the money advice will be given. I refer to the guidance given to the social fund officer about discussing with people their need for money advice:

"Are there any relatives outside the home who could help? A common reaction is to hide financial problems from relatives, yet they may be prepared to help. They may be ready to offer moral as well as financial help. This is also a sensitive area."

I bet it is a sensitive area.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): If people are not able to get any advice or help from immediate relatives, will not the natural corollary be that families who do not have money will go to the loan sharks? We all know that their rates have been increasing rapidly in the past eight years. The residual income of the average family going in debt has risen from 45 per cent. in 1979 to more than 80 per

cent. in 1988. The truth is that the Government are running a pawnshop economy, and these provisions will add to the problems of the poorest families in Britain.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is correct. He will readily appreciate, from the tone of the guidance in the manual, that not only will some people be forced to go to loan sharks because they will be turned away from the Department, but that some people, faced with that kind of questioning, will prefer to go to loan sharks. They may be wrong or mistaken, but would people want to go to the DHSS and be asked about their friends and relatives and how many charities they had approached before being turned down for a loan?

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): As my hon. Friend knows, I rarely disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) but he is being kind to the Government in saying that they are running a pawnshop economy for the poorest in the community. In the old days, if one went to a pawnshop, it had money to pay out. Under the social fund, for most of the year the Government pawnshop will not have any money.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend has again put his finger exactly on the scale of the problem. No amount of advice can bridge the gap of £500 million faced by the unemployed because of inadequate scale rates.

The final seal is set on the generosity of the social fund and its flexibility by one simple provision. A family who are already so deep in debt when they approach the social fund officers that they cannot afford to repay a loan in the time scale and at the rate that would be necessary to qualify for such a loan would get nothing, not a single penny, although by definition they are in the greatest need of all.

The reforms, as the Government call them, are being made in the name of targeting help to those in the greatest need. This is Alice in Wonderland politics, and those who lose their heads will be those in the greatest need—all in the name of helping them. This is probably the worst aspect of all the proposals that the Government have put before us to change the social services. It will be arbitrary and unjust, and it will cause bitterness, rancour and resentment. Reading the social fund manual is like reading some black humour from the pages of "Punch" at the turn of the century.

It is often said that history repeats itself. This week I have been reading some articles on the old poor law. It is amazing how the words of Ministers justifying these changes are echoed in the pages of the discussions about the history of the poor law. It is said that history repeats itself as farce and then as tragedy. For the poor, this certainly is tragedy.

4.58 pm

The Minister for Social Security and the Disabled (Mr. Nicholas Scott): Today is the last opportunity to discuss the reforms before their implementation in April. It will come as no surprise to the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) to hear that I have been conscious that the social fund is not the most popular of the reforms which will be introduced in April. It has been subject to a spread of criticism from many organisations, most of which have been collected in the speech of the hon. Lady.

When the reforms are introduced we will have a social fund, and it will be for the Goverment, the Opposition and other bodies to see how it works in practice. We will be in new territory. Many aspects of it will be positive and will help to meet flexibly and compassionately the needs of people who cannot be helped by other aspects of the system, such as income support.

I understand why we are discussing the wider issues of the social fund today, because this is an ideal opportunity so to do. I welcome the chance to put on the record, as we come to the launch of the social fund, the facts about the new scheme and the argument in favour of it. Before that, perhaps I may respond to some points raised by the hon. Lady, although my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will reply generally at the end of the debate.

The assertion has been made that it is inevitable that the budget for the social fund will be exhausted either in the course of a month or in the course of a year. That is by no means certain. The social fund officers and managers of local offices will not be the only people who have placed upon them the duty of managing a budget throughout a financial year. The allocations for the social fund will be made to local offices on an annual basis. As has been announced publicly, the local offices will for their own purposes draw up a profile of likely expenditure throughout the year and will allocate a sum for each month.

But that will not be carved into tablets of stone, if I may put it that way. It will be guidance for their management of the fund. If they need to shift money between months to meet a surge of demand, they can do that. There will also be a built-in flexibility. If a social fund officer finds that he is running short of funds in one month, he will not have to take an immediate decision on an application, but may hold it for up to 28 days and consider it in the light of the funds that are then available.

A second canard that has begun to run about the social fund is that when claimants ask for loans, they will first be referred to charitable bodies. That is not true. There is no question of claimants being sent routinely to seek other sources of help—whether a charity or a relative—before an award is considered. But it is only right that social fund officers, confronted with a claim, should have to take account of the help that might be available from other sources. Before making such a referral, a social fund officer will have to be satisfied that there is a realistic expectation that help will be available in time. No one is suggesting that claimants will be advised to seek charitable help from another agency or a relative on the off-chance that such help will be available.

Mr. Winnick: Leaving aside for the moment the plight of those who may be unable to get assistance because the social fund has been exhausted, why are the Government pursuing a policy of hurting the poorest — to receive supplementary benefit one has to be very poor — by giving loans instead of grants? Why is there such a spiteful, mean attitude to those who are in dire need? It is something which we cannot understand.

Mr. Scott: As I have told the House already, I do not believe that we will be confronted with a situation in which the budget is exhausted. No doubt the hon. Gentleman will be able to make the rest of his intervention again later in the debate. I hope to use this opportunity to set forth the arguments and the facts about the social fund.

Mr. Winnick: Why have loans instead of grants?

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman asks why there will be loans. There are two elements. One is discretion. The hon. Member for Derby, South and others have suggested that discretion will always operate to the disadvantage of the claimant. That is not so. Under the existing single payments scheme, a claimant may be turned away because his claim lies just outside the letter of the regulations. Discretion can operate to the benefit of claimants. Social fund officers, who will be specially trained, will be able to exercise their discretion sensibly and compassionately—*[Interruption.]* If Opposition Members will restrain themselves, I shall seek ot answer their questions.

People who are just above the level of income support have to budget for the payments that qualify for loans under the social fund. I believe that it is right, and increasingly should be right, that people who are on income support should have a sum of money which they are expected to manage themselves. The hon. Member for Derby, South talked about the level of benefits. In an ideal world, we might wish to see different levels of benefit. No doubt the hon. Lady would want benefits to be much higher, whatever the cost to the taxpayer, but I cannot believe that it is other than a proper approach that those on income support should, like the rest of the community, be put into a position in which they can manage their own resources without recourse to single payments.

The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) made great play about loan sharks. I cannot believe that anyone in his right mind, given the opportunity of getting an interest-free loan from the social fund, would want instead to avail himself of the facilities offered by loan sharks. *[Interruption.]* I am confident that in the budget for the social fund there will be adequate resources to provide for the high-priority cases that will arise. There is flexibility within the social fund to meet the needs.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston) *rose*——

Mr. Scott: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman this time, but I am conscious that quite a few hon. Members wish to speak and that we are constrained by time, and I do not want to delay the House.

Mr. Cook: The Minister must be aware that he has made an important statement which goes to the heart of the anxiety about the social fund. If it turns out that his confidence is misplaced and the social fund is not adequate to cover the claims, will he in the course of a year reconsider the budget?

Mr. Scott: I take two points from what the hon. Gentleman has said. The first is that I have been in the House too long to start answering hypothetical questions. Secondly, the provision for single payments this year will be about £200 million and is not far removed from the provision that will be made for the social fund. So we will have to wait and see. Of course the Government will monitor the operation of the fund. So, I am sure, will the Opposition and various other bodies.

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Is the Minister aware that in my local office in Stoke Newington the amount of money being allocated for the social fund is only 73 per cent. of what was paid out in single payments this year? So my people in Stoke Newington are already a quarter down. How can the Minister say that people will not be turned away?

Mr. Scott: Perhaps the hon. Lady will forgive me if I do not give a detailed answer to her question. My hon. Friend knows of her concern and will deal with it later in the debate.

The current system of weekly benefit and payments for exceptional need is operated under a complicated set of supplementary benefit regulations. I have not heard widespread praise for that system. The rigidity and complexity of the single payments scheme, and the fact that the pattern of payments across the country frequently bears little relation to the real pattern of need in communities, are all disadvantages that have been raised. I believe that the changes in the overall pattern of income support, including the social fund, will enable the Department of Health and Social Security to provide a faster, better and more flexible system for claimants.

In some circumstances the social fund will be able to help not just those on income support but those who are just above that level. The House will be aware that, since last April, payments have been made from the social fund for maternity needs and funeral costs. Amendments to the rules for those payments are set out in the regulations. Phase 2 starts in April this year and will not be regulated, as the other payments have been, but will be discretionary. As a discretionary scheme, it will be more flexible than single payments and will provide a more varied response to the different needs which can arise and a greater responsiveness to local circumstances.

Perhaps I should remind the House briefly, to get it on the record, of the different types of payment from the social fund. The hon. Member for Derby, South referred to maternity payments, which will be at a flat rate of £85 from April for each baby expected, born or adopted, and payable to people receiving income support or family credit. It is worth reminding ourselves that the single payment will replace the old maternity grant of £25 and the single payment for maternity needs that was previously made under supplementary benefit regulations.

The social fund maternity payment of £85 from April is not based on needs for specific items, but is a standard sum for each new baby. As such, it provides more accessible help for those now receiving supplementary benefit and will continue to do so after the introduction of income support in April. Of course, there will be regular help from weekly benefits towards the costs of looking after a baby, and child benefit and income support, with extra amounts for each child.

A second aspect of the social fund that is already in operation are the payments to meet essential funeral expenses incurred by people receiving income support, family credit or housing benefit, who are responsible for a funeral. The payments replace the old death grant of £30 and the single payment for funeral expenses.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Will the Minister explain what happens once the amount allocated for the social fund in a particular area has gone? What happens to those who come late, even in relation to funeral benefit? How will those people manage? What are they going to do?

Mr. Scott: The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) is referring to funeral expenses, which are made under regulations and not within the cash-limited part of the social fund, and those payments will be made,

if they meet the regulations. Maternity and funeral payments are regulated, subject to appeal, and are outside the local office budgets.

Attention has understandably been focused on the discretionary parts of the social fund that are to be introduced in April, in phase two. Budgeting loans will be interest-free loans available to help people who have been in receipt of income support for six months or more to spread the cost of intermittent expenses that are difficult to meet from weekly benefit. Money advice will be available to those with particular financial difficulties. Crisis loans will be interest-free loans available to assist people, whether or not they are on benefit, who cannot meet their short-term needs in an emergency or disaster. Payments will generally be for a specific item or immediate living expenses for a short period, not normally exceeding 14 days.

A great deal of play has been made of the fact that because this scheme is discretionary there will be no right of appeal. If it is discretionary in essence, it is difficult to see how one could have an appeal system, in the sense that it is normally understood. It may be a help to the House if I explain generally what will happen during the review process that will be in place and available instead of an appeal system as we normally understand it.

The regulations simply prescribed the way in which applications for review and further review should be made. For example, they must be in writing, be delivered or sent to a DHSS office within 28 days of the date when the disputed decision is issued, and must contain the reasons for the application being made. When an application for review is received, a social fund officer, who is usually the one who made the original decision, will first of all make sure that the application has been made in accordance with the provisions of the regulations. He will then review his original decision in the light of all the points that the applicant has raised.

If the officer feels unable to change his decision, he will arrange for the applicant to be interviewed. During the interview, the social fund officer will explain the original decision fully and the applicant, or his representative, who may be present if he so wishes, may make any points to the officer. The officer will then write an account of the interview.

If, after the interview has taken place, and the written account is delivered, the officer still feels unable to change his decision, he will pass the matter to a senior officer, usually of the higher executive officer grade, who will look at every aspect of the case in reaching the formal review decision. If the applicant is not satisfied with that review decision, he has the right to apply for a further review to the social fund inspector.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax) *rose*——

Mr. Scott: I shall not give way yet.

Social fund inspectors will be independent of the Department's local and regional office management, and will be answerable, not to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services but to the social fund commissioner. The inspector's role in the review process is to ensure that the social fund officer applied the law correctly, including the Secretary of State's directions.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West) *rose*——

Mr. Scott: I shall give way shortly.

The inspector will ensure that the social fund officer acted fairly and reasonably and took account of all the available evidence, and that all the required procedural steps were taken, with the applicant being given sufficient opportunity to put his case.

Mr. Clarke: The Minister has outlined the role of a social fund inspector. It is very important that we should know, first, whether the inspector at any stage will be hearing oral evidence and, secondly, where he will be based.

Mr. Scott: It is open to the social fund inspector, if he feels that it would help him in coming to his conclusion, to interview the applicant. He is not compelled to do so and in general I believe that that would be unlikely.

In relation to the review procedure, which I think is fair, the social fund commissioner will be responsible, among other things, for the standard of the inspectors' decisions and will report annually to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and that report will be published. The review procedure that I have just outlined has had much scorn poured upon it, but it has been described by Lord Denning in the other place as being simple, fair and just machinery.

I believe that the basis upon which the social fund has been established is sound and that the element of discretion will operate to the benefit of claimants. I do not believe that the money will be exhausted. The review procedures are fair and just, and reflect the reality behind a discretionary rather than a regulated system.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr. Scott: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order.

Mr. Scott: I believe that the social fund needs a fair chance to show that it can meet, in a flexible and compassionate way, the needs of those who need extra help, whether or not they are in receipt of income support. I commend the regulations to the House.

5.18 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): The reason for the social fund is very simple. The Government are intent on reducing the amount of money that is paid under single payments, and have come up with this scheme. There has been worry about escalating public expenditure and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) said in her powerful speech, there is the question of abuse.

In a sense, Members of Parliament have a social fund. A whole range of expenses are available to us, which our constituents know little of. This debate is our last opportunity to comment on the shape and structure and policing of the social fund. I wonder whether we would be happy to have the policing that the poor will get through the social fund. There seem to be dual standards operated by the House.

The other view that has been put about——

Mr. Winnick: There are other people's expenses.

Mr. Field: I agree with my hon. Friend, but as we are voting, it is fair enough for me to raise the question of our expenses.

[Mr. Field]

The view being put over is that some people are milching the system; indeed, some journalists make such comments about MPs and their expenses.

No Opposition Member claims that poverty ennobles people. The reason why we want a war against poverty is that it destroys people and makes it more difficult for them to be decent to themselves and to one another. That is why we oppose so many measures that the Government bring forward. Of course some people will work the system, but there are hundreds of thousands, indeed millions, of other people who are dependent on the safety net that is disappearing with the regulations.

I will give two examples of people who applied for help under the system that we are abolishing and failed to get it — so goodness knows what will happen to people under the new system.

A couple moved from the husband's parents in Rock Ferry to the Ford council estate. When the officer visited them, because they had made a request for furniture, one of his questions was, "Why have you got those pictures on the wall?" The wife explained to me that they were just cheap pictures bought in the market and were the only wedding presents that people could afford to buy for them. There was no furniture in that flat. I realised this when the wife, who was pregnant, said that sleeping on a carpeted floor when they were with her husband's family had been much easier and softer.

Another family on the Ford estate visited by the officer had a single deckchair, because that is the cheapest type of chair that one can buy. The wife was pregnant. The visiting officer took the deckchair and sat in it while he conducted the interview, and my constituents sat on the floor. They were not successful in getting a single payment. That is the generous system that we are turning off today.

When listening to the Minister, we had a horrible feeling of unreality. The Government seem to feel that if only they can get through the script and read the brilliant prose which a civil servant has written for them the scheme will work. We have taken every opportunity to try to convince the Government that it will not work in a way that is acceptable to decent people in this country, and certainly to the poor.

The only time that I disagreed with my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South was when she said that it was like Alice in Wonderland. Alice could wake up from the dream. The constituents of Opposition and Conservative Members will not be waking up. That is the grim reality of the regulations.

There was another element of unreality when the right hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton) kept moving in and out like Banquo's ghost. He was the Minister responsible for much of this scheme, but he got out. The Minister for Social Security and the Disabled has got to stick to this measure and see it through.

I should like to put again the point that I put to the Minister briefly at the end of the meeting that my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) and the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) arranged the other day. I think that the Government are under the illusion that while they are dealing with the NHS crisis, the crisis about the social fund will not erupt, and that it will come at the end of the year. But the social fund crisis for families and individuals will start from week one, not because the Government have planned it that way but because officials will be fearful of going over their budgets. No Minister will have sent out a circular saying that those who fail to meet their budgets will not get promotion, but that is what people will feel. So on that side there will be rigorous enforcement, and therefore horror stories will start in the first week.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South was right in saying that for many people there will be a private grieving and they will go to the moneylenders. One could not find a better example of privatisation, with the Government acting as recruiting sergeant for those back-street moneylenders who take the child benefit book. Then, if that is not enough, there are the heavies, who will start kicking the door down and pulling people about in the house. We are going to see a massive amount more of that, but that is only the private grieving. We might pick it up in the constituencies, but it will not feature in the media and it is the media that the Government fear.

What the Government will see is the rough stuff in the offices. Already precautions are being taken to strengthen partitions. There are staff who are dreading the start of this scheme, because many of them are decent people and do not want to treat the poor like this, and they are also fearful for their own safety. So far, as the Minister knows, decisions have been taken by a tribunal. Now the woman or the man in the office will have to say no across the office counter.

One can imagine, when children are hungry and without shoes, with electricity cut off in winter, and so on, what the reaction in those offices will be, with no further support available, because perhaps the family has been lucky enough to get a grant or a loan. There will be violence in the offices. Both sides, obviously, will regret it afterwards, but it will be understandable.

It will be worse than that. We saw that with the board-and-lodging allowances, when the deaths began. No one is pretending that the scheme in itself will drive anyone to suicide. Thank God, I do not know much about suicide, but it seems that in this respect it is the straw that breaks the camel's back, and there will be people who find that they just cannot continue with this sort of system. The media will pick up those stories and it will be in the headlines that another victim of the social fund has done himself or herself in. So the Minister must not think that he has a year of seeing this fund in, because those horror stories will start very soon. It will be our job to make sure that our "friends" in the media get hold of those stories, and get hold of them quickly.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not an illustration of the Prime Minister's sick humour that the Minister, who is basically certainly a decent person and a Tory wet, and if he had been on the Back Benches would undoubtedly have been protesting today, is given this task, the most discredited part of the Tory social policy? It is part of the Prime Minister's sick humour.

Mr. Field: We all have to live with ourselves in the cool of the evening and we should leave people to do that.

I beg the Minister not to think that he has time on his side, because he has not. I make a plea for him to draw up contingency plans now.

Two things are required if the social fund is to work, and some of us are not against the principle. The first is that benefits must be set at an adequate level so that people are not budgeting from hand to mouth. Secondly, people

must have the chance, partly with a slightly larger income, to know about saving collectively. I make a plea that the contingency plans will ensure that, if it gets rough and if we get the deaths, the Government will be big enough, before there are too many of them, to put the scheme on ice. The old system, grim as it was, as I have tried to explain, will operate for another three years, but in the meantime there will be attempts to cover the country with credit unions.

The charges made against the Prime Minister are not so much about her personal philosophy, because, strangely enough, many of the people who vote for me would support the business about self-help and self-improvement. But she must understand that people need help to cross that bridge. I went to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) recently and there is a credit union there run by a woman who is dying of cancer. It is astonishing the difference it makes when people have real control of their own lives and can make decisions about when to buy and when not to buy. That is all something which the Prime Minister ought to encourage rather than destroy, and it will be destroyed if people are expected to move from utter poverty to lower-middle-class respectability in one short step.

So my plea to all hon. Members is that, before voting, they think a little more openly and honestly about their own expenses and the policing to which we are subjecting the poor. The scheme that we are replacing is far from generous. Words fail me when I try to describe the sort of scheme that we are going to impose on those who have been unfortunate enough to be kicked out of the bottom of our society.

5.29 pm

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): My objection to the social fund has always been that it is the most harmful feature of the Social Security Act 1986. It is a wholly inadequate replacement for the single payments system, and I believe that the principle behind it is not social well-being but financial savings.

The regulations further highlight the many problems that have been identified with the social fund. The fund cannot replace the single payments system, because the grants budget is only a woefully inadequate £60 million, whereas expenditure on single payments was £360 million in 1986. The cut in August 1986 to £190 million may make the grants budget look less miserly, but that appearance is superficial. The result of the cut, and the move away from grants under the social fund, can only be misery and poverty.

I do not believe that the loans system will prevent the slide into further poverty for the vast majority of claimants. Those who are forced to pay back loans out of benefits will face increased hardship, and the whole system will become a bureaucratic nightmare, which I believe is destined to create chaos.

Those paying back loans from their already meagre benefits will not be made more independent; they will just be made poorer. This method of paying back loans will reduce the capacity of those who are already dependent on benefits to take the road to true financial independence, and that is contrary to the Government's avowed aims and intentions.

As a former banker, I have watched people struggle against small loans — struggle to pay rates, mortage, rent, lighting, heating. They were on steady incomes, but the people we are talking about are not. The amounts that claimants will have to pay back out of their benefits are not insubstantial, as the Government would have us believe, and the amount of time for which a claimant will be forced to live below the poverty line is considerable.

The normal repayment rate will be 15 per cent. of a person's weekly benefits, even for a single person under 25. That will be £3·90 out of the £26·05 that he receives weekly. Perhaps the Government do not realise that £4 is a large amount for someone who is struggling to survive on less than £30 a week. How can a young person be expected to survive in any remotely civilised way on less than £25 for several weeks, especially if he lives in a big city? The prospect is outrageous.

Let me give another example. A single pensioner might have an income made up of £41·15 basic retirement pension and £2·90 income support. If that person borrowed £514·80 for an essential repair to his home, he would have to repay the debt at the maximum rate, £6·60 over a maximum period of 78 weeks. During that period, he would receive no income support, and his pension would be reduced by the amount of the remainder of the debt. That would leave the pensioner with only £37·45 retirement pension for all his living expenses.

The position will become worse when the pensioner is required to pay 20 per cent. of his poll tax. Even before the poll tax is introduced, he will have to pay contributions towards his rates and water rates, which will further reduce the amount that he has to live on to about £34·75.

People in that position will face enough difficulties, but my greatest fear is that a vast number will be forced into the hands of unscrupulous moneylenders. They will be the unfortunate people who have been refused a loan, but are still in desperate need of money. There may be many more who will lose confidence in the system, or will not face the inevitable red tape and means testing, and will instead turn to the "no questions asked" lenders. The exorbitant interest rates charged by those lenders or loan sharks would not be paid by anyone who was not absolutely desperate for money. The fate of those who turn to the loan shark will ultimately be worse, as they will then be plunged into a cycle of debt from which it will be difficult to escape.

The Minister cannot close his eyes to the fact of debt and its effects on people living on or below the poverty line. One survey of people on supplementary benefit found that 56 per cent. of couples with children and 44 per cent. of one-parent families were in debt. Other indicators of debt show the same pattern of widespread borrowing and the problems associated with it. In 1986, a total of 20,550 people had their homes repossessed by building societies through mortgage default. That was an eightfold increase since 1979. The social fund will greatly increase those harrowing statistics, which is a frightening prospect.

The harrowing statistics of which I speak can only provide more work for those already under pressure in the DHSS offices. In my constituency, the DHSS staff are hard-working, dedicated and very compassionate, but to ask them to act as moneylenders and then, obviously, as debt collectors would be too much on top of their massive work load. They will have to do the paperwork before any debt collectors move in.

I am also concerned about other inadequacies in the social fund. For example, deposits to secure accommodation will no longer be available. That will deny people the

[Mr. Ronnie Fearn]

chance to live in better accommodation. It is virtually impossible to rent a room or flat in any major city without first providing a fairly substantial deposit. How on earth are people already living on very small amounts supposed to produce the cash? The result will be that people are forced to live in unsuitable accommodation, and, once again, the poorest in our society will be unable to improve the standard of living for themselves and their families because of the Government's meanness.

Not only in the cities, but in the towns, people will be forced to live in substandard accommodation. In my constituency, flat lets are plentiful in winter, but as soon as the holidays start, people have to move out. They will be moving into substandard accommodation, although they are the people who are supposedly within the fund. Young people seeking summer jobs move down into the resorts, and they too will suffer.

The social fund manual decrees that, once a claimant has been refused a payment, he may not reapply for six months unless his circumstances alter. The most unjust feature of that rule is that it applies even when a social fund officer refuses an application because he has no money left in the budget. I have always been opposed to the limited budget, but that feature of the system is grossly unfair. Why cannot the social fund officer tell the unsuccessful claimant to come back in a week? Under this system, the claimant will be told, "Yes, you have a good case for a loan. But go away and come back in six months." It seems that, no matter how urgent or important that person's needs, he will be refused a payment without further explanation unless he chooses to appeal.

I ask the Minister to reconsider that six-month time limit. Indeed, I should like to know whether a review of how the system is working is likely after, say, six months, rather than the 12 months mentioned in the opening speeches.

The appeal system has long been a major sticking point for those of us who oppose the social fund, and the Government have faced embarrassing reversals on the subject in the past. I make no apology for repeating my view that people will have no confidence in a review carried out by the DHSS employee who originally refused their payment. A review should be conducted by an independent tribunal, and in private.

The manual says that an interview will be in private wherever possible, but it should always be in private. Anybody who has to speak about his means should always do so in the privacy of an office rather than in a public place.

How can people believe that their review has been fairly or even accurately considered when they know that the whole point of the social fund is to save money? A potential claimant is further deterred from appealing by the bureaucratic system devised for arranging an appeal. The final appeal to the inspector is hardly better since it is still carried out within the DHSS. Those who are already most disillusioned with our society will be given further reason to distrust the system.

The social fund will lead to increased despair and misery for all those living in poverty. Those already facing despair will be told that the state no longer cares what happens to them. That is a prospect which I will not support and I urge the House to vote against the regulations.

5.40 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Our social security system is directed towards two different objectives. The first is to meet entitlement and the second is to meet need. Embedded in the speech of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) was a reference, which I welcome, to the difficulty that we all find in differentiating one need from another, and sometimes, somewhat invidiously, having to form impressions on the level of need. To take an example in a different sphere, hon. Members have no direct responsibility for housing applications, but it is remarkable how different are the weight of the claims of various people who write to me, and, I am sure, to others.

In social security matters, despite an understandable and humane wish to do so, it is difficult to cover all the hard cases without some mechanism for controlling the inexorable rise of costs. I elicited more details in a written answer on 17 December 1987 at column 707 of *Hansard*. The cost of the single payments system, which the social fund will replace, has risen remarkably. On a platform, one could summarise it by saying that the cost has risen fivefold in real terms from £40 million at 1979 prices in that year to approximately £200 million in 1985-86, and similarly in 1986-87.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Does the hon. Gentleman not understand that he is charting the growth of poverty and the increase in inequality in our society since 1979? Costs have gone up, not because people are getting too much money, but because they are a lot poorer.

Mr. Boswell: I do not share the hon. Lady's easy certainty in the matter, but let me continue to develop the point by analysing the figures.

I readily concede that within that time unemployment has risen sharply, but I cannot correlate the rise in unemployment which, fortunately, is now diminishing equally sharply, with the figures as presented. Until the year 1981-82, when the rise in unemployment was already well under way, the figures were virtually static in real terms at £40 million. Thereafter, they started to rise by approximately 50 per cent. per annum in real terms. That must give any hon. Member cause to consider why that should have happened. No one has a satisfactory explanation for it.

Last year, the Government took certain measures to curb costs within the single payments scheme and, in doing so, made scope for other social changes and items of social spending which have been developing in the recent past, such as, for example, the rapid growth in payments under the attendance allowance, which I welcome, and to which I would like to see further extensions made in due course.

Mr. Cryer: The hon. Gentleman has obviously been doing some investigation and analysis of the DHSS figures. Did he do the same sort of analysis of payments to farmers when he was at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food? Did he attack and seek to reduce them with the same zeal? If so, it appears that he was singularly unsuccessful.

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful for that magnificently irrelevant comment. I was a mere official, not a Minister, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the Ministry was

dedicated, as is the Prime Minister, to reducing the inordinate growth in the common agricultural policy. If we can do that, that too will make more resources available. Therefore, to some extent, I accept the hon. Gentleman's point.

Let me move from that diversion to the business in hand. There is an underlying misunderstanding by the Opposition, although I am sure not a wilful one, of the role and feasibility of budgeting. All of us have to budget, whether in private business or in our private lives. As anyone who has been a Minister is well aware, including the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), that applies also during the public expenditure survey. There is no free lunch in Government or outside. On the other hand, when one looks at cash limits one has to ask whether the more dramatic predictions made by Opposition Members can really be fulfilled. I have never yet heard of a Girocheque being bounced. If there is an overrun in any one month, the obligation will be met, but it will give rise to certain management consequences later.

I also welcome the thrust of the proposals as a means of trying to free as many people as possible from an automatic assumption of a client relationship with the state. In saying that, I readily accept that not everybody living at the margins can easily cope with a one-off expenditure—items that were referred to at some length in Committee. I see no reason why such people should not bear a measure of responsibility for the consequences of not being able to put the money down in advance.

Ms. Abbott: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boswell: No, I have already given way twice and I must continue to make my points so that others can speak.

The difference in the social fund is, first, that such loans, if made available, are interest-free; secondly, they will be accompanied by advice from social fund officers; and, thirdly, unlike the money sharks, social fund officers will be as keen as the clients to ensure that the money is repaid as promptly as possible.

In conclusion, let me examine one or two details of the scheme on which I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to comment when he replies. In the voluminous list of benefits from which deductions may be made, I see no reference to child benefit, and I should like my hon. Friend's confirmation that I have read the regulations correctly.

Secondly, to go beyond the mere deductions from benefit, we have to record that the state is again going, in a modest way, into the banking business, at the same moment when it intends, rightly, to withdraw from the Girobank system. That will mean running an innovatory low-level banking or credit system. In some cases, particularly if, as we hope, clients can break out of their situation and back into employment, they may not be in receipt of benefits and it may be necessary to find other ways of recovering loans.

I have some small experience of the court order system of attachment of earnings from employees. That functions in a rather archaic way. Employees are obliged to account on a weekly basis for pay, but the employer is obliged to pay on a monthly basis, which automatically creates asymmetry. It is impossible for the employer to pay electronically and a lot of paperwork is involved. Such aspects will need consideration at a later date.

There are three matters, very much in the spirit of the concerns expressed in the debate, about which I should like to ask my hon. Friend the Minister. The first—I accept that he spoke about this in extenso in Committee—is the training of social fund officers. Clearly that is taking place at the moment, but I hope that it will continue after the day of vesting—as it were—of the fund. I hope that there will be maximum opportunities for consultation, mutual meetings and exchanges of views and experiences between social fund officers in different areas so that a pattern of experience can be established.

Secondly, and following on from that—my remarks are very much a package — we need an adequate publicity campaign to explain what is going on, both to hon. Members, who will have a role to play, and to the public. We shall all have a very busy traffic during the summer and we shall have much explaining to do. It is important that we should form part of the process.

As has been said, the Government must also show a readiness to review the system in the light of developments. It would be useful to have at least a preliminary examination and possibly a debate before the winter sets in to give us an initial snapshot of what is going on.

This is a new scheme. It is an innovation. On the whole, I welcome it, but we need to be ready to learn from experience when it is in place. We need to give a positive commitment to do our best to explain the social fund to our constituents and to contribute to making it work as well as possible.

5.50 pm

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): The Minister started by saying that this was the last opportunity that we would have to discuss the regulations, and unfortunately it is. However, more unfortunately, it could be the last hope for many of those whom we represent, who at the moment have a lifeline, albeit a limited lifeline.

There is no doubt that the proposals are unfair, to say the least. They are also undemocratic. It is far from democratic to take from poor people seeking state help the right of appeal. That move has been condemned not only by hon. Members but by just about every organisation dealing with the poor. It has been condemned too by many of the groups that have advised Governments in the past on social services matters. It is bound to place further strain on poor families and on the social services. As was said more than once in Committee, if the strain is pushed more and more on to poorer families, more and more people will go to their local social services departments.

Sheffield is rate-capped. How will the social services department be able to help those driven out of the DHSS offices because they have run out of money, or for whatever reason? I know for a fact that Sheffield will have less section 1 money this year than in previous years. Therefore, the poor families will not be able to get help from either of the public sector bodies. Obviously, if they have any sort of nous, they will get the money one way or another. Unfortunately, they may get money by wrongful means and, perhaps even worse, they may fall foul of the loan sharks, who must be rubbing their hands as they await the implementation of the regulations, which will drag people deeper into poverty.

As I said, the removal of the right to appeal has been condemned all round. In Committee, the Minister said on more than one occasion that it does not really matter, because the fund will not run out. He confirmed that this

[Mr. Bill Michie]

afternoon. He is misleading the House if he says that the new fund will be about the same as the present system of single payments. He said that the fund would be near the present single payments budget.

The point is that, since the Government came to power, the budget for the single payments system has been reduced year after year. It is now almost impossible to get single payments. It is said that one has about the same chance of qualifying for a single payment as a 60-year-old has of doing a four-minute mile on one leg. That shows how bad it is in some areas. I could take hon. Members round Sheffield — I am sure this applies to all hon. Members' constituents — and show them flats and bedsits whose occupants are in need of essentials but have been refused single payments. Only last month a young girl who was pregnant at the time came to my office. She had been supplied with a single person's flat by Sheffield council but it had no carpets, no furniture and no bed. Over Christmas that young woman literally slept on bare boards. We tried and tried to get her single payments, but, unfortunately, although she may now get single payments, she decided to have an abortion, which she had not really wanted to do in the first place.

The House should not think that the present system is good; it is bad. All that we are doing now is making matters worse by restricting the meagre resources available to poor people and introducing a very difficult loan system. What sort of appeal is there when someone refused by one officer has to appeal to a senior officer and then to another senior officer—all of them dealing with the same legislation dictated by the Government, so that unless they can find a really technical point they are not in a position to change the initial decision?

The Minister said that the applicant could write to the DHSS office. Many of those who come into my office are not blessed with good writing. They are inarticulate and they are the people who suffer most precisely because of those disabilities. It is disgraceful for the Minister to say that all they have to do is write and put their case. They are not lawyers. They are people at the bottom of the pile who are struggling to make a living and look after their families. But the Minister says, "Put it in writing." The history of the appeals and tribunals system shows that the vast majority of successful cases have been won orally rather than in writing.

Although the Minister said that it might be possible to meet the clients, he hinted that that was not likely. Therefore, we are left with no democratic right of appeal and with a silly system that will make people run round in circles until they give up and are driven to the loan sharks and to despair.

I am sure that in a few months' time it will appear from the statistics trotted out by the Government Departments that the social fund has solved the problem, but the truth is that needy and helpless people will have been pushed out of the equation. The Minister has always been considered a bit of a wet, as was said earlier. Today, he is defending proposals that are as hard as nails. He is justifying proposals that in his heart of hearts he does not believe in. It was obvious in Committee that he was uncomfortable. Nevertheless, he will push the proposals through with some form of what he claims to be credibility. Many are worried about the consequences of the regulations but none will have the guts to say so. While they do not have the guts to say so, many thousands of families will suffer pain, anguish and despair.

I shall finish on the note on which I started. This is the last opportunity to discuss this matter. I hope that it will not be the last hope for the people whom we represent.

5.57 pm

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): First, let me respond to some of the points made by the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell). I disagreed with almost everything that he said, but at least he is one of the few Conservative Members who not only attended the Committee but has made an effort to participate today [HON. MEMBERS: "He was the only one."] Indeed, he was the only one.

The hon. Gentleman described the chaos that will result after 11 April as an increase in business traffic. What a euphemism that was, and what an underestimate of the problems and difficulties that we will face. Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman with the statistics—with which he had trouble—comparing trends in employment with single payments. He cannot have been listening to Opposition Members' arguments about the 19 fiddles of the unemployment figures, or he would not have found it so difficult to comprehend the differences.

The hon. Gentleman said that many poor families would like to show a measure of responsibility by receiving loans. He completely fails to understand how people live their lives and how they want to live their lives. Families on benefit show responsibility every day of the week as a result of the accounting and suffering that they face under the present system.

Mr. Boswell: Although I accept that many families may be in that category, will the hon. Lady accept that some families might be in a position to do something for themselves? Should they not be encouraged to do so?

Ms. Mowlam: I shall answer that question when Conservative Members answer similar questions about many people in the City, with their gross carryings on.

The final point that the hon. Member for Daventry must accept about the loans which he sees as bringing in a measure of responsibility is that they must be paid back. The DHSS offices will give a one-off loan payment, and in the next year must survive on what is paid back. This means that, under the obscene system of loans, payments will decline, and that is why hardship will worsen.

I am pleased that the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) is in the Chamber. I hope that he will not suggest having a national lottery for the social fund as he did for the National Health Service, because that really

I should like to make just three points, because I know that many of my hon. Friends want to speak. The first is about grants, to which the Minister referred. It must be said that he was economical with the truth. He says that there will be what he described as "profiling" by the local offices which will, according to the regulations, have two-month periods during which they can consider the nature of the single payments that might be demanded. He said that this will mean that there will be enough money to go round.

I failed to understand that point throughout all the time that the Minister spent trying to explain it in Committee, because if, at the beginning of that two-month period there

is a heavy demand for curtains, carpets, cookers and the other basic needs that cannot wait 28 days if one's family needs to be fed, by the end of the two months the money will have run out.

The Minister says that the officers can shift that period and be flexible by moving it from one part of the year to another, but by the 10th or 11th month there will not be any money left at the local offices. Ministers cannot have it both ways. There is either flexibility within a two-month period, or there is a 12-month period. However, the outcome will be that at the end of that 12-month period no money will be left and people will suffer.

What people will find most difficult to understand is that somebody up the road gets a cooker because it is 2 April, but on 12 May somebody three doors down, who is in exactly the same circumstances, does not get one. Pensioners question why some people should get television licences when others do not, and now some people will get cookers while others who are in exactly the same material circumstances will not. That degree of unfairness and injustice will concern many people, who will find itpay-difficult to understand. I hope that Ministers will have an easier job explaining the position than many of us will have when we encounter exactly those problems. It will be a question of robbing Peter to pay Paul. We have said that all along, ever since the legislation was introduced, and that, indeed, will be the outcome.

My second point relates to loans. The Government have made much today, and previously, of the fact that the loans will be interest-free. Great. We are then told that in exceptional circumstances 25 per cent. of the loans will be paid back weekly. Ordinarily, 15, 10 or 5 per cent. will be paid back weekly by deductions from benefit. If we are talking about a 10 per cent. pay-back on a weekly basis, that amounts to £7·95 out of benefit. When the Minister replies to the debate, I hope that he will explain how a family can pay back £7·95 out of benefit when they are already budgeting carefully.

The Minister talked about the need for flexibility. Will he accept that under the payback system there will be weeks when families will be unable to pay back that £7·95, because of fuel bills and the need to buy clothes for the children? There will be weeks when families will need to make such one-off payments. When the Minister talks about flexibility, let us hear about flexibility not just for his side, not just in terms of administration, but in terms of how the system will work for families. Will the Minister consider flexibility for payback, so that those who have to pay back the loans will be able to do so in a way that means that they can take that measure of responsibility that we are told people should be able to take?

My third point relates to the nature of the reviews. This is important, and I hope that the Minister will take it on board. The Minister had the cheek and the affrontery to quote from the debate in the House of Lords in relation to the review procedure. When the Social Security Act 1986 as it now is went through this House and on to another place, an all-party group in the Lords introduced an amendment to suggest that there should be a better appeals system. When that came back to this House, it was rejected. If the Minister quotes from debates in the Lords, he should do so across the board to show how the Lords insisted on the need for a review procedure.

The Minister explained carefully the way in which the review procedure would progress—with a social fund officer and social fund inspector—but he did not answer the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) about where the social fund inspectors would be located. Earlier today we heard the Prime Minister talking about civil servants being moved out of London, so we should like to know where the social fund inspectors will be based. Will it be Birmingham, as has been suggested, or elsewhere? We hope the Minister will reply to that point.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie) said, the important point about the review is the need for oral evidence when social fund inspectors consider appeals. I should like the Minister to listen to the statistics for single payments in the north-east region, when an oral appeal was available. He will then see the number of cases that we are talking about. Under the new system, the social fund inspectors will choose whether to have oral evidence. They will sit at their desks and flip through the papers and will not want an oral appeal.

The figures for the north-east region for the year ending 31 March 1987 show that, of the 10,498 single payment appeals, the success rate was 20·4 per cent. The interesting statistics come when one breaks down that success rate. One discovers that where claimants attended—that is, where there was an oral hearing—the success rate increased to 30·5 per cent., and where there was an oral hearing plus a representative assisting the claimant, the success rate increased to 42·2 per cent. That is why the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Heeley is so correct. That example from the north-east shows that 2,014 people would not have been given single payments if there had not been those oral hearings, with the opportunity of being represented at them.

I hope that the Minister listened carefully to the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who talked about what the scheme will look like when it comes into operation. We are talking not only about the implementation of the social fund, but about the implementation of the changes in housing benefit and the introduction of the poll tax. We are talking about debts and about the problems that families will encounter, day in day out, of a kind that we have not experienced, even during the recent years of Tory Government.

The Minister tried to pooh-pooh the suggestion that there would be debt difficulties. I shall give him some figures from the Cleveland trading standards department, which found that loan sharks were providing loans at an interest rate of 300 per cent. of annum.

I am sure the Minister is aware of the kind of problems that we have faced in Cleveland during the past two years. About 40 per cent. of people in Cleveland are dependent on some form of supplementary benefit or income support. That problem should be looked at alongside low incomes, because it creates poverty, higher infant mortality — *[Interruption.]* I am surprised that the Minister finds this an issue worth smiling over. One finds evidence of higher infant mortality. There are also housing problems and problems relating to violence towards children. These problems will become intolerable and unmanageable, and if Ministers were honest they would acknowledge that.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: It might be for the convenience of the House for me to say that I understand that the Front-Bench speakers will seek to rise at 6.30. As several hon. Members wish to take part, perhaps those called would bear that in mind.

6.8 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) spoke of the impact of the social fund being a 25 per cent. reduction in payments in her area. When the Minister replied, he seemed to suggest that that was a special case. Well, I must remind him that, as in many constituencies throughout Britain, the introduction of the social fund will mean a massive reduction in payments in my constituency. In fact it will mean about a 50 per cent. reduction.

The single payments budget of the last comparable figures for 1985-86 was £1,750,000. The projected budget for the social fund includes a grants budget of £141,000 and a loans budget of £327,000—a reduction of more than £500,000. I should like to know how the Minister will square those cuts with his view that people will continue to get payments.

The social fund manual makes it plain that the major concern is not about meeting the needs of people but of remaining within the budget. Social fund officers are reminded that they

"will sometimes be obliged to refuse applications in order to meet higher priorities within the budget."

It is clear that there are higher priorities than tackling poverty. That is what the Minister is telling the poor in Britain by supporting the proposals.

On 11 April when the regulations come into force and when all the statistics and budget figures become real people, we shall have to face those people in the homes and the streets around us. They will turn up at our advice surgeries wanting to know to whom they should turn, and where they should go to get help and assistance to pay for their ordinary daily lives.

We are not talking about the people to which the Secretary of State for Social Services referred, who will have to give up their second holiday to pay for their health, or the people to whom the Secretary of State for the Environment referred, who might want to let out their extra houses. We are talking about the poorest in our society—the young unemployed, the single parents and the pensioners who make up about 30 per cent. of the population in Britain and should be treated as part of society.

I am reminded of the lobby which I attended before I became a Member of Parliament, during the review of social security. Members of Parliament were being challenged about the details. One response to a person who asked the Members about the proposals was that she should not get too involved, because social security issues were too complicated for Ministers and Members of Parliament to understand, never mind the general public. That disabled lady replied, "I remind Members of Parliament that those of us who have to pay the daily price can do the arithmetic, and so should Members of Parliament." So should the Ministers.

The proposals exclude the poor in our society from the Budget and, therefore, from society. Conservative Members echo the classic Victorian response to the poor, which is to blame the victims for their plight. Conservative Members need to face the reality that the loss of a partner through death or through the breakdown of a relationship can plunge an individual or a family into poverty. Real poverty means that, in practice, for most weeks families do not have enough money to live on, as the London Weekend Television survey showed. Not even that well-known television commentator and former Conservative Member of Parliament, Mr. Matthew Parris, could live for a week on unemployment benefit. Fortunately, after that week he was lucky enough to go back to his job without the compounded debts that he had outstanding from one week on the dole.

Worst of all is the intolerable scandal of all the Budget talk from Conservative Members and the press about the millions of pounds that the Chancellor has to give away in tax cuts on 15 March. It is an insult to the poor to talk about the national wealth and suggest that it should be used for tax cuts for the better-off. It will hit the poor smack in the face to hear those expressions. The Government treat people like donkeys. They provide a carrot for the rich and say that they need tax cuts as incentives, but the poor get the big stick. Again, the Government's approach is deliberately divisive. It is strange that if one is rich one can live on credit but woe betide anyone who is poor who gets into debt, although both are borrowing money.

One of the papers that I examined before the debate was the Conservative research department's document "Reform of the Welfare State" published in June 1985. It defines the central objectives for reforms of the welfare state and states:

"It is of paramount importance that these objectives should not conflict with the Government's overall strategy for national economic recovery."

It goes on:

"It would be self-defeating if the cost grew to such an extent that the wealth-producing sector on which this provision rests, was jeopardised. That practical consideration reinforces the strong Conservative conviction that individual self-reliance should be increased".

That is the bedrock for the Government's policies and for today's proposals.

The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) said that people should be made to face the consequences of not being able to put money by. That seems to suggest that the poor are to blame and should pay the price and be excluded while the wealthy get wealthier.

I remind the House that the Government should not assume that poverty in our society is the result of misfortune or bad luck, that it is inevitable or due to laziness, ignorance or lack of development. Poverty is a direct result of the political and economic policies of the Government. The poverty in our society is not accidental or an act of God, but has been created, indeed manufactured—I am tempted to use that 19th century word as the Government hark back to Victorian values.

Not far from the House, a cinema in town is showing the film "Little Dorrit". I recommend that film to Conservative Members. If they do not have time to see it they could read the book on the train because the first part is entitled "The Poor" and the second part is entitled "The Rich". The proposals will create exactly that Dickensian division and take us back beyond the poor laws. Poverty is not accidental. It is being created and manufactured by political policies. Poverty in our society is the result of callous, inhuman Budget policies.

I appeal to the Government, even at this late stage, to put the poor back into the Budget, because if they are excluded from the Budget they are being offered only the callous freedom to which the hon. Member for Daventry referred—the freedom to go hungry and to starve.

6.17 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Years ago, I was told a story by my mother about my grandmother who was left a widow, looking after four daughters. That was in the days before the welfare state. One Saturday morning, they were sitting around the table eating a hot supper which had been provided by the parish of St. Luke's church in the centre of Liverpool. There was a knock at the door. The parish relief officer had arrived. He looked around at the children having their hot supper and said, "Mrs. Mallon, you obviously do not need any assistance from the parish because the children are being looked after."

I tell that story because the Government, and in particular the introduction of the social fund, are creating such a society. The Minister refuted that, and said that people would not have to go to charity. However, he did say that DHSS officers should have to take account of resources being made available from other sources. What are the other sources if they are not relatives? The pressure will be on the voluntary organisations and the churches to provide what should be provided by the state. If the Government went back to the principles of Beveridge or Nye Bevan they would accept that the state should be responsible for the collective provision for those in the community who are worst off.

The Government tell us that, under their regime, single payments have increased year by year. In the social fund draft manual the Government say:

"The Government consider a number of factors including likely need for payments and the general economic climate in setting the overall size of the fund for any particular year".

The Government consider that such factors are important. This is a Government who have been loud in voicing their opinion that the economy is buoyant and that everything is going well. Therefore, we should be looking for a greater share of that wealth. However, many of us doubt the truth of the Government's claims. Any distribution of wealth should take account of those who are poorest and weakest in our society, but what is happening in reality? Let us consider some of the figures for the DHSS offices in my constituency.

In 1985-86 the Norris Green DHSS office paid out £689,716 in single payments. What has that office been allocated under the social fund in the first year of its operation? Its allocation is £124,393—less than 20 per cent. of what it paid in 1987 in single payments. In 1985-86, the West Derby DHSS office paid out £711,166 in single payments. That office's allocation for next year is £150,053—less than 25 per cent. of what is paid in 1987 in single payments.

Many hon. Members will not have heard of Norris Green. It is true that they will have heard of West Derby because they have heard me speak so often. However, they will all know Toxteth. That area is not in my constituency, but it is well known because of the riots that took place there. The conditions that will arise from the social fund may result in a similar set of circumstances to those that led to the riots in 1981. The Government should not be surprised if they find that the events of 1981 are repeated as people are driven into dire poverty.

What is the Government's solution for Toxteth? In 1985-86, Toxteth DHSS office paid out £2,138,792 in single payments. Its allocation for the first year's operation of the social fund is £346,814—that is a 16·2 per cent. allocation in comparison to what is paid out in single payments in 1987. That is a measure of the Government's meanness. Indeed, at this very moment they are preparing to demonstrate their largesse to the rich of our society with tax handouts.

What makes the Government believe that tax handouts to the rich are a rightful incentive, but that it is wrong to give a decent supplement to those who are in dire need? They are prepared to give money to the scroungers and the City slickers—the people who donate to and finance the Tory party. They are the people to be sustained by Exchequer handouts.

So often we have pleaded with the Government to change their mind and to reconsider. I am perfectly convinced that the social fund is part of their punitive exercise against the poor. It is part of their plan. No one should be under any illusion that the Government are trying to recreate the one nation of Disraeli, let alone the Socialism of Nye Bevan. The Government want to divide our country to make sure that we return to the thirties —not the 1930s, but the 1830s.

I hope that constituents throughout the country—not only those represented by my hon. Friends—will show their contempt for the Government. It is a Government who are prepared to bale out the fraudulent people of the City but who care not one iota for the poor. If the Ministers had any conscience they would not be prepared to go down in history as part of a Government who took us back to the dark ages. They should do the honourable thing and resign.

6.25 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): I wish to say a few words about maternity grant. The Minister of State has pointed out that, under the regulations, an expectant or new mother will be able to get a grant of £85. He implied that that was an extremely generous amount because the old maternity grant was £25. However, the Minister of State omitted to say that, until last April, the same mother could qualify for single payments amounting to £188 for necessities as evaluated by the Minister's Department. Therefore, the true comparison is not £85 versus £25, but £188 versus £85.

I wish to draw the Minister's attention to the needs a mother may have. For instance, there is a need for maternity clothes. A maternity dress is not simply a frivolous wish: it is necessary because she cannot get into her clothes. A mother will also need a pushchair and a high chair. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) has already told us how people are forced to sit and sleep on the floor. No doubt babies can learn to crawl more quickly if they do not have the luxury of chairs.

Perhaps it could be argued that a pushchair is unnecessary—one can always carry a baby, or indeed, one need not take it out! Fire guards are necessary, but some parents will be unable to afford the fuel so there will be no need for such a guard. Safety gates are an obvious luxury. Just as the poor parents must budget so expertly, so the infants must learn to walk safely about the house

[Mrs. Audrey Wise]

without the benefit of a safety gate. The Under-Secretary of State yawns. I know it is terribly boring and I know that I am going over the top. I am doing so because in his life he never has, nor ever will have, to exist in the circumstances facing the people to whom the regulations apply. It is boring in the abstract, but it is horrible to live it.

The Minister of State said that Lord Denning had described the social fund and the arrangements for review instead of appeal as simple, fair and—I believe that the Minister used the word—just. I am waiting eagerly to learn from the Under-Secretary what is fair about a system that will ensure that two people will be treated differently, not because of different circumstances, but because they live in different areas or have applied at different times. How is that just or fair? It is certainly simple. There is nothing more simple than the word no. That word will be increasingly employed when the social fund is operating.

We have been told about the review, and how a case can be reviewed again by a senior officer, and then by a social fund inspector. But the Minister will recall that it was drawn from him in Committee that the only person who has responsibility for managing the budget is the social fund officer who gave the original decision. So the other people who have the task of reviewing have no responsibility for managing the budget — the Minister said that in Committee. So he admitted, by implication, that such people have no right or ability to overturn the decisions of the social fund officers, because they will not have to find the money for the next applicant, and they will surely bear that in mind.

My hon. Friends have spoken a great deal about the money running out. When making these forecasts, we must be careful. I do not know whether the money will run out, but the definitions of priority will be changed. People will not be told they are being refused because the money has run out; they will be told they are refused because the priority of their case is not high enough, and that other people are even poorer.

Others will not apply for a loan because they are scared of going into debt—the old bogey of the poor. Only the middle class can look on debt with equanimity. Then there will be people who are refused because they are too poor to repay the loan. There will be many expedients to avoid the embarrassment of the Government's having to say that the money has run out. But not enough money will be going into the pockets of the poor. Not enough money is being put into the fund. The Government keep telling us that the amount equals the single payments. They equate loans with grants, but when it comes down to it, loan or grant, the money in the social fund will be much less than the money paid out in single payments the year before last, before the Government started making all the adjustments in preparation for this manipulation.

I hope that there will not be too much smugness on the Government Front Bench. I hope they will realise that they have little to say except, perhaps, that the country is rich but they are so poor at budgeting that they cannot manage to find the money to give the poor a reasonable standard of living.

6.32 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): If this debate has been significant, it has been so for a number of reasons, not least because the Minister began by saying that this was not one of the most popular measures that the Government are proposing. If we needed evidence of that, it is to be found in the absence of speeches by Members of the Conservative party, with the exception of the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), who gave the appearance of having been discovered somewhere behind a haystack defending the EEC social fund—for that is what he seemed to be talking about. The fund he seemed to be describing was a great deal more generous and, perhaps, more attractive to the farmers in his constituency than this social fund will be to the poor people of this country.

We have had only two speeches from Government Members to go on, and the message that came across from them was that we need a social fund because so many people are selfish and lack the work ethic that they need this measure of discipline. I find that appalling at a time when benefits worth £1,000 million a year are not taken up by people who are legally entitled to the money. I should prefer the Minister to use his time with his hon. Friends to promote the need for people to claim their rights, instead of restricting the resources that are available by means of these measures.

The regulations must be seen, as my hon. Friends have said, in the context of the attacks of the Social Security Act 1986 and the so-called Fowler review; and they come on top of the freezing of child benefits, the mean-minded attitude even to school meals and the drastic cuts in housing benefit which have had a severe impact on many people. This is not an attack on poverty: it is a raid on the impoverished. The very people who, by definition, are the poorest in our society are being denied even the right to exercise their civil rights. We heard that in the ludicrous way in which the Minister tried to explain the internal appeal procedure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) referred to the unreality of the Conservative contributions to the debate. Of course, he was right. The Government have been completely unable to justify the removal of the safety net that society seeks to provide, in order to justify their cash limits, which are based not on need but on rigid cash control. That control has been influenced by the Treasury and by a Secretary of State who has just come from those quarters. The removal of the right to an independent appeal seems to have had no proper defence. Replacing grants by discretionary loans has not been sufficiently explained either, to the House or the country. The Government give the impression that all the people who gave them advice — even though the Government deliberately restricted the time available— were wrong and that they are right.

These measures will place an intolerable burden on social service and social work departments at a time when they can least shoulder it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) said, we cannot ignore the placing of vulnerable families in even greater jeopardy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) mentioned the views of the Spastics Society which, together with a large number of other voluntary organisations, is concerned about the social fund, — despite the Minister's reassuring tone. The Spastics Society is particularly concerned about what is expected from voluntary organisations. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) said, the Government have placed much emphasis not on facing

their own responsibilities, as the taxpayers would want them to do, but on telling us to look to the churches, the charities and voluntary organisations.

I invite the Minister to comment on the views of the Spastics Society, as expressed today:

"We are aware that Spastics Society social work managers have already been approached by local DHSS offices with inquiries about what money we have available to make grants. It would be hard to believe that this information is being sought only in the remote possibility that it would be inappropriate for the Social Fund, itself, to provide help in a crisis for someone with cerebral palsy. We consider it likely that the DHSS is planning, right from the start, to refer community care grant and budgeting loan applicants to us for help."

The Spastics Society and other voluntary organisations are entitled to a reply.

In his attempts to justify cash limits, the Minister said that the Government are by no means certain that the fund will run out. That is an incredible proposition. We already know about the sums that have been provided to local offices. We already know that, in spite of the single payments of 1986, there has, in effect, been a 50 per cent. reduction in the global sum being made available for the social fund. Of that, only a third would be considered for grants; the rest will go in loans. For the Minister to tell us that social fund officers and local DHSS managers will stand like Mr. Micawber waiting for something to turn up is entirely unacceptable, given the problems that face local offices and communities.

I shall not weary the House with the global social fund figures that are available. The Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Ealing, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), gave the impression during a radio programme in which we both took part that only areas where heavy demands have been made on the DHSS will be subject to reductions. The truth of the matter is that those areas will be subject to reductions, although their demands are growing and their needs are clearly identified. If there is increased unemployment in Scotland, Wales, the north of England and the inner cities, the figures should reflect those needs and demands, but they do not.

In Coatbridge, in my constituency, in 1986 the amount of benefit that was paid per head under the single payment system was £163·50. Under the allowance, grants will be reduced to £29·47p per head and grants and loans combined will be £98·82p. In Bathgate, the 1986 figure was £160, but it is now down to £15·22p and the total for grants and loans is £51·26p. In Bradford, West the 1986 figure per head was £82·40p, but that is now down to £13·76p for grants, and the combination of loans and grants is £46·11p. The story is the same in Chester-le-Street, Edinburgh, East, Bristol and other areas. There is no justification for those reductions.

When the Minister gave a pathetic outline of people's rights for reassessment he ignored the fact—the House cannot follow him in this—that these regulations will mean that a person's right to seek an independent review of an application that has been refused has now been removed. There will now be an internal review.

We were not told, in spite of pressure from a number of my hon. Friends, especially from my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam), where the social fund inspectors will work from. If the rumour is true that it will be in Birmingham, or that the work is to be centralised, that is appalling. The Minister is suggesting that the only way in which people can appeal—I use that word as loosely as the Government intend it to be used—is to do so in writing, to have it considered in writing and to have no oral input whatsoever.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heely (Mr. Michie) rightly underlined the importance of the number of people who have been successful at tribunals. He contrasted the tribunals that will consider only paperwork with those that have been able to hear witnesses and take oral evidence. What the Government are suggesting is a disgrace and a denial of fundamental and basic human rights.

The regulations deal with recovery by deductions from benefit, which is a euphemism for loans instead of grants. Before a social fund officer takes a decision he must consider whether a person has the ability or income to repay a loan, however deserving the case may be. When the Government tell us about targeting, are we not entitled to ask how that will work? We know that the poorest in our society will not be considered as a good risk. The commercial judgments that will be made will be most unhelpful.

If the Minister doubts that that is a wide interpretation of Government thinking, I refer him to the notorious directions 11 and 22, which make it clear that no crisis loan and no budgeting loan

"may be awarded in excess of the amount that the applicant is likely to repay."

We know, as my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar said, that some people will be asked to repay loans—from their very limited incomes—at a rate of 10 per cent. That will involve a family with two children repaying £7·90 a week. That family could do a great deal with £7·90. It could buy a pair of shoes or some extra furniture or lino. The Government's decision will be regarded by the public as a scandal, particularly as we approach 11 April.

The Minister is aware that there has been little support for this measure, not only in the debate—only one Conservative Member vocally supported the Government—but from people who will have to deal with these matters day after day. There is no support from the British Association of Social Workers, the Association of Directors of Social Services, the Child Poverty Action Group or local social service and social work departments, who are aware of the issues involved and who know that the reality, once the fund is pursued, is that there will be greater demands on social services because more children will find themselves in care. We know that the Government are not taking on board the problems of the elderly, the sick, disabled people and others. The absurd £60 million community care grant is in no way regarded as a substitute for the daily demands that those departments must meet.

It would be interesting if the Minister could tell the House how many people support his measure. He knows that it is not supported by the Social Security Advisory Committee, which was appointed by the Government. When the Minister for Social Security and the Disabled rather curtly told it that, despite all its advice, the Government were going ahead with the fund, it said—these are the words of Mr. Peter Barclay—

"At the Committee's request I am writing to place on record that this decision is without our support."

No Labour Member will be surprised by that.

The social fund attempts to divide the deserving from the undeserving—the haves from the have-nots. The Government seek to ration compassion by monthly

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

instalments. If they have provided a safety net at all, it is one that runs out two thirds of the way along the tightrope. It is a plan for misery on the never-never. It cannot be right that citizens, far from being protected against their poverty, are being punished and penalised because of its very existence.

I remind the Minister that this measure is about people who are entitled to legal rights and who are entitled to enjoy the concern and compassion of the House. So far, the Government have not shown concern or compassion and, because of the anger about the measures that they are seeking to impose on the most impoverished, we are determined to oppose the regulations. In that spirit, I ask for the support of my hon. Friends and the rest of the House.

6.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Michael Portillo): It was well understood among hon. Members that the debate would range widely, and I make no complaint about that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) asked a specific question about the regulations: whether deductions could be made from child benefit. I confirm that deductions for social fund loans will not be made from child benefit or from attendance or mobility allowance. Those benefits are paid for specific purposes. The intention is that deductions should be made from income maintenance benefits — income support in particular, but other income maintenance benefits as well. The other points that my hon. Friend raised have been well taken.

Another specific point that arose concerned social fund inspectors and where they will be based. They will be based, along with the social fund commissioner, in Birmingham. The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) was concerned about that. I think that he felt that they would not be sufficiently mobile, or some such problem. The hon. Member for Monklands, West and some of his hon. Friends are concerned about consistency. It is important that a body of social fund inspectors with some responsibility for the consistency of decision-making should be in touch with each other. The hon. Member will see the good sense of their being based more or less in the centre of the country.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) spoke about interviews. It is intended that, as a normal practice, interviews should be held in private. The social fund manual must cover all eventualities. It must cover the possibility that, if an interview were requested urgently and there was no private place in which to hold it, a difficulty might occur.

Mr. Tom Clarke: My hon. Friends the Members for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) have managed to squeeze from the Minister the remarkable announcement that the inspectorate will be based in Birmingham. If that is so, when discussions are held, people would have to travel to Birmingham from, for example, Airdrie, in the constituency of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). Will the Minister confirm that that is not a final decision and that there will be discussions?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman has a different understanding of the word "based". The inspectors will have an office in Birmingham, but that does not mean that they will run all their operations from there. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has met the social fund commissioner, but she realises that her job will require her to move around a great deal.

About £8,000 million a year will be spent on supplementary benefit. Over the years, supplementary benefit has acquired a series of additional requirements payments, which have grown on to the structure like barnacles on to a ship. That has created a number of difficulties which the reforms will address. It has made the social security system extremely difficult to manage. I understand the criticisms made against the system concerning delays, but Labour Members must accept that, to a large extent, those are due to the complicated system which we have tried to operate by having additions for every conceivable need and demand over and above basic needs.

The system has become unfair because people are receiving additions, not so much by virtue of their need as by virtue of their skill as claimants. The range of benefits is falling unevenly between one set of claimants and another. The system is being wrapped up and a simpler system introduced. As a result of the change, the Government are not putting less money into income support than is available in supplementary benefit; they are putting in more money over and above that and an amount to provide transitional protection for those who might otherwise lose.

Ms. Abbott: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Portillo: I shall deal with the hon. Lady's point in a moment.

The single payments system is a special case of a build-up of an addition to basic supplementary benefit, which has created a number of problems, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry referred. There has been an enormous growth in real terms in expenditure on single payments from £67 million in 1979-80 to £346 million in 1985-86. Between 1981 and 1984-85, the costs increased by almost four times in real terms and the numbers of payments by three times.

The hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) believes that the increase in payments has been due to an increase in poverty, but I must challenge that. The total number of claimants receiving regular weekly help increased by less than three fifths between August 1979 and August 1985, but the number of single payments increased by 3·5 times. That is not an increase in poverty. During that period, the real rates of supplementary benefit have been rising and the increased prosperity of the country has filtered down to the lowest quintiles of society. There has been an increase in the standard of living, even among the poorest quintiles of society.

Mr. Frank Field: The Minister claims that there has been a trickling down effect. There has been a change in the composition in the lowest quintile, largely because increasing numbers of people have been pushed into unemployment and because some pensioners have occupational pensions which have taken them out of that quintile. Does the Minister agree that, since 1979, the

increase in the number of people drawing supplementary benefit has been greater than the whole of the increase between 1948 and 1979?

Mr. Portillo: I have given the hon. Gentleman the facts since 1979. There has been a much greater increase in single payments than there has been in the supplementary benefit caseload. There has been a change in the composition of the lowest quintile, but that quintile has increased its standard of living.

Mrs. Beckett: Has the Minister seen a recent document published by the Family Policy Studies Centre entitled "Family Fortunes" which shows that the standard of living of people with children has fallen?

Mr. Portillo: Is the hon. Lady aware that there were a number of misunderstandings in that document and that my Department has written to that organisation explaining why the figures are wrong? I do not believe that that is in dispute between us.

The Government are putting in £100 million more to help families on income support and £200 million more is being put into family credit, by comparison with the family income supplement, which it replaces. Much of the debate has centred on the question of the refusal of social fund loans.

The hon. Member for Redcar was concerned that the Department might run out of money. It is precisely because we have great experience of the way in which the single payment, scheme operates that we are confident that social fund officers will be able to profile adequately to meet high priorities throughout the year. I have repeated that point to the hon. Lady and I do not know why she has not yet understood that the money will not run out. Social fund officers will organise their priorities to meet needs throughout the year.

The Government will put £203 million into the social fund. That is about the amount of money being spent in the current year on single payments. The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) suggested that, on 11 April, there will be some sort of cataclysm, but I find that idea far-fetched. The amount of money being made available in the coming year is the same amount of money being spent during the present year. Expenditure in the present year has been inflated by a sort of closing down sale, as people have been anxious to obtain single payments before the system is replaced.

There has been considerable controversy in this and previous debates about the sums of money allocated to different offices. So far as I am aware, the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) cannot know how much money has been spent by the office in her district this year. She is right to say that the social fund allocation is less than the amount of money spent by her office on single payments in 1986-87. Given the pattern throughout the country that the amount of money being spent on single payments is about the same amount of money that we shall put into the social fund, I expect that the social fund of the office in Stoke Newington will receive more or less what is being spent this year.

Ms. Abbott: Is the Minister aware that the social fund will cause problems in constituencies such as mine because, first, people will not be able to get money for gas and electricity? They will be able to get money for fuel costs —only for Calor gas and paraffin. People in Hackney, who largely live in council accommodation, are advised not to use Calor gas or paraffin, so they can get money out of the social fund only for heating which they have been advised is dangerous.

The second problem is that they will not get money to put a deposit on private accommodation, so they will not be able to get private accommodation. Thirdly, the discretionary element in the allocation of the social fund will provide scope for all kinds of prejudices.

Mr. Portillo: The social fund is not intended to provide for things which are already provided for, and gas and electricity are covered under the fuel direct scheme. As for deposits, if the hon. Lady speaks to her constituents they may confirm what I hear up and down the country—that the availability of money for deposits has led to widespread abuse by landlords, and many claimants are concerned about that.

During the debate, the Opposition have found many shortcomings in the social fund and our reforms, but throughout the period we have been discussing the reforms to social security the Labour party has pursued a very ambivalent approach. Labour Members have not mounted a defence to the present system or offered us an alternative. They have invested much energy and time in attacking the social fund because they believe that the social fund will lead to a massive cut in the money available. They have now discovered that the social fund will have as much money as is being paid in single payments this year. In that sense, the Opposition's fox has been well and truly shot.

In 1985, we had a statement of the Government's intentions on the reforms and the Green Paper. A statement on the White Paper was published towards the end of that year, and three Bills have been discussed. We have had two statements, two Opposition Day debates and one set of regulations today. The social fund has been discussed ad infinitum. During all that time, no alternative to the social fund has been put forward by the Opposition and no argument has been made against establishing the greater equity between those on benefits and those just off benefits which would be brought about by a loan system. No convincing case has been made against loans. The time has come to bring the social fund into operation. I commend the regulations to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 213, Noes 270.

Division No. 187] **[7.2 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Bidwell, Sydney
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*	Blair, Tony
Allen, Graham	Boyes, Roland
Alton, David	Bradley, Keith
Anderson, Donald	Bray, Dr Jeremy
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Armstrong, Hilary	Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Ashdown, Paddy	Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Buckley, George J.
Ashton, Joe	Caborn, Richard
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Callaghan, Jim
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*	Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Battle, John	Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Beckett, Margaret	Canavan, Dennis
Bell, Stuart	Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Bermingham, Gerald	Clay, Bob

Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Hefler, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
John, Brynmor
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Frank Cook.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bigge-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*

Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hume, John
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Maples, John
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Mecampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Richard Ryder and
Mr. Peter Lloyd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Rate Limitation

7.14 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): I beg to move,

That the draft Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988, which was laid before the House on 12th February, be approved.

The order, which specifies rate limits for 12 of the authorities subject to rate capping in 1988-89, marks the end of a process which began in July last year. It may assist the House if I briefly outline that process.

I announced last July that I had designated 17 authorities under part 1 of the Rates Act. They were budgeting to spend from 13 up to 112 per cent. above their grant-related expenditure assessment; and those which were newly selected were budgeting to increase their spending by 8 to 21 per cent. on the previous year's budget. Also in July, each authority was informed of the expenditure level determined for it. The authorities were given until mid-October to apply, if they wished, for the expenditure level to be increased. Two authorities did so, and in one case — Tower Hamlets — I agreed to redetermine the expenditure level at a higher figure.

On 9 December I notified all 17 authorities of the proposed rate limits for 1988-89 and gave them the opportunity to accept those proposals or to make representations about the matter. Three authorities did, in fact, accept their limit within the statutory period ending on 15 January; these were Manchester, Middlesbrough and Kingston upon Hull.

After considering all the representations from authorities, and all the other relevant information, I took the view that I would be prepared to agree a higher figure than that proposed in December for five authorities. Two of these — Greenwich and Hackney — agreed to accept the new figures. This makes a total of five authorities where a rate limit has been fixed by agreement. It leaves 12 out of the original 17 where the limit needs now to be specified by order—and these are the ones named in the draft now before the House.

I should add that, even among the 12 authorities specified here, one — Tower Hamlets — has notified me that it does in fact accept the limit specified for it. It is only because that acceptance fell outside the statutory period that the authority has to be included in the order. So the essence of the order is about 11 of the original 17 rate-capped authorities which did not feel able to agree with me the figure that I put forward for their rate limit for the coming financial year.

I have set out this potted history of the year's process because I think it will help the House to see that it has been conducted in a very considered and reasonable manner. Had it not been so, I doubt whether six authorities would have come to the conclusion that they could accept what I had proposed. All this is a far cry from the first time the House debated a rate limits order back in 1985. Then, the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), who is not in the House at the moment, said:

"the Secretary of State . . . is creating a tragedy and a constitutional crisis that he, this Government and the Department of the Environment will live to regret till the end of time."—[*Official Report*, 25 February 1985; Vol. 74, c. 82.]

Time has not come to an end, but the hon. Gentleman has not even come to the debate.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): That cannot be allowed to pass unchallenged. My hon. Friend is in Committee on the Education Reform Bill.

Mr. Ridley: Hackney has accepted the rate limit proposed. [HON. MEMBERS: "Apologise."] Of course I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for suggesting that he should be here. We all have our priorities.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): My hon. Friend cannot be here and in Committee at the same time.

Mr. Ridley: I respect the hon. Gentleman's priorities enormously, and I admire them. I think that he has his priorities right. I could not make a more handsome apology.

It is three years on, and the audience must still be waiting for the curtain to go up on the tragedy, as the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch described it. The constitution has not crumbled. The Government certainly have no cause for regret. Indeed, the local authority in which the hon. Gentleman's constituency lies is not even included in the draft order, because the council has calmly accepted the rate limit that I proposed for it. The Government's policy has stayed the same, but clearly times have changed to catch up with it, since so many people in local government are now prepared to operate calmly within the framework of that policy.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The Secretary of State may say that the tragedy has not happened nationally. Perhaps he would address himself to Southwark, which asked for a higher rate level. The effect of the rate support grant supplementary report which the House approved last night, and of today's marginal increase accorded by the Secretary of State, is a £2·7 million reduction in the money that Southwark will receive for the coming year, and it cannot add to it. That is a 5 to 10 per cent. cut in real services, and many people are suffering. Does the Minister not realise that, although calamity has not struck him, for many old, young and vulnerable people the effect of the order will be severe disadvantage, when they are already in a dire state?

Mr. Ridley: I can only say to the hon. Gentleman that all the factors, including the rating order that was debated yesterday, are taken into account in setting the limit. The funny thing about the hon. Gentleman is that although he often makes similar points about his borough, I have never heard him mention its ratepayers, who also need to be taken into account.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is extraordinary for Southwark, if it is so hard up, to spend £13,800 on a reggae concert for Black Solidarity day?

Mr. Ridley: That is not a factor that I took into account in reaching my decision, because it is the first that I have heard of it. I do not think that it constitutes new evidence. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising it.

In considering the order, the House may also want to bear in mind the extent to which the times have changed in some of the local authorities that are named, and in other authorities with a similar background. I have touched on the early history of rate capping, the terrible warnings sounded in the Chamber, and the cries of outrage from some quarters of local government. A recent account of this phase of rate capping tells us that Left-wing councils

"saw the scope for politicising support for council services around the anti-cuts campaigns. If they publicised the potential cuts long and hard enough, local people would rise up to save the services"—

rather like the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes)

"Looking back it is astonishing to think how naive it was for nearly everybody on the local government Left to consider that people could be so easily politicised around such a disingenuous tactic. These phoney wars reached their nadir with the 1985 ratecapping campaign."

Those are not my words. I hope that Opposition Members do not find the assessment contentious, because it is from a publication called "Labour Councils in the Cold", which was produced by a body called the Labour Coordinating Committee. I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) is reading it and, I hope, learning from it. He has a great deal to learn from it. I do not think that he will find it unpalatable, although some of his hon. Friends from the Left of the Labour party might find it a bit prickly-making.

I do not know whether the publication is Bennite or not, but it has such insight that I cannot resist sharing it further with the Opposition. It calls on Labour councils

"to desist from taking rates from people's pockets when they are not getting value for it."

It continues:

"We owe it to the consumers who need our services, are willing to pay good money for them, but just want the services delivered properly. The new challenge to labour councils is to improve services despite the cuts."

That is wise advice, with which I agree. I am sure that Opposition Members, who are better placed to judge, will agree with the booklet's dictum that there is nothing Socialist about inefficiency, incompetence or waste. I am sure that hon. Gentlemen will agree with the same sentiment, more quaintly expressed by the leader of Hackney council, who said that inefficiency is organised theft from the working-class.

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): It is astonishing that the Secretary of State has spent his time so far in knock-about students' union debating points. When he says that boroughs should be able to improve the quality of service with cuts, he should make an analogy with a private enterprise firm whose cash flow is cut, and whose self-financing and investment powers are cut as well. In the private sector such an enterprise would go out of business.

Mr. Ridley: That is a schoolboy debating point. It is not a matter of competition. If the overheads of private sector companies are too high and their cash flow is wrong, they go out of business. Local authorities are expected to get those things right through the discipline of the rates or, if it comes to it, the discipline of rate limitation. That is why we are here this evening.

My colleagues and I have held meetings with nine local authorities which wanted to see us about their proposed limits. Many of them provided us with useful information about the circumstances of their authority. Not all of them persuaded us that it would be appropriate to agree a rate limit higher than that originally proposed, but nearly all of them sought to impress on us that they were already taking steps to trim their expenditure to match their resources, and to improve the efficiency of their operations.

If these conversions are sincere, as the hon. Member for Copeland might believe, he must be as relieved as I am that a new realism has dawned. It may be because of the events

of last June, or it may be, as I prefer to believe, the realisation at last that the Government's policy on the control of local authority current expenditure is indeed sensible.

I do not want to detract from what many of these councils have told us that they have embarked upon. I have not hesitated to criticise the wasteful spending of some of them in the past, or their delay in making the necessary savings to live within their means. I have not been slow to criticise their use of so-called "creative accounting", which has simply exacerbated the problems. I gladly acknowledge, however, that many of the authorities seem to be taking, or squaring up to, those long-overdue decisions to cut costs and improve efficiency. They undoubtedly have a very long way to go, but they seem to be making a start.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): On the assumption that the Secretary of State welcomes the £5 million to £6 million economies that the London borough of Camden has made in revenue spending on its housing estates, will he say whether it is a sensible incentive for the Government to reduce Camden's housing subsidy by £5 million, thus wiping out all the savings?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman may be confusing current account, which we are talking about in relation to rate limitation, with the completely separate capital account. I am not prepared tonight to go into the circumstances of individual authorities because it is not the practice—*[Interruption.]*—in arriving at rate limits to give the detailed reasons or sums that were in my mind when I came to a conclusion. I am not prepared to depart from that principle now.

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): In making these calculations, do the wishes of an electorate supporting a party that sets out its manifesto in a local authority election come into the Secretary of State's mind?

Mr. Ridley: The considerations that have to be in my mind are enshrined in the statute. I am simply operating a statute that was passed by the House of Commons. I shall give the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell) the same reply that I gave the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson)— that I have to operate and make my decisions entirely in accordance with the Rates Act 1984. It is all set out there. The hon. Member for Southall was probably active in the House when that measure was debated and ought to know exactly how I have to conduct myself in making the order.

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is rare, if not unprecedented, for a local government election address or manifesto to pledge that a party will raise the rates by 15 or 25 per cent.? Where only the expenditure side is presented, that obviously will confuse the electorate.

Mr. Ridley: Some of them do not even worry, because as few as 20 per cent. of the electorate are ratepayers. I hope that position will soon be remedied.

Mr. Simon Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: This will be the hon. Gentleman's second, and last, intervention.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Secretary of State accept, though, that the great difference is that the ratepayers of any borough or district can hear their budget debated in public and in detail, whereas tonight one order relates to many authorities and the determination, of all their finances? The Secretary of State, who is ultimately responsible for their budgets, says that he cannot speak about the detail. That is not democracy. Democracy is about decisions and debates on issues affecting hundreds of thousands of people.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman should have made that point in the debates on what is now the Rates Act. He knows perfectly well that I am only operating the Rates Act, and I shall not depart from that.

The essence of the order is not about the principle of rate capping, which the hon. Gentleman is raising again. That is well established in statute and appears now to be accepted by the authorities concerned as a constraint within which they must work. The order is concerned with the practical application of rate capping in those authorities which have not accepted the limits that I proposed for them. They consider that they need to raise a higher amount from their ratepayers. In my judgment, they do not. I have not come to this view lightly. I have looked at a large amount of information and evidence and have taken account of what the council leaders have had to say. I accept that many of these authorities will not find it easy to take the measures necessary to live within their resources, but I am satisfied that their task is by no means impossible.

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): The Minister must know, because of the representations that have been made to him by Lewisham, my local authority, that it is prepared to take some of the measures that the Minister has sought, such as the 12·3 per cent. cut in staff over all council departments, robbing us of much-needed services. Having done all that, we are then required to go further and to cut, for example, two occupied residential homes for the elderly and one home for adolescent children, to close two day centres for the elderly and five luncheon clubs, to reduce by one third the existing level of hospital social work, and so on. How can the Minister possibly justify that? It is not an economy. It is robbing desperate people of desperately needed services.

Mr. Ridley: That is the old trick that the hon. Lady is playing. One puts up front for cutting the things that one thinks will get the maximum public sympathy. For instance, I also read about the Lewisham council:

"Cash for gays but NSPCC grant axed."

[Interruption.] I am only quoting from a newspaper.

Mr. Dobson: A Tory newspaper.

Ms. Ruddock: Indeed, the report was published in a local newspaper. It does not explain that the NSPCC had access to other funds, that the amount of money that was being cut was a very small amount and that the amount being given, as the Minister suggests, to gays is actually money being given to advice centres — counselling centres—particularly for young people who are facing difficulties in adjusting to their own sexuality. In the age of acquired immune deficiency syndrome, I would have thought that those counselling services were vital to an inner-city authority.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Lady is unwittingly giving me much evidence with which to rebut the suggestion of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), that it would be a very good idea if these matters

[Mr. Ridley]

were debated at length in the House in relation to each borough. She has exposed the extreme range of complications, views and different spending projects of each council. I take into account all the factors, including full knowledge of the accounts of each council, and I listen to their pleas. I do not think that we are going to get any further by proceeding in the way that the hon. Lady is going.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney) *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman, but after that I must finish, because a lot of time is needed for others to take part in the debate.

Mr. Shore: The right hon. Gentleman is most generous in giving way. I want to put to him the very special problem in connection with Tower Hamlets council, of which I hope he will be fully aware and take note.

We are alleged to be overspending in Tower Hamlets by £21 million, but £18 million of that sum is spent on looking after over 1,000 homeless families. Does the Secretary of State expect the council, even if it can lawfully do so, to put those families in the street? What advice, apart from that, does he give to a council faced with a special and very urgent human problem of that kind?

Mr. Ridley: Both I and the Tower Hamlets council consider that the rate limits in the order are reasonable. It has informed me that it does not disagree with them. I admit that that was after the statutory period, but it has indeed done that. The right hon. Gentleman's point falls to the ground if his own council agrees with the rate proposal. It does not have to do so.

Mr. Shore: It agreed under great duress. I really have to say that to the right hon. Gentleman. The council tried to secure some serious aid. It received £2 million towards the £18 million from the Secretary of State. I know that it is assenting to his order, but only under great duress.

Mr. Ridley: That must be rubbish. There is no duress whatsoever. There cannot be duress. Eleven authorities have not voluntarily agreed, and that is why we are debating the order. Tower Hamlets is in the order only because it agreed after the order was put before the House. It did not have to do that. If it had felt that the rate limit was intolerable, it could have done as the other eleven authorities did and not agreed to it.

The limits in the order reflect the financial circumstances of the individual authorities. I have considered not only the appropriate expenditure level in each case, but each authority's present financial position and the grant that it is likely to receive next year, including the changes that flowed from last night's order. Leaving aside Tower Hamlets, which, as I have said, has accepted its limit, in each case the figure is the same as that which I proposed in December. In these cases I was not persuaded by the authorities' representations that the figures in question were not appropriate. In three cases —Camden, Southwark and Ealing—the figures in the order are higher than those proposed in December, but the authorities still have not agreed to accept them. They, too, have not persuaded me, however, that the new figures are inappropriate.

The overall effect of the order is to reduce the average local rates of the 12 authorities by about 9 per cent. compared with the current year. At the individual authority level the range is from a reduction of 31 per cent. in Waltham Forest to an increase of 11·5 per cent. in Tower Hamlets. This range is due to the differences in the individual expenditure and financing circumstances of the various authorities. The overall effect on the amounts paid by ratepayers in these authorities is a reduction of £87 million compared with bills in the current year. Taken together with the rate limits that the other five rate-capped authorities have already accepted, the reduction in rates is equivalent to over £100 million less than in the current year. That £100 million will be to the benefit of local people and local businesses, as will the level of prosperity that will result.

For those reasons, I consider the rate limits specified in the order to be both appropriate to the circumstances of each authority and a good overall result for local ratepayers. The evidence available to me suggests that most of the authorities concerned are already taking a realistic approach to the implications of the limits. I urge these authorities to press on with their task. I ask the House to have due regard to the interests of local ratepayers in this the penultimate year of the present rating system.

I commend the order to the House.

7.37 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I begin by unequivocally placing on record our absolute opposition to the Rates Act 1984 and its use in this way by Ministers to determine the budgets and the revenue income of local authorities. It is important to recognise that although the order covers 12 local authorities, five more authorities have accepted the Secretary of State's decision with great reluctance, and some 19 other local government bodies and joint boards have their budgets and their precepts controlled by the Secretary of State, as does the Inner London education authority. So some 40 local government bodies in England have their budgets and their rates or precepts determined by Ministers and civil servants, who are not well placed to make the best judgments about the local circumstances that prevail.

Let me say also that I do not think that the House of Commons is fit or equipped to be making decisions of this kind about local authority budgets and revenue.

In the case of the elected local authorities affected by the order, those budgets add up to £2·3 billion. The number of people living in the affected areas is over 4 million. Here we are, in a debate of three hours' duration, making decisions of this magnitude without any real grasp or understanding of all the implications involved. It is nonsense for a national legislature to make such decisions in such a way. Anyone who has given the matter any serious thought could not fail to agree.

What does the Secretary of State intend to do when the powers that he exercises under the Act that abolished the metropolitan authorities expire, as they will at the end of the coming financial year? He will then have to decide whether to use the powers under the Rates Act to take control of the budgets of the 18 joint boards, and we should like to know his thoughts on that. Presumably, he will have to make a decision in a relatively short time, and I hope that he will announce it here.

The Secretary of State had little to say about the benefits of what he is asking the House to approve. It is important to examine just what has happened to the

Government's claims since the Act was introduced. The Secretary of State said that the Act was working to control local government expenditure, but that is simply not true. In the case of those authorities, and of authorities more generally, expenditure has risen and will continue to rise. If that is a test of the workings of the Rates Act 1984, it is clearly a failure.

Let us look at another test of what has been happening under this Government and their legislation. In 1979-80, the average unrebated domestic rate bill in England was £155. By the current financial year, the figure had risen to £428. There is not much evidence of protecting the ratepayer in those figures. Over the Government's period in office, rates have risen on average by 13·6 per cent. every year. Some protection for the ratepayer there!

Although the Government have claimed to be on the side of the ratepayer, the majority of their actions and decisions on local government finance have been very damaging to the ratepayer's interests. The major and continuing reductions in rate support grant were just one — perhaps the most important — case in point, and I intend later to examine how those reductions have affected the financial circumstances of the authorites subject to the order.

All that makes nonsense of the claims by the Secretary of State — including his most recent claims for the coming financial year—that the Government have been acting to minimise rate increases. They have been doing exactly the opposite. Last year, average domestic rates in Britain rose by nearly 10 per cent. What the Government have been doing is transferring resources from non-rate-capped authorities to rate-capped authorities. That is the effect of the Act, and that is what we said would happen when it was under consideration as a Bill. It will continue to happen, and that is why the Government's claim that they are protecting ratepayers is false.

The effect of the Act is to increase the proportion of rate support grant — albeit a smaller amount of rate support grant — that goes to designated authorities, to the detriment of the non-designated authorities. All the claims, supported by Tory Members, that the Rates Act would benefit rural areas, cities and towns that were not designated are false, and are exposed by the workings of the Act.

The 11 most consistently rate-limited authorities have suffered a cumulative loss of nearly £2 billion—£1,980 million—during the time in which the Act has been in force. Some of the boroughs worst affected by the withdrawal of grant—a deliberate part of Government policy — are the very inner-city boroughs that the Government claim that they most want to help. The great initiative in the few days after the general election victory was the Prime Minister's announcement that they must do something about the inner-cities. Well, they are doing something about the inner cities all right: they are continuing to take more and more resources away from them. No adequate compensation or comparable support has been brought to the boroughs and inner-city areas that the Prime Minister so falsely claimed that she intended to help and support.

The introduction of rate capping in 1985 saw a net extra £118 million in rate support grant go to the 18 designated authorities. I have to say that the overwhelming proportion went to the then Greater London council. A net extra £79 million went to the nine newly rate-capped authorities, compared with the previous year when they had not been rate-capped. However, that extra grant has been swamped by the eight succeessive years of systematic, deliberate and continuing withdrawal and reduction of rate support grant as a whole.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): In percentage terms.

Dr. Cunningham: In percentage terms, and in real terms as well.

The Secretary of State said in December, when introducing the rate support grant order:

"ratepayers in areas where local authorities choose to budget sensibly should on average receive rate bills which increase by around the rate of inflation."—[*Official Report*, 9 December 1987; Vol. 124, c. 466.]

He had made the same claim in a statement about rate support grant on 30 November. Earlier still, in July of last year, he used almost identical words about the coming rate increases.

Let us see what is happening. In 1988-89, county precepts will be many times higher than the rate of inflation in many counties, including several under Conservative control. What the Association of County Councils had to say about the rate support grant decisions of the Government has been almost exactly borne out:

"Present indications are that over £200 million of shire counties' block grant will be returned to the Treasury; this alone will cost the equivalent of a 5p rate and will necessitate precept increases which, on average, will exceed 10 per cent."

The Secretary of State denied that, but I have the published precept decisions of some 22 shire counties. The average increase for the coming year is 11·2 per cent., several times the rate of inflation and nowhere near the claims made for Government policy by the Secretary of State in his announcements.

Lower rates, if they exist in rate-capped authorities, are being financed by higher rates in the shire counties. The basis of rate capping is an above-average increase in expenditure targets for designated authorities, which brings budgeting targets closer together — thereby reducing penalties and earning the authorities more rate support grant than in the previous year.

But in the newly rate-controlled Ealing, for example, the rate support grant allocated to the borough will rise from £71 million in the current financial year to £84 million in 1988-89.

Mr. Ridley: What is wrong with that?

Dr. Cunningham: What is wrong with that is that it has been done at the expense of ratepayers in other areas. Therefore, the claim that the Act benefits ratepayers is bogus. I shall have a little more to say about Ealing in a moment, but let me examine further the Government's claims to protect ratepayers.

Authorities with budgets below £12·2 million can raise rates and expenditure with impunity because they are not covered by the Act, and many of them do. There is no protection for their ratepayers in the Act. This year the Secretary of State chose the criteria of a budget below £12·2 million and an increase of 12·5 per cent. or more in grant-related expenditure for existing rate-capped authorities. For newly selected authorities, he used those two criteria plus increased spending on 1986-87 of more than 6 per cent.

But for the fourth successive year, authorities were selected on the basis of spending above grant-related expenditure assessments. They were never intended to be

[Dr. Cunningham]

a normative spending target, but rather a means of distributing grant. That was made clear at the time that the Government constructed the system and that was the promise given to local authorities and Parliament at the time. It is simply not a suitable bench mark by which to make this kind of judgment.

London has perhaps been worst affected by the Government's policy under the Rates Act. London has been the focus for much of the attack on local authority services and jobs, as several of my hon. Friends have already pointed out. In each of the four years of ratecapping, over half the authorities selected have been London authorities. In 1985 it was 11 out of 18; in 1986, eight out of 12; in 1987, 12 out of 20 and in the coming financial year it will be 10 out of 17.

Seven London authorities — Camden, Greenwich, Hackney, Haringey, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark —have been selected every year since the Act came into force. Again, I emphasise that those are some of the hardest hit authorities in the country, with some of the worst problems of homelessness, deprivation, bad housing and the like. Yet the Government go on and on imposing restrictions on those authorities' ability, freedom and flexibility to tackle those very problems.

It is hypocrisy for the Prime Minister to say that it is her Government's aim and objective to help inner-city boroughs to solve their problems when the Secretary of State for the Environment is introducing orders such as this. The rate limit set out in the order, and the expenditure levels on which they are based, imply serious shortfalls between the resources available to those councils and the money required to maintain local services.

In addition, many London councils also confront sharply rising levels of demand on those services. That is particularly the case with homelessness, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) has pointed out. London authorities face a crisis of homelessness. At the close of 1987, some 19,000 families were in temporary accommodation in the capital. That is costing the ratepayer a colossal amount of money, and it is money inefficiently spent. It would be cheaper and better value for the taxpayer and the ratepayer to build houses to house those families rather than to keep them in temporary accommodation.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Nobody will dispute the needs of many London boroughs and inner cities throughout Britain, but the theme of the hon. Gentleman's speech so far seems to give a clear message from the Opposition Benches that local authority spending should not be restrained or limited. Is it the Labour party's policy that, in the totality of national spending, the one area which is not the business of the House and should in no way be constrained is local authority spending? That seems to have been the message for the past 10 minutes.

Dr. Cunningham: Of course that is not the message. The hon. Gentleman is a regular attender of these debates and often contributes. He knows very well that that is not Labour party policy, because I have had the opportunity to tell him so on several occasions. But since his memory seems to be as defective as his political reasoning, let me put it on the record again.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Charming.

Dr. Cunningham: I took the trouble to re-read the previous two debates on this subject last year and the year before. If the hon. Gentleman had taken the trouble to do that, he would have known the answer that I am about to give. It is simply that the Labour party's policy makes it clear that what the Government provide to local authorities would, of necessity, be controlled and limited——

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): How?

Dr. Cunningham: Because the Government and the Chancellor of the Exchequer would come to a decision. That is how, fathead.

The difference between us and the Government is simply that we do not believe that local government's revenue-raising powers should be subject to Government control. Whatever revenue-raising powers local government has, it should be free to determine how to use them.

What is happening here is, in a way, a fundamental negation of local elections. That is perhaps best illustrated by the case of the London borough of Ealing. The Conservatives were swept out of power in the local elections in Ealing in 1986 and Labour was elected with a good majority and given a vote of confidence in that borough. Labour decided to change the priorities for Ealing's budget — rightly so — on the basis of the manifesto on which it had campaigned. Therefore, it started spending more money.

But along came the Secretary of State and said that he would not allow that to happen. He would not allow the decision of the people of Ealing in the ballot box to take effect. He decided to rate-cap Ealing in an almost nonsensical way. However, I am pleased about one thing. He did respond to the representations from Ealing and the questions that I and other Opposition Members raised with him some time ago about the stupidity of his first announcement in respect of that borough. But even now, Ealing's expenditure limit in pounds per head is considerably less than all other rate-capped London boroughs. At £570 per head, it is £88 per head lower than the next lowest designated authority.

Ealing has housed 1,000 homeless families, appointed 140 new teachers and entered into deals with the private sector to build at least 600 new homes. But the Government want to negate all that and make a judgment about what should happen in Ealing, not on the basis of what the people of Ealing voted for, but on the basis of what the Secretary of State decides.

Mr. Holland: Does it not illustrate the economic illiteracy of Conservative Back Benchers that they assume that public spending drains the private sector? In housing, which my hon. Friend mentioned, public spending sustains the private sector. In Greater London, only 13 per cent. of council houses are built via the public sector through direct labour organisations and 87 per cent. are built by private contractors. The cuts in council house spending are one of the reasons why bankruptcies among private contractors in house building have doubled since the Government came to power.

Dr. Cunningham: I agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Ridley: Does the hon. Gentleman really agree with that?

Dr. Cunningham: I agree with my hon. Friend that local authority expenditure brings major benefits to the

economy and often to the private sector. If the Secretary of State thinks that there is something odd about that, he had better say so.

Mr. Ridley: I was wondering whether the hon. Gentleman agreed with his hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) that rate limitation has an effect on the building of council houses. He would surely agree that that is not on the revenue but on the capital account. Perhaps he could educate his hon. Friend, who has made the mistake before.

Dr. Cunningham: I can agree with the Secretary of State on that point at least.

I return to what has happened in the London borough of Ealing. I see that the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) is in his place. The Government's solution in Ealing is simply to force the recently elected Labour administration effectively to continue the spending policies of the previous Conservative administration. That is the direct implication of the order. We might as well ask ourselves what is the purpose of having local elections in Ealing at all if the view of the electors is to be so obviously and nakedly negated.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): How does the hon. Gentleman explain the result of the general election?

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman asks how I explain the result of the general election. If the Conservative party is concerned only with more and more central control, it had better be honest and stand up and say so, because that is the inevitable consequence of the Act and the order.

If the hon. Gentleman wants to be enlightened, he should look at clause 96 of the Local Government Finance Bill—the poll tax Bill—which is currently in Committee. He will see that even these powers are not sufficient for the Government. Under clause 96 of that Bill, the Government are to give themselves powers to limit and control the poll tax in every authority in the country. They are giving themselves powers retrospectively — [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] It is interesting that Conservative Members should say "Hear, hear." Under the power, local electors can go to the polls and elect a council, but when the council introduces a budget, and fixes the poll tax at a level commensurate with that budget Ministers can come along and say retrospectively, "We shall not allow that to happen. We shall insist on changes in this budget retrospectively."

Quite apart from the fact that that is an absolute negation of the local democratic process, the provision simply does not make sound economic and managerial sense. It is a recipe for confusion and inefficiency.

Mr. Butterfill: Does not the hon. Gentleman accept that, as local government spending represents 25 per cent. of all public expenditure, any Government who are responsible overall to the electorate must reserve some power to control the overall level of expenditure?

Dr. Cunningham: As I have said many times, there are no sensible macro-economic arguments of which I am aware in favour of central Government controlling the totality of local government expenditure as this Government have sought to do but failed.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The party's over.

Dr. Cunningham: I am getting rather tired of the hon. Gentleman waffling away from a sedentary position. Every time he opens his mouth he displays his ignorance. To assist him, I shall send him a copy of the speech made by my late friend Anthony Crosland so that he can see —if he bothers to read it, which he clearly has not— that any resemblance between the contents of the Manchester town hall speech and what the Government propose is only a figment of his imagination.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: The hon. Gentleman said that there were no macro-economic arguments for such control. I ask him to consult his right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), who was Secretary of State for the Environment not so many years ago. On precisely the same grounds, he wrote to all the local authorities requesting them to rein back their expenditure that year by £1,000 million because that was the wish of Parliament. In those happy days, local authorities said, "Parliament is supreme and we rein back our expenditure." They did that to meet the target of the right hon. Gentleman, who is here tonight.

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman will recall that in those days there was a consensus between local and central Government on these matters. There is no such consensus now; it has been broken by the Government. On coming to office in 1979, they decided to reduce the level of rate support grant which, under my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney, was approaching 62 per cent. and has now been——

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It was coming down.

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman's memory is not just defective; it is very defective. When Labour was elected in the 1970s, the level of rate support grant was 62 per cent. and when we left office, it was 62 per cent. The hon. Gentleman cannot win with his canards. As a deliberate act of policy, the Government have now reduced rate support grant from 62 per cent. to 45 per cent.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: It went up to 66 per cent.

Dr. Cunningham: Yes, of course it did, but when the Labour Government left office, rate support grant was at the level that the Conservative Government had inherited. Now it is at 45 per cent. and the major consequence of that is that the boroughs and those elected in inner cities are facing considerable problems.

Mr. Bidwell: My hon. Friend has spent some time on the case of Ealing. Is not the Government's action pure political spite? There are special needs, particularly in my constituency, which is part of the London borough of Ealing, which the Secretary of State seems not to have taken into account at all.

Dr. Cunningham: My hon. Friend is right. The Government have been vindictive and spiteful about local government and local democracy ever since they came to office. The Act is one of the worst manifestations of that, and the order seeks to put into practice decisions that we want none of. That is why we shall vote against it.

8.9 pm

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): I propose to speak on behalf of the London borough of Ealing — briefly, because I know that many of my hon. Friends wish to speak. The order enables my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) and me to honour the commitment that we gave our electors in Ealing last year.

[Sir George Young]

We said that if we were re-elected the council would be rate-capped and the rates would go down: we were, it is and they will.

Almost a year ago, the Labour council in Ealing announced a rate increase of 65 per cent. which turned out to be the highest in the country. In an Adjournment debate last March, I asked the Government to rate-cap the authority at the earliest opportunity. The general election intervened before a decision could be made. Much as I would have been willing to fight that election on the achievements of the Administration, the issue on the doorstep in Ealing was the rate increase. I am sure that the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell), who is in his place, will agree that that was the dominant local issue in Ealing.

The only party that was prepared to offer protection against extravagant authorities such as Ealing was the Conservative party. Those who are interested in the minutiae of election results—I imagine that is everyone in the Chamber—will see that in Ealing there was an above-average swing to the Conservative party. Much as I would like to attribute that result to my charisma and my twice-weekly advice bureaux, and to the other excellent services offered by the Conservatives in Ealing, Acton, the reality is that the rates have much to do with the result.

The 65 per cent. increase bit very deep in Ealing. It hit people's incomes, pushed up prices in the shops and has depressed investment and employment. Many of the Budget reductions that were introduced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer last March were soaked up in Ealing by the higher rate increase. One small example of that impact is that about a year ago I launched an appeal to restore St. Mary's church. Many people, including industrialists, who responded said that they would have given more to the appeal if they had not had that rates demand over the same period.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose*——

Sir George Young: I shall give way when I have finished my point.

Indignation in Ealing is, if anything, higher than it was at the time of the last general election, for two reasons. First, nearly everyone has now paid his rates. A large number of carefully made budgets were wrecked by the increase.

Secondly, people cannot for the life of them find out what the bulk of that increase has secured. My constituents take the view that if the rates can go up without services being improved, rates can go down without them getting worse. Indeed, that is just what the order does, and it will be widely welcomed in Ealing by employers as much as by householders.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) mentioned the homes that were being built by Ealing. Those homes, in Priory road in my constituency and in Drayton Bridge road in Ealing, North, were already being built by Laing and Barratt. They would have been bought by first-time buyers in the London borough of Ealing. However, through a deal which would now require the Secretary of State's consent, the London borough of Ealing bought them through a housing association. There are no more homes now than there would have been if the London borough of Ealing had not intervened. All that has happened is that the tenure has changed from owner-occupation to renting. It has not generated more work or more homes.

The council is now engaged in the usual propaganda exercise of indentifying some visible cuts, mainly in Conservative wards, to embarrass the Government. For example, there are rumours that Pitshanger library is to be closed. That library was operated throughout the years of Conservative administration, when expenditure levels were far below that fixed in the order tonight. People are already asking why that library is under scrutiny when £12 million is being spent on the huge empire which embraces the equal opportunities unit, the police unit, the race unit, the women's unit and the economic development unit. Might not the economies sought by this order be secured there, rather than from libraries and luncheon clubs?

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Gentleman has a reputation for being fair in his analyses. That is true until he starts talking about his own borough of Ealing, when he is grossly unfair — as, indeed, is his hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway). The hon. Gentleman has just told the House something that is palpably untrue—that Ealing was spending £12 million on equal opportunities policies. I think that is what he said. My information is that all those policies amount to an expenditure of £1·5 million. When the hon. Gentleman comments on the amount by which the rates have increased, why does he not say something about the 1,000 homeless people who have been housed since 1986, or something about the 180 teachers who have been appointed? Can he not be fair about his own borough for once?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman mentioned homelessness. If he considers the figures, he will find that Ealing is now somewhere near the top of the league for accepting homeless families in London. When the Conservatives were in office there, it was somewhere near the bottom. Ealing has acquired the reputation of being a soft touch. People come to Ealing knowing that the criteria there are somewhat more generous than elsewhere. Therefore, that figure for homelessness is not a true reflection of need, but a reflection of the fact that the administration and the criteria have changed.

Perhaps I can give one example that Opposition Members will accept as fair. For entirely ideological reasons, the council changed its bank account from Barclays to National Giro, at a cost of £100,000 in extra charges. However, worse was to follow. National Giro is not a clearing bank, so when Ealing ratepayers recently paid their rates through their own banks, the full details on the paying-in slips were not passed on to Giro. Ealing now has about £20 million in its Giro account, without knowing who that money belongs to. As a result, many people were summonsed for non-payment of rates when, in fact, they had paid them. The result is a cost of about £250,000 in staff time to put the matter right. I understand that the council is now to switch its account from Giro to the NatWest.

Money is also being spent on propaganda. I have sent my hon. Friend a copy of a leaflet describing in wholly inaccurate terms the Government's Housing Bill. Whether this is in breach of the new code remains to be seen, but the costs of the publicity unit have risen enormously and,

to my mind, much of it seems to be campaigning against the Government. I believe that some economies could be secured there.

I want to put one point to my hon. Friend who is to reply to the debate. I believe that it is still possible for councils to indulge in creative accounting to get round the restrictions in the order. In Ealing, capital funds are being used for revenue purposes and I suspect that other ingenious devices are about to be launched. I urge my hon. Friend to have yet another look at the opportunities for evasion.

Apparently there is now a lot of support for the London borough of Ealing from Opposition Members. However, although the leader of the Labour party lives in the London borough of Ealing, there was no trace during the last general election of him lifting one finger to support any of the local candidates in the two marginal seats in that borough. Indeed, judging by what his press secretary said last year, the London borough of Ealing and other London boroughs are widely believed to be an embarrassment to Opposition Members.

The order is good news for Ealing. It shows my constituents that Parliament is there to protect them from local excess and that the Conservative party is in tune with what the voters in Ealing want.

Mr. Butterfill: Will my hon. Friend confirm the report in the *Municipal Journal* that the cost to the ratepayers of taking street cleaning away from private contractors and giving it to a local authority work force is an increase from £900,000 to £1·7 million?

Sir George Young: I understand that those figures are accurate. Street cleaning was deprivatised, but again there is no visible improvement in the service.

Mr. Bidwell: Yes, there is.

Sir George Young: Well, I live in the borough and the hon. Gentleman does not. I can look out of my window to see whether the streets are now cleaner.

Ealing council is living on borrowed time and on borrowed money. This order is the first nail in its coffin. I hope that the House will drive it home.

8.17 pm

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): The hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) has just made some points about the borough of Ealing, some of which were hotly contested, which just goes to show that what the Secretary of State said earlier about the way in which we debate these orders simply is not true. He said that we would not be debating the detail of individual local authorities. However, as the hon. Gentleman has just said, there are specific local circumstances in Ealing that need to be looked at, some of which are disputed, but the House is given just three hours in which to decide on 17 local authorities which are to be rate-capped.

Although we will not agree—even on the Opposition side—about the nature of some of the local policies, the problem is that there is no legitimate way in which hon. Members can put forward the case of their local authority except in a series of hurried speeches, which some will contest and some will accept.

The Secretary of State reminded us that 1988 marked the fourth year of rate capping under the Rates Act 1984. The last debate on this matter took place on 25 February 1986. No such debate occurred last year because of the fiasco surrounding the Government's discovery late in 1986 that for several years they had been operating the entire rate support grant system in a way that was illegal. Following that discovery, they introduced into Parliament what became the Local Government Finance Act 1987, which enabled the Government retrospectively to make legal the previous year's rate support grant settlement and the rate-capping arrangements and to make it possible for there to be a legal settlement in 1987-88.

My purpose in tracing the origins of the order, which rate-caps 17 authorities, including my own local authority in Liverpool, is to remind hon. Members of the turmoil and uncertainty that has engulfed local government for a sustained period.

During the eight years in which I served as a member of the local authority in Liverpool, I chaired some of its committees and, as deputy leader, was involved in budget-making. It was always an agonising business for me and for other council members from all political parties—to temper financial prudence with a proper desire to enhance local amenities, facilities and services. In those days, the rate-cappers were the ratepayers, who ultimately held the sanction of turfing out an administration if they disapproved of the way in which it was governing their affairs.

That relationship has been entirely changed. Rate capping by central Government has driven out of local government people who in the 1970s and earlier would have had a great deal of satisfaction from working in local government and putting before local ratepayers priorities that they believed to be right. These days, many men and women see little point in merely acting as the Government's bookkeepers and have left local government. I passionately believe that the strength of democracy lies in the foundations of its local government and I mourn the passing of a strong and stable local government.

The Government's approach has been to bid the gelding run faster and then to hobble it. Local government all over Britain has been put into leg irons. The Government's task has been made easier by a handful of local councils, dominated by the militant Labour Left, whose antics have simply played into the Government's hands. Time and again, the Government have been able to use the excesses of a few to harness public opinion and push through punitive legislation. Many ordinary councils and ratepayers have been involuntarily caught in the crossfire and through the actions of extremists many Labour, Liberal and even Conservative councillors have faced disqualification and surcharge.

When he was the Member of Parliament for Hexham, Sir Geoffrey Rippon said of rate capping:

> "It is deplorable. It raises major constitutional issues. It is a classic example of elected dictatorship."

The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) said:

> "I do not believe these powers should be given to Ministers."

The Conservative-controlled ADC also opposed its introduction.

It is my simple contention that a community that is not allowed to make its own decisions on how much to spend on schools, clinics, libraries, old people's homes, roads, homes, or street sweeping will simply decay.

Rate capping neuters local government and annually it throws it into confusion. It has a second insiduous effect. Rate capping hits the most disadvantaged local authorities

[Mr. David Alton]

the hardest. As the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) reminded us, in the aftermath of the 1987 election, the Prime Minister said that she was going to "do something about those inner cities."
Now we know exactly what she had in mind.

The order runs contrary to that claim. Almost all the rate-capped authorities this year, as in previous years, have to deal with some of the worst urban deprivation—areas where homelessness, poor housing, unemployment, crime and alienation are at their worst. Those councils are now to be used as a punchbag.

The consequences for the rate-capped authorities will be severe. On 8 January *The Independent* stated:

"Councils in London are drawing up plans to cut at least 5,500 jobs because of rate-capping. Final decisions on the cuts will be made at budget meetings over the next two months, but at least four Labour-controlled councils have already decided on the number of jobs to cut."

My hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) who is on the Housing Bill Committee this evening—he was in the Chamber earlier and is hoping to return—told me in a note:

"The effect of this in the coming year will be a reduction in real terms of between 5 and 10 per cent., a cut in our spending of between 5 and 10 per cent."

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Alton: In a moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey went on:

"It looks as if the most severe cuts will fall on housing and social services, and in particular on the most vulnerable closures of day centres, nurseries, old people's provisions, libraries, swimming pools and the like.

Mr. Tony Banks: I do not wish to be unfair to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) as I agree with him, but he has been misled by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). The Housing Bill Committee finished at 8 o'clock. I am the Labour Whip on the Committee, so I can say that with some certainty. That is why I am here. A number of Conservative Members who were on the Housing Bill Committee are present. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey is not in the Housing Bill Committee.

Mr. Alton: My hon. Friend has been at that Committee and he was in the Chamber when the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) was not present. He intervened in the Secretary of State's speech. Similarly unfair criticism was made about the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) earlier when he was in the Education Reform Bill Committee.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West will also recognise that only one person ever gets called from this Bench in a debate. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey will be happy for me to have made his point, and I hope the hon. Member for Newham, North-West will let me proceed as we agree on a number of points.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) talked about rate capping. Perhaps he will explain why Liverpool city council has the largest number of empty council properties anywhere in Britain—10·8 per cent. or 6,955—whereas Knowsley has only 499 empty properties or 1·9 per cent. There are five times as many empty properties in Liverpool owned by the council as there are in any other Merseyside borough. That is one reason why the Government has had to rate-cap Liverpool.

Mr. Alton: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands the position in Liverpool. The problem exists because we have lost one third of our population during the past 20 years. As there has been this massive exodus from the city, property has been left empty. Many of those properties are uninhabitable and have had to be closed; others form part of the demolition programme.

Part of the problem also stems from the overheated economy in the south. As people move south, the homeless problem in the south-east increases. As we have become a nation of Dick Whittingtons and as people leave cities such as Liverpool, problems have been created in some of the London boroughs as people coming from the north seek accommodation here. Secondly, this causes empty housing in places like the north-west of England.

Mr. Heffer: I am sure that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) will agree with me, in relation to empty property, that one of the great problems in Liverpool is that a number of years ago properties were built on a fairly large scale, but the people who built them ought to be put in prison because of the state of those properties. They have had to be emptied out, and they include empty properties that are uninhabitable. That is not the responsibility of the present local authorities and to a large extent was caused by previous Government policy.

Mr. Alton: The sins of our fathers are often visited on their sons. The hon. Gentleman will recall that in 1972 thousands of properties were constructed on the Netherley estate. That was a great mistake by Liverpool council. I made my maiden speech on Liverpool city council in opposition to that scheme. Regardless of who now administers the city, the debt charges that still stem from the construction of those properties remain to haunt the local authority. The repayments will go on for a further 40 years. The debts on properties now demolished will go on being a major millstone around the neck of Liverpool city council. Those special circumstances are never taken into account when the rate support grant settlement is made.

This year, the gap between what is prescribed by the order and what will be allowed to be spent in Liverpool amounts to some £45 million.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Alton: Not at the moment. That is the difference between the anticipated expenditure and that allowed by the Government. The consequences for Liverpool city council will be catastrophic. If the money were to be saved entirely by shedding labour, it would require 5,625 employees to be sacked, according to the chief executive of Liverpool city council. But if redundancies are to be the key to meeting the targets set by the Government, in a city where unemployment stands at 20 per cent., is that, to use the Prime Minister's words,
"doing something to help those cities"?
That seems a strange way of helping them. Surely what is needed is a true partnership, where local and central Government tackle the problems together.

Liverpool council refused to apply for a redetermination — in my view, wrongly. But I understand its

reasons. It was given no assurance that its permitted expenditure would not be reviewed downwards. If the Government could at least have promised not to make matters even worse, it would have been a catalyst to bring Liverpool's politicians around the table.

One does not have to be clairvoyant to see what failure to obtain agreement will lead to. The city will shortly be plunged into a debilitating fiscal crisis and the casualties will be the ratepayers, with yet more damage inflicted on the city's battered image. Today's *Financial Times* bleakly states:

"The warning, in a letter that will be made public tomorrow, will say that setting a spending limit and trying to run services within it in an attempt to avoid cuts in jobs and services will not be an acceptable alternative to setting a proper budget. Failure to do so might lead to further surcharges and disqualifications of councillors."

Some of the wounds suffered by Liverpool are self-inflicted. One example is the decision to spend £250,000 on the trade union resource centre. That decision alone will attract £200,000 in penalties this year. I was also opposed to the decision to borrow £60 million from Swiss and Japanese bankers—that borrowing will incur additional loan repayments of £92 million. I believe that that is reckless and irresponsible. However, I would fight against such decisions locally, through local elections, not through rate capping. Although we may disagree with some of the council's policies—and it should be said that some of those policies date back to the council's predecessor—such matters should be determined locally rather than nationally.

I hope that the Government will reconsider enhancing the urban progremme. If some of the city's housing was transferred to housing associations or co-operatives, that would also help. However, it would still not be enough. If the Government vindictively leave Liverpool to stew in its own juice they will create the conditions for Militant and its friends to prosper. As Peter Taafe said last weekend:

"There are more Militants on the council now than there even were before."

Government inertia will simply create a breeding ground for extremism and militancy to prosper.

Rate capping does not create better local government—it leads to confrontation and centralisation. It does creates the climate not for good management but for chaos, and it drives decent people out of local councils. In July, the Secretary of State said that, because of the pending abolition of domestic rates and the introduction of the poll tax, this would be

"the penultimate rate support grant settlement".

In October, at the Conservative party conference, the Secretary of State said:

"The choice before us is a stark one. We must either have more and more central control or local electors must exert real local control. We vote for local control."

By the autumn, the truth was out. The Minister for Local Government admitted that the Government were to extend rate capping to cover the poll tax. Therefore, we are not discussing the penultimate capping of local councils, as he said. So much also for the power of the ballot box, a simplified system and less central interference. Capping rates has led to this present vale of tears. For the future, capping the community charge will simply be an act of selective vengeance against councils that the Government do not like. For those reasons, Liberals will vote against the order.

8.32 pm

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): Before the general election, I recall that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who then sat on the Opposition Front Bench for matters concerning the environment, telling me that as a result of my intention to vote in favour of rate capping, I would be unseated at the general election. That hon. Gentleman has moved on to other responsibilities, but I am happy to tell his successor, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), that my majority increased by 350 per cent. at the election. Therefore, I believe that we should beware of name calling, in which the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) indulged. It is not possible to solve the intractable problems of local government in that way.

The problem is that the consensus between national and local government has broken down. However, that problems lies not with the Government, but with the councils with which we have attempted to maintain that original consensus.

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Gentleman would say that, wouldn't he?

Mr. Coombs: The hon. Gentleman has said from a sedentary, if not lying, position that I would say that, and he is right. Let me give the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends the facts, which I believe justify my case.

In 1976, a Labour Secretary of State asked local authorities to rein in their expenditure by £1,000 million. At that time, a large proportion of local government was in the hands of the Conservative party. The response of those Conservative-controlled councils in that national crisis — a crisis brought about by the Labour Government of the day—was that it was right that they should react in a public-spirited and responsible manner. As a result, the Labour party was able to rein in local government expenditure.

When the present Government came to power in 1979, they found that the problems had continued to mount on the hapless head of the previous Labour Government and that the economy was overstretched and in considerable difficulties. There was also an international crisis in the oil market. Yet again there was a need to restrain public expenditure. What happened? There was no response from the councils which, after 1979, were under Labour party control. The only response was to continue to increase dramatically at the cost of local ratepayers.

When we discuss the breakdown of consensus, we must remember that it is due to the fact that in the past eight years Labour councils have consistently refused any request to act responsibly in the national interest. It is nonsense for the hon. Member for Copeland to say, in answer to my question, that it is for the Treasury to sort things out.

Mr. Butterfill: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, since 1982, the London borough of Camden has increased its staff by 2,000? I also believe that since 1985 the London borough of Hackney has increased its staff by 1,150.

Mr. Coombs: Those are two examples of the way in which expenditure has been heaped upon the ratepayers and the citizens of some councils in the country. It is not my intention to make detailed attacks on the Labour party. I wish to make my case on a national basis.

In a sedentary intervention, I asked the hon. Member for Copeland how the Labour party would respond to the

[Mr. Coombs]

fact that, in the macro-economic sense, it cannot allow 25 per cent. of national public expenditure to go on increasing every year because local Labour councils are unable to deal with their problems in a cost-effective manner. If the Labour party ever came to power again, it would have to tackle that problem. I invited the hon. Member for Copeland—he is not in the Chamber—to tell me how the Labour party would do that, but rather than answer he called me a rude word.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman's colleague, the hon. Member for Perry Barr, who has a reputation for independence of thought, will not feel it necessary to follow the official Labour line of calling people rude names if they do not understand the question or if there is no answer. When the hon. Gentleman replies, perhaps he might be persuaded to tell us how the Labour party would tackle the problem of rapidly expanding local government expenditure. The Opposition, if in power, would have to face such a problem.

Rate capping is not unpopular among the people. If it were, at least a dozen Conservative Members would not be representing seats with Labour-controlled local councils. If voters were unhappy with rate capping, undoubtedly they would have turned out Conservatives representing parts of the affected boroughs. On the contrary, in one such area, Waltham Forest, the Conservative party made a gain rather than a loss. We must accept that rate capping is not an unpopular policy for those who suffer the high rates of local Labour councils. On the contrary, those high rates are unpopular; that is why my hon. Friends the Members for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) and for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) were returned with such thumping good majorities at the election in 1987.

Mr. Tony Banks: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, when rate support grant—central Government support for local authority services—has been cut from 61 to 46 per cent., there is bound to be pressure upwards on the rates? The *Financial Times* said that the reason for rate increases was the cut in rate support grant. Why cannot the hon. Gentleman not accept that, and accept also that the problems of the inner-city boroughs are nothing like the problems of the shire counties? If the Labour party were in government and needed to control the overall sum, it would at least ensure that the resources went into the inner-city areas, where they are most needed.

Mr. Coombs: I welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman is a convert to the *Financial Times*. I feel sure that as the years go by, a greater sense of financial reality will break in on him.

I shall deal now with the reduction in rate support grant. The Labour party comes to the House tonight, as always, in the guise of defending local democracy. What could be more appropriate to local democracy than that an ever greater share of expenditure on local services should come from local people? That is what the switch of rate support grant is designed to do.

When we discuss democracy in the House, we should reflect on the fact that Labour councillors are elected by 25 or 30 per cent. of the electors in their wards. Conservative Members of Parliament, representing those same areas, are returned by turnouts of 75 per cent. Which of those two groups is the more democratically entitled to speak on behalf of the ordinary people of those areas? I would say that Conservative Members are.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): The hon. Gentleman says that only about 25 per cent. of people elect Labour councillors. What is the average figure for the election of Tory councillors in Tory boroughs and local authorities?

Mr. Coombs: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I belatedly congratulate him on surviving a 6·8 per cent. swing to the Conservatives in his seat at the general election last year. We are glad to have him with us. The point I made was that Labour councillors are the beneficiaries of those areas because they control the authorities. Of course, the point applies equally to councillors in general. Conservative Members of Parliament have a greater right to speak on behalf of all the people in the areas they represent because they have been elected by a majority of the people—75 per cent. of them.

I want to say a word about the borough of Thamesdown, which is on the list, in the company of authorities in inner London, which, as I recognise, have real social problems that are not to be compared with the problems which, happily, the people of Thamesdown face — although in Swindon many people have severe difficulties. There is no reason why Thamesdown should continue to figure in the list, apart from its own reluctance, its refusal, to come to the Secretary of State to discuss the problems. I understand that all that has happened this year is that a letter of protest was sent. There was no attempt to discuss the problems that face the borough or to persuade the Secretary of State that more money would be appropriate.

Other authorities have gone to my right hon. Friend and been given extra cash to deal with the problems. Some have been allowed to increase their rate precept by more than the rate of inflation. Not Thamesdown. Its attitude is simple. Before the general election its ex-deputy leader said that it was a Labour Government or bust. We told him then that he had to face the responsibilities of his own actions, because there was no way that he would have a Labour Government to bail him out.

These problems remain. I am happy to support the order, but unhappy that it affects the people that I represent here. I hope that, as the years go by, the people of Thamesdown will be represented by a council which will be prepared to discuss these matters rationally and which, in due course, will be Conservative-controlled, removing our name for all time from the list of those whose expenditure has to be controlled by the Government.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. Time is getting very short, and many hon. Members wish to speak. I appeal for short contributions.

8.45 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I shall oppose the order on behalf of Tower Hamlets. I repeat the point that I made to the Secretary of State, that the alleged agreement between him and the borough of Tower Hamlets was made under duress. If Tower Hamlets had not consented to it, he would have had the option of reducing still further the grant given to the borough. If that is not duress, I do not know what is.

I am glad to see that the Secretary of State has returned to the Chamber, and I want to put to him some of the difficulties we face. I want to urge him to think again, or at least to explain why he has taken this decision, which has such adverse consequences for my borough.

Like the other inner-London boroughs affected by the order — and like Liverpool and Newcastle — Tower Hamlets was part of the original partnership of boroughs that we set up deliberately in 1977, because we recognised that they were areas of exceptional need, requiring exceptional help. That was the spirit and the intention of our inner-city policy. Those same boroughs have sustained successive attacks on their finances by reductions in the rate support grant from 61 per cent. to 46 per cent. Fines have been imposed on them for alleged overspending, and they are faced now with the effects of rate capping.

When rate capping of Tower Hamlets was announced last autumn, the council decided to apply for a re-determination. Its alleged overspend of 22 per cent. above GRE amounted to £23 million. As a result of the Department of the Environment rethink, an additional £2 million for expenditure was allowed. Still, that means that the borough must retrench by £21 million next year—20 per cent. of its total expenditure.

When the council went to see the Minister of State for Local Government, the case that it argued was based almost completely on the exceptional problem of homelessness and the high cost of bed-and-breakfast accommodation for our homeless people. No less than £18 million of the council's alleged overspend last year and this year will have been incurred in securing temporary accommodation for the 980 homeless families in 1986-87 and the 1,150 homeless families in 1987-88.

No other borough, with the possible exception of Camden, has had to face a bill for accommodating the homeless of anything like the scale that we face. The reasons are plain: we have a large Bengali community. Being the last major ethnic group to settle in the United Kingdom, the flow of relatives to join husbands and fathers here in Britain is inevitably high. Moreover, Bengali settlement is highly concentrated in a few locations in the United Kingdom, the largest of which is in Tower Hamlets. The council, people and Members of Parliament of Tower Hamlets have long argued that additional special housing money was essential to meet the special problem of homelessness in Tower Hamlets.

When the council met the Minister, he merely listened. The Secretary of State did not turn his mind to the problem or attempt to give the reasons for his decision. I want to know whether the Government recognise the exceptional problem of homelessness in Tower Hamlets, and if not, why not? Is it the Government's case that the council is spending money extravagantly on other services? If so, which are they, and by how much should they be cut?

Mr. Butterfill *rose*——

Mr. Shore: I am asking the Secretary of State, not the hon. Gentleman.

Is it the Government's case that the problem of homelessness could be solved by making better use of the voids in the council housing stock? Certainly there are far too many voids, but the Government must be aware of the fact that there is a major mismatch between the large size of homeless families who need to be accommodated and the small size vacant accommodation, which consists mainly of one and two-bedroomd flats.

On top of that major housing crisis, the Government's rate capping of Tower Hamlets will produce a further crisis in the provision of other services throughout the borough. The number of homeless families cannot be easily or quickly reduced, in spite of the restrictive and harsh provisions of the Immigration Bill.

What have the Government to say? Are they blind or are they indifferent to the special problems of Tower Hamlets? Have they nothing to offer except a relentless squeeze on its expenditure and its power to raise revenue from rates? The order — not the Prime Minister's rhetoric about regeneration — reveals the true and ugly face of Government policy for the inner cities.

8.50 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I welcome the order to cap rates in Basildon, as do many of my constituents. I say that in the light of the fact that the previous Labour council got us into debt to the tune of £34 million, which is a disgrace. Net expenditure will exceed income by £14·6 million by March 1990.

The House may wish to know that in 1983 Basildon was ranked 112th in the list of Labour seats that could be won by the Conservative party. In the general election last year, Basildon was ranked as the 14th most marginal seat. A number of Opposition Front Bench spokesmen visited my constituency, including the campaign manager for the Leader of the Opposition, who was frequently seen on television forecasting a Labour gain. Hon. Members will be aware that the Basildon count was shown on television; the seat was retained by the Conservative party, and we doubled our majority.

I am proud to represent the largest new town in the country. It is now the finest new town in the country. It is a supreme example of the success of the Government's policies. We have the largest covered shopping centre in Europe. When I became the Member of Parliament for Basildon, there were about 9,000 unemployed people. The caring Labour council, in typical fashion, put a board outside the council offices to display the number of people who were out of work. I am proud that in the past five years unemployment in Basildon has been cut by 50 per cent. During that time, the display board disappeared. When I inquired why that was so, I was told that one of the screws had gone rusty and the board had fallen down. I do not think that we are so naive as to believe that. It was all very well when the arrow was going up, but when it went down the council did not like it.

In the last Parliament, I talked about rates in Basildon on a number of occasions. There is no doubt that the rate burden in Basildon has been intolerable. I made my maiden speech on the Rates Bill. I served on the Committee with a number of hon. Members who are present in the Chamber and I well remember difficulties that the noble Lord Jenkin of Roding encountered with the Opposition about rate capping. I feel that my constituents have benefited from rate capping

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the statement that he made at the beginning of his speech, when he spoke in such glowing terms of the progress in his constituency, is consistent with what he is claiming to be a problem with rates? Is it not a fact that the growth that he mentioned has been helped by the local authority and that it has played a major part in the progress of that town?

Mr. Amess: The hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) should be careful when intervening on another hon. Member's constituency matters. He probably does not know where Basildon is. Basildon's success has nothing to do with the work of the local authority but everything to do with the Basildon development corporation and the Commission for the New Towns. Those are the organisations that should be praised, not the irresponsible spenders on the former Labour council.

In my maiden speech, I suggested that we should abolish rates and introduce a community charge. I welcome the Local Government Finance Bill, and when it becomes law many of my constituents will benefit from it.

Over the past years, I have had occasion to refer a number of items of extravagance to the district auditor. Unfortunately, he has found it difficult to act on those matters as his powers seem rather toothless.

We have had to cope with a barrage of propaganda. We have a district council which employs 12 people in its public relations department. I am sure that the House will be interested to listen to the detail of a press release that it put out in early 1986:

"Basildon ready to win through with Labour's national commitments. 'Basildon is ready and able to take full advantage of any multi-million investment programme by the next Labour Government to create jobs,' says the Labour council leader. He pointed to Basildon's recently announced multi-million pound capital development programme, aimed at taking the District bustling into the 1990s, as evidence that the Caring Council and Community are 'winning through', and as an indication of how local planning is tying in with Labour's national approach and commitments."

The council leader continued:

"As a District Council we are fully prepared for the next Labour Government to implement a multi-million programme of capital investment.

Our recently announced programme will see Basildon into the 1990's, and we will be ready with details of other development and job creation projects.

Despite all the obstacles this present Tory Government attempts to place in our way and all the pressures it tries to bring on our community we are winning through.

We are laying the plans locally which tie in with the national plans and commitments of Labour's incoming Government team. The choice will be for the people of Basildon and similar hard pressed communities up and down the nation."

He got his answer on 11 June when I was re-elected and doubled my majority.

The truth of that press release is revealed by what I said earlier in my speech — Basildon is £34 million in debt because of the irresponsibility of that administration.

Mr. Butterfill: Will my hon. Friend confirm that that press release was prepared at the expense of the ratepayers?

Mr. Amess: Of course it was. In Basildon, everything is done at the ratepayers' expense.

Just before the general election, the Under-Secretary of State replied to an Adjournment debate in which I showed him a glossy leaflet. That leaflet supplied information to the ratepayers, but it might just as well have said, "Vote Labour." That is the sort of thing with which we have had to contend in Basildon over the past few years. Basildon district council has often provided services and interfered in matters for which it is not responsible. For example, it has confused people about the sort of welfare benefits to which they are entitled.

The House will want to know what sort of council we have in Basildon. I refer to a press release headed:

"Militant threat to Labour rule".

which states:

"Councillor David Harrison resigned as the Labour whip on Basildon council after being suspended for failing to support a £700 grant to community associations. His defection, together with"

Councillor Peter Maloney, a lifelong member of the Labour party, means that the Labour party lost control of Basildon district council.

Mr. Bernie Grant: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is supposed to be a debate about rate capping and rate limitation. The speech of the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) is just a series of scandalous stories.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I was also becoming slightly worried about the hon. Gentleman's remarks. I am sure that he will address his remarks to the order.

Mr. Amess: I shall certainly do that. I understand the embarrassment of Labour Members. The councillor about whom I am speaking in connection with this rate-capped authority, said that he would now vote in line with his conscience. He remains chairman of Basildon district council.

In the previous Parliament, I was the only Conservative Member not to have a Conservative district or county councillor in my constituency. They were all Labour. I am delighted to tell the House that, in September 1987, the first Conservative councillor was elected in my constituency since 1979. He took the seat from Labour when the alliance was expected to win, so we came from third to first position. The councillor now fully supports the rate-capping measure.

I wish to give the House some brief examples of items of expenditure which have led to rate capping in Basildon. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) said, creative accounting is rife in Basildon. On 11 April, the largest and most expensive theatre in the country will be opened in Basildon. That theatre cost £8 million, but none of that money was paid in interest over the past three years. We are now forced to pick up the bill. The Socialists responsible for that gross extravagance have run away from their responsibility.

The Socialists have also committed us to building a town hall which will cost £17 million. They have decided to replace the Laidon community centre, at a cost of £1·7 million. They have set up an area management style of services which is extremely expensive. It is a clever Socialist way of taking the power away from the elected council and giving it to a few people who turn up at the meetings and push forward Socialist propaganda.

A sports hall will be built at Markham Chase for £2 million. Before that sports centre was built, the local people were consulted and given two options. They plumped overwhelmingly for one option and the local authority chose the other option. That is a wonderful example of Socialist democracy. They then opened another sports centre in Pitsea in my constituency, at a cost of £1·2 million. They have also built community workshops.

The latest Socialist idea is to organise the countryside. They decided to organise Wat Tyler park. They put in a floating ramp, which cracked. Then a slipway was installed for people outside the area to use, and the Socialists calmly wrote off £20,000. A boat compound was moved on a number of occasions. That cost £25,000. In 1974, the

Socialists dredged a creek, which cost £10,000. In 1985, at a cost of £6,000, they built a beach, but they built it on mud and it has since vanished. They built a jetty for a crane, but we do not even have a crane to put there. If we want one, it will cost us £30,000.

The Socialists built a nature pond and filled it in after four months because it leaked. That cost us £2,500. A private caterer was catering for the good people who work at Wat Tyler park, but, because of the Socialist belief that profit is a dirty word, he was driven off. The job was given to someone in the council and the business now makes a dirty great loss.

We had, as ever, a peace festival which, of course, was not supported by people from Basildon but by people from all sorts of areas. The ratepayers of Basildon had to pay for all the rubbish to be collected. We have the usual nonsense of nuclear-free zones and a number of ideas for theme parks to be built in the area.

If Labour had won the election, the reality for people in Basildon, with no other commitments than those I have announced to the House, would have been a doubling of the rates in Basildon. That is the irresponsibility of Socialism in Basildon.

I am delighted that we now have a hung council. A hung anything is not ideal, but at least it is a little better than the previous Socialist administration. In the hung council, the Conservative group put forward suggestions for savings of £7·5 million and the Liberals — who always find themselves in difficulty when they are given power and have to make decisions—did not quite have the guts to go all the way with us and suggested savings of £4·5 million.

My constituents and I welcome the order to cap rates in Basildon. We eagerly look forward to the benefit that a community charge will bring to all the people of Basildon.

9.6 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I have heard some remarkable arguments from Conservative Members. The hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) suggested that Members of Parliament have the right to represent people only if they have an overwhelming majority on a particular council. I have to tell the hon. Member that Labour has an enormous majority on my council, but at one stage it was Conservative-controlled and every councillor was Conservative. I do not quite know the logic of his argument and I do not think it has a great deal to do with rate capping, so I will not waste time pursuing it. The hon. Member for Basildon has wasted an awful lot of time.

I wish to make two quick points, because other hon. Members want to speak. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) made a good case for our position in Liverpool, but I disagree with him on two points. He talked about militants and the loony Left running local authorities, which was totally irrelevant. Let us talk about the real position.

My area has problems of unemployment, housing and drugs — you name it, we have it. The problems have arisen not because of the dreadful activities of the local council, however the council has been made up, but because over the years the port of Liverpool, because of the change in world trade and our entry into the Common Market — *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should listen for once instead of smirking. If they came from areas such as mine, they would understand that the local economy has changed so that we are left, as it were, stranded on the shore. If we still had the same economy and trading patterns, we would not be in the position we are in today. Areas such as mine need assistance from Governments, not rate capping.

The previous council went to the Government and asked whether it could have back some of the money which had been taken away in the rate support grants. It had lost about £350 million. I think that over those years the total grant was about £500 million. The council asked the Government for £30 million as a loan, but it did not get it; it had to go to international bankers. I deplore that, as does everyone else. That happened because the Government refused to assist a council with housing problems which hon. Members from nice new towns do not begin to understand; they live in an entirely different world and in a different atmosphere from the people in my part of the world.

The hon. Member for Mossley Hill said that the council is faced with cutting jobs and services. It will have to impose a rent increase of £4 a week, which will raise only £11·6 million. Rents of council property in Liverpool are 16th highest of the 36 metropolitan districts. Rents are already too high in an area where the people cannot afford them because there is so much unemployment.

Enough has been said. We must impress upon the Government that they have a duty to people in all parts or the country. Because the people elect Labour or Liberal authorities, or in Ulster other authorities, that does not mean that the Government can run away from the their responsibilities and say, "We will only help Conservative authorities because they represent the people who support us." If the Government continue along that path, sooner or later the anger which is growing in inner cities like Liverpool will again bubble over. That is the last thing I want to see.

Therefore, I ask the Government to think again. Certainly I shall vote against the order. I hope that Conservative Members who have still got a little conscience will at least abstain, even if they will not vote against the order, and let the Government know that they are not satisfied with the present policy.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) set a commendable example in making a brief speech. Many hon. Members are affected directly by the order. I should be grateful if we could have brief speeches so that most of them may be called.

9.12 pm

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): Until May last year I was privileged to have been associated with local authorities for the previous 20 years. Therefore, I was sad when it became necessary for the Government to bring in rate limitation, but it was and still is necessary. I do not object to the reserve powers contained in the new legislation which will reform the domestic rating system.

Earlier, the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) spoke of the old consensus. My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) explained why the consensus had broken down. Clearly, it broke down because many local authorities forgot that they were local

[Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo]

authorities and slipped into the jargon of referring to themselves as local governments, or even governments in exile, ignoring the fact that this is the place where laws are made and which answers to the wider public.

Time and time again, in this debate and in others, Opposition Members have referred only to the rate support grant when commenting on the needs of inner cities, some rate-capped and some not rate-capped under the order. Some might wish that they were being rate-capped in view of the forecasts for rate precepts in the list referred to by the hon. Member for Copeland.

The area of central Government support that seems to be ignored, as it was by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), is that of specific grants. To give the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) his due, he mentioned programme partnership authorities. For many years these authorities have received specific grants in addition to their rate support grant. Many cities in the midlands, if they put the two grants together, find that the percentage of rate support, in its widest sense, is as high now as it has ever been, but, because part of it is specific, it is much better targeted and in many ways the money is being better spent because of that.

There seems to be a view that, somehow, local government spending ought not to be constrained. Again, from the Opposition Front Bench, that policy has been confirmed. As we have heard, the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney, recognised the national need when he asked local authorities to rein back £1 billion spending. People should also remember that local government expenditure has to be seen in the totality of national needs. At the time that the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney reined back local government spending, hon. Members will remember that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in those dreadful years, had to make cuts in our National Health Service.

The NHS is very dear to all our hearts. When we look, even now, at the overspending of local authorities, with an estimate of £1·6 billion overspending, it seems foolish for the House to ignore the sort of runaway expenditure that could happen. Even with strict controls, overspending is £1·6 billion.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): They are underfunded.

Mr. Brando-Bravo: The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), from a sedentary position, talks about underfunding. If the Government of the day spend £1·6 billion more on supporting local authorities, they have to choose whether they want to do that or to spend it on the Health Service. The money cannot be spent twice. It is totally unacceptable for hon. Gentlemen to imagine that they can talk about any one Department's expenditure as if that had no impact on any other.

Mr. Holland: Instead of the hon. Member simply reasoning that if one spends money in one way it cannot be spent in another, may I ask whether he is aware that the figure of £1·6 billion is less than 0·5 per cent. of GNP? If the Government could maintain the rate of growth of the economy rather than have it halved next year, they could spend that on local authorities and also generate resources for the private sector.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: The hon. Member likes to choose a yardstick that suits his case, but I must remind the House that each of the various items of additional expenditure that the Opposition promised the electorate prior to the general election, with a few billion here and there, came to about £34,000 million, and the people of this country realised that that was simply not on.

Mr. Holland *rose*——

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: No, I shall not give way. I must make progress.

The criteria for rate capping mean that the order will affect only 17 authorities. I must draw the attention of the House to the constituency that I represent, the southern part of Nottingham. In the years until May 1987, when both Nottingham city council and the county council were Labour-controlled, I believe that my constituents wished in many ways that they could have been rate-capped. Nottinghamshire county council under Labour increased an 81p in the pound rate precept forecast in 1981 to a precept forecast this year of 253p in the pound. I wish that we were part of the order. Indeed, I think that it is illustrative that in May of last year the city council became Conservative. It does not need to be rate-capped. It has a zero——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a debate about the boroughs that have been rate-capped. It is legitimate for the hon. Gentleman to draw comparisons, but he must not dwell too heavily on his own constituency.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I apologise if I am dwelling too heavily; I am merely trying to illustrate my support for the principle in general and for the specific order before the House. I only wish that my own authority had been rate-capped, because only the remaining Labour authority of Nottingham county council is increasing the rates in the coming year.

This order is right. The people affected by it will benefit by lower rates. I only wish that there were some mechanism for protecting much of the rest of the country that is not affected by this rate limitation order.

9.21 pm

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): I shall not be sidetracked into alluding to the antics or activities of the hon. Members for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) and for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), who we in the area feel to have been largely responsible for the adverse rate-capping activity, which in the end will be sufficiently clear to blow back in their faces politically when the time comes for judgment.

Ealing, with 11 of the other rate-capped authorities, refuses to accept the Secretary of State's maximum proposed rate for 1988-89. Ealing's treatment by the Government has been unique in the circumstances that I have already described. Ealing is rate-capped considerably below the level at which many Tory-controlled authorities are spending. The neighbouring borough of Harrow, for example, is currently spending at 6·5 per cent. above the grant-related expenditure assessment.

Ealing's expenditure limit per head will be considerably lower than that of all other London rate-capped boroughs. At £570 per head, it is £88 per head lower than the next lowest. I want the Secretary of State, who is not in the Chamber at the moment, or his Minister, to take these figures on board and try to reply to them this evening.

because they are fundamental to the needs of the people of the London borough of Ealing as a whole and of my end of the borough in particular.

It was freely accepted by the Labour Government, in particular my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), that my constituency—he will remember visiting it on more than one occasion—had special needs. It seems to me that this has been entirely overlooked in making these calculations. The Government have not taken into consideration Ealing's social needs. The revised offer does nothing to face the particular problems of the borough. This is part of a continuous policy of refusing to accept Ealing as an authority with inner-city characteristics.

As an example, on 1 December 1986, using the Z index to measure urban deprivation, Ealing ranked 10th of the 23 authorities that qualified for permanent status, but it has been refused that status. This is extremely important for the future when we consider the iron necessity of sustaining racial harmony in our borough.

The revised offer meets exactly the Tory opposition's request to bring the rate cap up to the grant-related expenditure and ignores all the arguments put forward by the elected administration. The balance of the council is currently Labour 47, Tory 20 and alliance three. That result, reversing the political line-up on the council, was no accident. The results at the general election in the Ealing, North and Ealing, Acton constituencies have been freely alluded to, but in my constituency I held the ethnic minority vote almost to the identical figure of the two previous general elections.

The revised rate limit will leave Ealing with a budget gap of around £38 million—a massive sum in a single year. Much of the new growth that has been introduced by the current administration since its election in May 1986 is committed and cannot be reversed. Reference has been made to homeless families. Moreover, 140 new teachers have been appointed, and deals have been entered upon—as we heard earlier—for the building of at least 600 new homes. That is a financial commitment, regardless of who started it.

The council does not wish to reverse those and many other achievements. Even if it did, however, it would not be possible to give notice to staff, end leases on property and evict homeless families in time to make the required savings. The sheer impracticality of such action was the principal reason for all-party opposition to the Government's first rate limitation.

The Government's action is designed to force the administration to adopt the spending policies of the previous council—which were rejected by the electorate, when the Tories were soundly defeated at the last local election. The expenditure level now set is exactly equivalent to what the Tories would be spending if they had continued in office with the same policies, and their rate base was the lowest in west London. To achieve that, all new growth would need to be cut.

New and essential services would disappear: for instance, rising-five admissions to schools, involving 80 teachers; restoring middle-school teacher posts, involving 60 teachers; additional curriculum protection posts in high schools, involving 20 teachers; and free school milk in first schools. We would also lose the improved street cleaning service — and it has improved. The council, I am informed, is receiving far fewer complaints. The hon. Member for, Acton can become equally well informed if he chooses. Officials are receiving far fewer complaints than they did when the service was in the private sector.

Other services that would be lost would be nursery nurses in every first school, involving 65 posts, and additional social services workers to protect children and elderly people at risk, involving 27 posts.

I met a woman the other day who is a teacher. Normally she votes Conservative, and no doubt she voted for the Conservative candidate in Acton. She told me that she was disgusted with the activities of the hon. Member for Ealing, North, whose presence in the Chamber is sadly missed this evening, and who has been peddling some considerable myths. He was admonished by the council's finance director — who, I notice from a copy of his letter, is on Christian terms with the hon. Gentleman, so pally have they been in the past. The finance director wrote:

> "If you were, as you claim, largely responsible for prompting the Judicial Review procedure, then that action has certainly severely affected the cash flow of the Council, with consequent loss of interest on balances, and will result in a major hike in Ealing's rate arrears problems."

The council has made attempts to secure more equal service provision and employment practices. That is not surprising, in a borough where 25·4 per cent. of the population live in households whose head was born in the New Commonwealth — which, of course, applies substantially to my constituency. But many myths have been peddled about the council's activities. It is accused of alienating the business community. That is not true. Where I live, the rate level is about the same as in Hillingdon. I do not know what the rate is in Cookham, Berkshire, but no doubt we will be enlightened on that point at some other time.

The chamber of commerce has complimented the authority on its consultative process. I have already mentioned the deprivatisation—an awful word—of the cleaning service. We are also told that Ealing is misleading its tenants about their right under the Housing Bill. That, too, is not true. The council is setting those rights out very clearly in accordance with the law. Eventually the electorate will see clearly the difficulties that the Government have placed on the local authority and they will return the Labour party with a handsome majority when they have the opportunity.

9.29 pm

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate and to speak shortly on rate capping. I have just one thing to say to the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell). People in Ealing had a chance to vote on the 65 per cent. increase in rates in Ealing last year: in every constituency in Ealing there was a swing to the Conservatives and the hon. Gentleman's own majority fell from 11,000 to 7,000.

My constituents will be delighted that the Government are controlling local government expenditure and capping high-spending councils because they, as ratepayers and taxpayers, are contributing to the spending of those boroughs. I have a personal interest as a ratepayer in one of the rate-capped boroughs and as a former leader of the opposition in the London borough of Lewisham in seeing that the expenditure of that borough is kept under control.

As a ratepayer in one of the rate-capped boroughs, I know of the anger among ratepayers when they see the

[Mr. Nicholas Bennett]

misuse of resources, the high staffing levels in the council and the poor services that they get in return for high rates. They are concerned that the council is not prepared to spend money on things which the ratepayers want, but instead wastes it on activities which are not in their best interests.

In the borough of Lewisham, in which I live, there are 1,331 empty properties. We have the 12th worst record in Britain on rent arrears, with 12 per cent. of the total rent roll outstanding—it was £4·1 million in 1987 and that has now risen to £5·6 million. *[Interruption.]* I am a ratepayer in the London borough of Lewisham and hon. Gentlemen should listen to what I have to say.

Let me give a few examples of the way in which the local authority wastes money. One cannot get a copy of the local paper in the public libraries there, yet in the foyer there are certain machines which do not work. Until recently, one could not read *The Times* in the local libraries because it was banned by the local authority. It was only due to the action of my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts that they were forced to have *The Times* back. It is interesting to note that the arts lobby made no protest when *The Times* was banned from some local council libraries.

The London borough of Lewisham has potholes everywhere because the council does not repair the roads as it should. When I went to register as an elector in the borough it did not manage to put me on the electoral register but had to add me to a supplementary list although my application went in before 10 October. The public library did not even have a list of new voters.

The borough council has an appalling record on street cleaning. There is no rubbish tip. People have to take their household rubbish to the Tory borough of Bromley. Wherever one looks, there is a lack of basic services in Lewisham. Instead, the local council spends its money on things such as the campaign unit which costs £300,000 and a public relations department which has 30 staff. It cuts its grant to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, as we see from the London *Evening Standard* tonight, yet it increases its grant to gays' organisations. That is how money is wasted in Lewisham.

Lewisham declares itself a nuclear-free zone and puts posters up everywhere telling people, but that makes no difference at all. It has a women's equality unit, a race equality unit, a community affairs unit, a women's committee, a police unit—all wasted public money in the borough.

In addition, I have just had through my letterbox a useful directory with 140 glossy pages — Lewisham women's directory. I thought at first that it might be a list of available women. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a list of Left-wing organisations in the borough of Lewisham.

Mr. Tony Banks: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I accept that every hon. Member has a right to speak, but it does seem to Opposition Members to be an abuse that an Member who represents an authority that is not rate-capped should prevent Members who represent those that are from speaking.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) has as much right to speak as anyone else, as long as he relates his remarks to the order, which he is doing.

Mr. Bennett: As a ratepayer in Lewisham, I care about how the money is spent. In the introduction to this little booklet, we find—[HON. MEMBERS: "The hon. Member does not pay the rates."] I do pay the rates. The little booklet says——

Mr. Ridley: Perhaps my hon. Friend could moderate his remarks a little, as it is clear that he is annoying Opposition Members. I introduced the order with great aplomb and solemnity, and if my hon. Friend would not say things which so infuriate Opposition Members, the mood of the debate will continue to be tranquil.

Mr. Bennett: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. He will realise that I have a heavy cold and have to speak loudly to be heard.

In the introduction to the booklet, the chair of the women's committee says that the Government are attempting to reintroduce Victorian values, to erode employment rights for women workers and so on. Of course, she signs the introduction "in sisterhood". This glossy pamphlet, produced at the ratepayers' expense, contains only one section of information for ratepayers. In the section on family planning and abortion, the abortion information services are listed but there is no information about Life, the group that tries to help people who want to keep their children. In the section on peace, all the organisations, as the House might imagine, are Left-wing, CND groups. There is no information on Peace Through NATO or any other Right-wing group. The pamphlet, which must have been quite expensive to produce, is published at the ratepayers' expense. It says on the back cover that the pamphlet is what we have all been waiting for.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Will my hon. Friend tell the House whether any of the literature that he received from Lewisham contains any news about reductions in costs in administration or any reference to fewer people being used in the finance department or any of the sensible things that could have been done to help the people in Lewisham?

Mr. Bennett: It does not. In fact, I can quote Dave Sullivan, the Labour leader of the council, as reported in the *South London Press* on 10 July 1987:

"Although we are spending more on services and employing more people, there has been little discernible increase in satisfaction."

On the same day on which the glossy pamphlet came through my door, I read in my copy of my local paper, the *Lewisham and Sydenham Comet:*

"Libraries forced to shut to save cash."

I have described how Lewisham spends its money. I commend the order to the House as a sensible and welcome move to protect ratepayers and taxpayers.

9.37 pm

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): As an hon. Member representing a genuinely rate-capped authority, I am disgusted by the shower on the Conservative Benches. They are wasting the time of the House when we should be discussing the rate limitation order, which is spiteful and vindictive to the people in my borough. For the fourth year running, the London borough of Haringey has been rate-capped and this year we are asked to cut rates by 10 per cent.

Some of the things that have caused us to incur additional expenditure have absolutely nothing to do with

the London borough of Haringey. They are not our responsibility. First, the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1987 was passed after long disputes between the trade unions and the Government. As a result of that agreement, Haringey will have to pay about £3·328 million more than we budgeted for. Hon. Members have alluded to the problem of homelessness. Homelessness will cost us about £3·25 million more but that is something over which we have no control. The North London waste authority, which was set up by the Government after they abolished the GLC has told Haringey that its levy will be increased by 35 per cent. over the 1987-88 rate. That will cost the borough about £516,000. Time-expired urban aid projects will cost the borough some £418,000.

All this extra expenditure is a direct result of agreements or requirements placed on the borough by the Government, yet the Government refuse to increase the expenditure for the borough. We should add to that the fact that, during the past year, we have sustained a loss against GREA of £12·526 million.

Our borough has a number of problems. On the Z index of deprivation of the Department of the Environment, Haringey ranks sixth. However, on just one of the variables used, unemployment in Haringey was 10·7 per cent. when the indices were set up. It is now 14·1 per cent. Under the Department of Education and Science's cluster analysis, 14 per cent. of children in Haringey received free school meals in 1982, but that figure is now 24·4 per cent. There are many other poverty indicators relating to my borough of which the Secretary of State has not taken account.

Finally, a delegation from our borough went to see the Minister of State to try to gain an increase in the expenditure limit of Haringey council. After 22 minutes it was shown the door and told point blank that Haringey would not get a penny more from this miserable Government. It is a disgrace that the Government can perpetrate this con trick not only on the people of Haringey, but on the whole country. However, I advise them that the chickens will come home to roost in the poll tax when people will see, once and for all, what the Government are doing to their liberties.

9.41 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): In some ways the debate has been interesting, but there are times when the House can make an utter fool of itself. To spend only two and three quarter hours dealing with the detailed effects of local public expenditure on 4 million of our fellow citizens — dealing with about £2 billion-plus of expenditure — is an absolute farce. I advise the House that it will not make good television. Whether or not people outside are rate-capped, they will not understand how on earth the House of Commons — 650 elected Members — can sit in this place, talk and appear to make expert decisions about the detailed expenditure of local authorities. It beggars belief. We are simply not competent to do it. We never will be, and we should not even attempt to do it.

Many hon. Members have spoken for all the world as if we never have a local election. I advise Conservative Members that it is not that we do not have any simple answers. In the short time available I would not, in any event, attempt simple answers, and indeed, I should not attempt that if the time were longer, but we have repeatedly challenged the Government and repeatedly offered them an easy passage through the House for a Bill to legislate for annual elections in all areas of local government, yet they will not do it. The Government talk as though local elections do not exist.

As I listened to my hon. Friends and looked around at my hon. Friends who sought to speak, I wondered where, behind me, Tory councils were represented. Of course, there are none. The Labour party is repeatedly returned to power when there are local elections. We sincerely wish that there were local elections in, for example, the London boroughs every year and not just once ever four years.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *rose*——

Mr. Rooker: No, I shall not give way.

We are prepared to meet that challenge.

Several of my hon. Friends have said that the Tory Government desire to ignore local government. Of course, if local government is of a different political complexion from central Government, local government seems a bad thing. However, it is not a bad thing to have local government and national Government of different political complexions. That was one of the reasons for having local government in a unitary state—to divide up the political power. If the political power is not divided up but simply resides at the centre, that leads to a dictatorship. It is as simple as that.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Rooker: I cannot give way, I have to give the Minister a chance to reply. I hope that the Minister will give way, as he will have more time.

Mr. Cohen: Why should he give way?

Mr. Rooker: The Minister should give way because he has to answer questions.

Hon. Members must ask themselves whether rate capping makes for better local government — [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."]. If Ministers think that they know everything and have great deal of confidence, I can give them a warning shot. What will happen when the poll tax legislation becomes law? What are the implication of national poll tax capping? The Department of the Environment does not always get it right.

There are three local authorities on the order for which the figures set by the Government were subsequently changed. They were changed after discussions and representations, but the Government had promoted the original figures on the basis that they were correct. For Ealing council, which has been often mentioned by two hon. Members, the figure went up from 125p to 167p. The Government must have thought that the figure was right when they promoted 125p. Where are the guarantees that they will get it right in the poll tax-capping era? The figures make us wary about what will happen.

The hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) made it crystal clear when he said that the reduction in the rate support grant is designed to switch more of the burden of local spending onto local people. That is absolutely true.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Will the hon. Gentleman give way? He mentioned me.

Mr. Rooker: I mentioned the hon. Gentleman. I wrote down the words that he used, and he can check the record in *Hansard*. It was an honest statement. The hon. Gentleman clearly made that statement. That is a consequence of what is happening.

[Mr. Rooker]

The rates have gone up in many areas, as there have been cuts in the rate support grant. It is a moot point whether central Government should be funding two thirds of local authority expenditure, but it is not a point that we can debate tonight. It is also a moot point whether the figure should be as high as that. We do not accept that it should be less than 50 per cent. and falling, as it is now. That causes other problems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) spoke about Liverpool. Whatever view one may take about Liverpool and its current and past difficulties, its population is about 500,000, it has an infrastructure to service about 750,000 people but an economy that will support only 250,000 people. That is a recipe for disaster for the people in Liverpool. There is no way in which one can juggle the figures to make sense of that equation.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) reminded us that many of the authorities, perhaps the vast majority of them, are partnership authorities. It was wrong to say that if one adds the partnership money to the rate support grant the percentage will be about the same. The needs of those areas would mean that the percentage should be higher and not the same. I can assure the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) that in many areas the cuts in the partnership money have only exacerbated the cuts in rate support grant to make a bad situation worse. That rightly has been described as the ugly face of Toryism. The Government ignore completely the situation in Tower Hamlets, which is a London borough with a unique problem over housing homeless families. It has specified the exact amount of money that it knows it needs as £21 million.

It is ridiculous for the House to try to legislate for the detailed expenditure of the local authorities. Four million fellow citizens are affected by the rate-capped authorities. Frankly, locally elected councillors know a lot better than us about the needs of their areas and they are more responsible so long as they face the consequences of their decisions at the ballot box. That is why we should have annual elections. That principle applies to Labour or Conservative councillors. They are the locally elected people and that is where the battle on such expenditure decisions should be fought. They should not be fought on the Floor of the House of Commons.

Mr. Cohen: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You are the custodian of parliamentary democracy and you represent the rights of Back Benchers. There are a number of Back Benchers who represent rate-capped authorities and they have important points to make in respect of those authorities. How can it be right that those hon. Members——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is a great sadness that not every hon. Gentleman who wishes to be called every day can be.

Mr. Tony Banks: They represent rate-capped authorities.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cohen: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not a point of order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat.

9.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): I am sure that there are many hon. Members who regret that the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) was unable to explain why he felt that the massive rate increase in Waltham Forest this year was justified.

Mr. Cohen: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Chope: No, I will not give way.

Mr. Cohen *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must sit down.

Mr. Chope *rose*——

Mr. Cohen: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that if the Minister does not give way he must not persist.

Mr. Chope *rose*——

Mr. Cohen: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman does that once more, I shall have to ask him to leave the Chamber.

Mr. Chope *rose*——

Mr. Cohen *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I now tell the hon. Gentleman to leave the Chamber.

Mr. Cohen: I refuse to do so.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman does not obey the Chair, I shall have to take further action. I order him to leave the Chamber.

Mr. Cohen: My constituents——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will give the hon. Gentleman one more chance. If he does not leave the Chamber I shall be forced to name him.

Mr. Cohen: My constituents——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I name Mr. Harry Cohen.

Motion made, and Question put,

That Mr. Harry Cohen be suspended from the service of the House.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

The House divided: Ayes 262, Noes 73.

Division No. 188] [9.53 pm

AYES

Adley, Robert	Baldry, Tony
Aitken, Jonathan	Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Alexander, Richard	Batiste, Spencer
Alison, Rt Hon Michael	Bellingham, Henry
Alton, David	Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Amess, David	Benyon, W.
Anderson, Donald	Blackburn, Dr John G.
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*	Body, Sir Richard
Ashby, David	Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Ashdown, Paddy	Boscawen, Hon Robert
Aspinwall, Jack	Boswell, Tim
Atkins, Robert	Bottomley, Peter
Atkinson, David	Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*	Bowis, John
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes

Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dobson, Frank
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Foster, Derek
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gill, Christopher
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robertson, George
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rooker, Jeff
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Straw, Jack
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.

NOES

Allen, Graham
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Hardy, Peter
Heffer, Eric S.
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKelvey, William
McTaggart, Bob
Madden, Max
Martlew, Eric
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Morley, Elliott
Nellist, Dave
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Primarolo, Dawn
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Alice Mahon and
Ms. Diane Abbott.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That Mr. Harry Cohen be suspended from the service of the House.

It being after Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to order [12 February]:—*

The House divided: Ayes 252, Noes 210.

Division No. 188] **[10.07 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Gill, Christopher
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Lloyd and
Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*

Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
John, Brynmor
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Alun Michael.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 12th February, be approved.

Abernant Colliery

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

10.18 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have called the Adjournment. This comes out of the time for the Adjournment.

Mr. Hind: It is just one simple point. Is it appropriate that an hon. Member should deliberately flout the rules of the House——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That matter has been dealt with. I do not think that points of order arise from it.

10.19 pm

Mr. Donald Coleman (Neath): I appreciate the opportunity to raise the matter of Abernant colliery. The recent announcement by British Coal that it intends to close the colliery and Wernos washery is a severe blow, not merely because of the loss of jobs in an area which at present has one of the highest unemployment rates in the United Kingdom, but because the hopes of the whole Welsh—*[Interruption.]*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will hon. Gentlemen and hon. Ladies who are not staying for the Adjournment kindly leave the House quietly?

Mr. Coleman: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, the closure is a blow to the employment prospects of an area with high unemployment, as well as to the Welsh anthracite coal industry. About 800 men will become unemployed as a result of the closure.

I am well aware of a meeting with the men at Abernant this week, when the previous decision to fight the closure was set aside. I understand clearly the reason for it—that the £5,000 severance money on offer will not be available after March. No one can expect men to pass up such a sum of money for something uncertain. The Minister should reconsider the matter. I ask him to urge British Coal to extend the time limit for this payment, as I want to demonstrate that the closure of Abernant is not in the national interest.

South Wales is the only area in Britain where anthracite is mined. It is the prince among coals, being naturally smokeless, and it is much sought after by merchants and domestic consumers alike. It is perennially in short supply. In 1987, this country imported more than 500,000 tons of anthracite, much of that at inflated prices and of relatively poor quality.

In addition, we imported at least as much again of anthracite substitute, often at a higher price. The average cost of anthracite imports was £84 a tonne. That meant that the country's balance of payments was worsened by no less than £42 million last year, simply because the pit closure programme denied men and management in south Wales the opportunity to mine and wash our abundant reserves of anthracite.

For those who believe that all coal is dirty stuff taken by the trainload into English power stations, let me explain about Welsh anthracite. In every respect, it is a clean and prized fuel. It does not pollute the atmosphere with sulphurous and nitrous emissions. It is smokeless and has the highest calorific value by weight of any coal. It is now, and will be in the future, a real and acceptable alternative to the increasing problem of obtaining imports of natural gas for domestic, industrial and public heating systems.

As our North sea reserves run out in the 1990s, so our dependence on imports of fuel will increase. If we do not secure our capacity to mine anthracite now, we will find ourselves in the same kind of dilemma as we were in after the OPEC price rises in 1973 and 1979. We were paying through the nose for imports of vital fuels. The supply of fuels will be under the control of profiteering foreign cartels.

During the final months of 1987 and the early weeks of this year, the coal industry witnessed an all-out assault on the European anthracite market by Chinese coal exporters. The Chinese Government are allowing their coal agents to undercut prices wherever and whenever they recognise the opportunity to capture a permanent niche in an important market such as the one in this country. They are systematically dumping their coal, and their prices, which do not in any way reflect the costs of production and transportation, to wipe out bulk anthracite production in areas such as south Wales. They wish to create for themselves a captive market within which to generate future profits.

In 1987, Abernant colliery was selling its coal at an average price of £66 a tonne, a price that compares favourably with £84 a tonne of imported anthracite. Its best quality coals are generating revenues of up to £100 a tonne; far higher, for example, than those of any pit on the British mainland outside south Wales.

There is no doubt about Abernant having immediate access to huge reserves of high-quality anthracite. Its reserves are not in question. The immediate problems arise from the fact that the pit is going through a period of upheaval and transition. It is shifting the focus of its production to a new seam and a new underground district, and as a result is forced to carry unusually high development costs at a time when output has necessarily been low. All collieries go through these phases. That is the nature of coalmining, and it will never change. What has changed, however, is the determination of British Coal to secure the permission of, and adequate resources from, the Government to enable it to pass through difficult times in order to secure a good future for collieries such as Abernant.

British Coal is abandoning its sane long-term strategy for the regeneration of the anthracite area, and appears to be going for a crash programme of profit generation by closing its deep mines and proliferating its opencast sites. This policy only brings more hardship to south Wales in the form of unemployment, along with resentment, in the mining communities, which see the landscape ravaged, with very little employment resulting. There is no logic in this. It is a policy that is rejected throughout south Wales, and there is growing evidence of public resistance to it.

The Minister should understand the depth of this resentment. He should recognise the anger, frustration and despondency that these policies are causing in the hearts of men and women as they see mine jobs replaced by a scarred landscape and foreign imports. We shall reap a bitter harvest if the Government do not look again at the need to transform collieries such as Abernant rather than close them. The harvest will be higher fuel prices, anthracite shortages and the generation of resentment at the unnecessary tragedy of unemployment.

I urge the Minister to look again at the decision over Abernant and to put aside short-term financial considerations, which must not be allowed to determine this country's energy future. If he does that, he will help unleash the potential of our coalfields, not destroy them.

10.30 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Coleman) for giving me a few minutes of the time available in this Adjournment debate.

The closure of Abernant colliery affects my constituency too, because about one third of the work force in Abernant live in the upper Amman valley in my constituency. Also, British Coal announced that in closing Abernant colliery, it is going to close Wernos washery. It was a bolt out of the blue for the work force there, because for the last 15 years it has been involved in washing the coal from Betws colliery, a new mine in south Wales since the war, so it thought that its future was secure. But British Coal has decided that it will close Wernos washery and use the redundant washery at Abernant. So the knock-on effect for me is about 100 jobs lost in Wernos and the loss of the jobs of about 200 of the Abernant work force who live in my constituency.

The effects in terms of unemployment in the upper Amman valley are quite devastating. Her Majesty's inspector of schools and colleges, a quite neutral source, produced a report on the further education college in Cwmaman, stating that the upper Amman valley has lost virtually all its industrial base, and that unemployment at present is around 50 per cent. overall, with some 36 per cent. of the young people out of work. Those are not my figures; as I say, they are from a neutral source. If the closures go ahead, that 36 per cent. will climb rapidly towards 40 per cent., with the knock-on effect of taking the miners' income out of my constituency.

Over the weekend, I learnt that the average age of the work force in Abernant is, unbelievably, just 32. That is because there have been so many colliery closures in south Wales during the past few years that all the older men have left the industry. When the Government came into office, there were 50 mines there; now there are only 12, and if these closures proceed we shall be down to 10 in a few months. These are young men with families and mortgages, who are anxious to carry on in a working life for the next 20 or 30 years.

When it was first announced, the Abernant miners decided to contest the closure. That was a courageous decision. Unfortunately, when redundancies are involved, the buying of jobs is all too common, and the fight has largely been lost, even in the coal industry. During this week, people have had second thoughts and decided to accept the closure, but the decision has been made under very unfair circumstances. They were told that if they decided quickly — before the end of March — each employee would receive an extra £5,000 in redundancy pay. That is bribery and blackmail.

However, there is a more sinister threat. Young members of the work force have been told that if they go quietly now it will be classed as voluntary redundancy, and there will be a possibility of jobs in other mines. If, however, they delay beyond March, the redundancy may become compulsory. With that kind of threat hanging over them, it is no surprise that the young work force decided to accept the closure.

Even at this late stage, I ask British Coal, through the Minister, to reconsider the decision to close Abernant. The pit is modern; it is only 30 years old. It is not an 18th or 19th century pit. Moreover, as my hon. Friend the Member for Neath said, it has massive reserves of coal. It has become known in south Wales as "the sleeping giant" because of its enormous reserves of high-quality anthracite. During the past few months, the pit has been producing about 90 per cent. of its target output, and its losses are marginal—about £10 a tonne.

Earlier this week, we heard that in 1992 we would be moving towards a single European market. For better or worse, we shall have an industrial common market with France and Germany. Why cannot that apply to coal? The coal mined in Britain is the cheapest in Europe. If Abernant were anywhere in France, Germany or Belgium, there would be no question of its closure.

I appeal to the Minister to think again.

10.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Michael Spicer): I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Coleman) and I pay a sincere tribute to him for raising so forcefully the Abernant colliery closure. In particular, I listened to his well-informed remarks on anthracite. I also listened to what the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) had to say about the Wernos washery in his constituency.

As hon. Members will know, decisions about the closure of individual units are the management responsibility of British Coal. The colliery review procedure, agreed between British Coal and the mining unions, provides for the detailed scrutiny of proposals for closure through three possible levels—local discussions, national appeals and, finally, the independent review body.

The consultation procedure for considering closure proposals is the most comprehensive consultation process available to any industry. It allows all those with a direct interest in the proposals to bring evidence throughout the three stages of the proceedings, including the independent review body.

The Government are not a party to closure decisions taken by British Coal or to the closure procedure, but I suspect that it would be helpful to the House if I were to fill in a few details of the background of this particular closure.

Abernant colliery, as has been said, has been worked for only 30 years, producing anthracite from the red vein seam. It was completed in 1958 at a cost of £10 million and is one of four anthracite mines in the locality. Output has been sold mainly to the domestic market, to the Aberthaw power station and to the furnacite plant at Aberconwy. A little goes for export.

The pit has consistently made a loss for over 15 years.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Like farmers.

Mr. Spicer: We are not debating farmers tonight, we are talking about the coal industry. The hon. Gentleman seems to forget that the coal industry is currently receiving subsidies to the tune of well over £1 billion a year. He conveniently tends to forget that whenever we sit here together. He tends to forget the tremendous support that the industry that he purports to support receives from the Government.

[Mr. Spicer]

Since 1975, the accumulated losses have totalled over £47 million, with annual losses of £7·6 million and £4·4 million in 1982-83 and 1983-84 respectively. So far this year there has been a loss of £3·7 million

In an attempt to bring the pit into profitability. new heavy duty face equipment was installed in the W20 face in September 1986 at a cost of £3·5 million. The expectation was that with that new investment output could be increased on that face to 1,300 tonnes per day. But — this is the crucial point — because of the pit's difficult geology, production has never achieved half that target.

In April 1987, local management advised the men that new shift patterns were necessary to improve productivity and to enable the pit to continue working. After a one-day strike, subsequent co-operation between the men and management resulted in some improvement in performance, but unfortunately not enough to make the pit viable.

In August 1987, at a further reconvened colliery review meeting, the area director expressed his concern over the continuing losses and a new plan of action was agreed with the aim of making the pit viable. I fully recognise the tremendous efforts that were made over the succeeding four months by men and management, which resulted in a small profit of £22,000 being achieved in November. If that sort of result had been sustained, it could have ensured the future of the pit. Regrettably, there was a considerable decline in output in December and January due to geological disturbances in S14 and W20 faces and an ingress of water into W9.

At a further review meeting on 3 February, the area director said that he could see no justification for keeping the colliery open and would be recommending its closure. In addition, he proposed to close the Wernos washery, because coal washing at Betws colliery could be transferred to the Abernant washery, which had sufficient capacity.

British Coal explained that the severe geological difficulties that had been encountered at Abernant in the current faces and in the future development area would result in continuing losses, which would be unacceptable. The options for slimming down production faces or carrying on development alone had also been examined, but offered no solution. For example, continuing development on its own, using 300 men, would have meant an annual loss of £10 million. It would have taken 12 months for the F1 development face to be ready for production, assuming no geological problems. Even then, the likelihood is that production would have been at a loss.

The area director made it clear that the decision to close the colliery had not been taken lightly and that it had been based entirely on the physical conditions of the pit. In the management's view, there was no prospect of an improvement. I note—this has already been noted in the debate—that the men, too, have recognised the reality of the situation and voted overwhelmingly on 16 February to accept that decision.

I recognise the concern of the hon. Members for Neath and for Carmarthen about the effects of the closure on employment in the Pontardawe area. Therefore, in the remaining few moments, I should like to draw attention to the measures that British Coal is taking to mitigate the effects of the closure. British Coal has stressed that voluntary redundancy would be offered, or there would be opportunities for those wishing to stay in the industry to transfer to the nearby Betws, Cynheidre or Tower collieries.

The hon. Member for Neath mentioned redundancy terms and the £5,000 lump sum. That sort of offer is not available in any other industry that I can think of. British Coal's redundancy terms are a matter for the corporation itself and reflect its assessment of the needs of the industry. Even without the current £5,000 supplement, the terms are exceptionally generous, providing up to about £35,000 including the statutory lump sum and cash in lieu of concessionary fuel — depending, of course, on age and length of service.

The supplementary £5,000 was introduced by British Coal as a temporary measure to help the industry to adjust to adverse market conditions. It has always been made clear that the supplement would end on the last day of British Coal's financial year — 26 March this year. I understand that the corporation does not intend to extend it beyond that date. However, I assure hon. Members that any mine worker who leaves the industry on redundancy before 26 March will be entitled to the £5,000 supplement.

Finally, we recognise that coal that can be mined commercially is one of our country's great national assets. I suspect that that is something which Opposition Members and the Government have in common. What is more, we believe that coal will be the fuel of choice for the great bulk of our electricity supply industry for many years to come. So long as it is competitive, which we are confident it can be, the coal that the electricity industry will buy will be British. However, it is no secret that British Coal is having to face extremely tough market conditions —much tougher, indeed, than had been expected even a year ago. It is against that background that the corporation has had to decide to close pits such as Abernant. It is also why a total of 16 pits have had to close or merge during this financial year.

I remind the House that Sir Robert Haslam has made it clear that the number of closures needed next year will be quite small, unless there is sustained industrial action. Perhaps I could say direct to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who has influence in such matters, that he has it within his grasp to assist the industry in that respect. The chairman is absolutely clear that, unless there is sustained industrial action, which will damage the prospects of those pits which are marginal, the industry has a sustainable and bright future.

The Government are backing British Coal with £2 million every working day, including investment in new pits and new seams, which quite often is forgotten. We would not be doing so if we did not believe that the industry has a bright future. It will have a bright future as long as it faces up squarely to the competitive pressures that are growing daily.

The problem with the Abernant pit is its geology, but the industry as a whole has a bright future and will be able to service our electricity industry as long as those working in it accept that it must be fully modernised and competitive.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 19 February 1988

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Debates

9.34 am

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St Pancras): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I did not want to raise this matter last night because to do so would have eaten into the Adjournment debate that had already commenced. Will you, Mr. Speaker, look into the events in the House of yesterday and the day before on the basis that the maintenance of good order in the House is dependent on you and also on hon. Members trying not simply to stick slavishly to the Standing Orders, but to stick to them in spirit as well?

Yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) was one of the hon. Members whose local authority areas were directly affected by the order before the House. During the debate, which was fairly short, more than half an hour—more than one sixth of the time available for the debate — was taken up by Conservative Members who had no direct involvement in the areas covered by the order.

Throughout the debate on Wednesday, which was devoted to the proposed dismemberment of the Inner London education authority, only four Conservative Members who represented ILEA areas spoke. Other Conservative Members rose to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, and they are entitled to do that. However, several Opposition Members who represent ILEA areas were not called as there was not enough time because those Conservative Members took part.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, you ruled, quite rightly, that any hon. Member had a right to take part in any debate. On Wednesday, when two of my hon. Friends from Scotland wished to raise legitimate points of order during the debate on ILEA, you told them that it was an ILEA debate. Therefore, my hon. Friends sat down and did not take up time in the debate.

It lies within the power of the Chair not to alternate from one side of the House to the other, but to choose speakers who are affected directly by a subject under debate. My right hon. and hon. Friends believe that it is extremely important that you should not be trapped, as you were yesterday, by the circumstances that were forced upon you by the actions of Conservative Members.

Opposition Members are moving to the view that either there is a deliberate organised effort on the Conservative Benches to crowd out hon. Members who have a legitimate right to speak, which was characterised during Scottish Question Time not long ago, as you may recall, Mr. Speaker, or there is a case for some increased discipline on the Government Benches — [HON. MEMBERS: "What is the point of order?"] My point of order—[HON. MEMBERS: "There is no point of order."] We now have a voluntary Chair—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. A point of order has been put to me and I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would be brief.

Mr. Dobson: My point of order, which I thought I had made clear at the beginning of my comments, is that order in this House is dependent not simply on slavishly following the letter of the Standing Orders of the House or on accepting your rulings—which should be accepted —but on general behaviour and attitudes. It would have been possible for us today to have arranged for the Labour Benches to be full of Labour Members representing constituencies—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I believe that I understand the drift of the hon. Gentleman's point of order. Will he bring it to a conclusion?

Mr. Dobson: In those circumstances, Mr. Speaker, can you confirm that it lies within your power to choose speakers other than by alternating from one side of the Chamber to the other if you believe that, in fairness to those present, and to the people they are attempting to represent, it would be better for you not to follow that practice? From time to time you vary that practice, particularly during debates on Fridays.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has raised an important point. He should know—it would be right for the House to know —the cause of the trouble last night. The motion passed last Friday, restricting the debate to an hour and a half curtailed the proceedings. Had that time been allowed, I suspect that every hon. Member who wished to be called would have had that opportunity. That is not a matter for me. The hon. Gentleman talks about being trapped. I am afraid that the Chair was trapped in having to put that motion at 10 o'clock.

As to the general proposition, of course what the hon. Gentleman suggests would be possible. However, it might be to the detriment of the right hon. and hon. Friends of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras if I adopted that practice as a regular method of proceeding. I will bear in mind what the hon. Gentleman has said.

May I say, apropos of last night, that up to the time when I returned to the Chair, every hon. Member who had been called from the Government Benches represented a rate-capped authority. Subsequently, I called two other Government Members who made brief speeches. One of them represents a Nottingham seat and was not from a rate-capped authority but he was in order, and the other lives in a constituency that has been rate-capped and I believe that he had as much right as any other hon. Member to express his point of view.

However, I shall certainly bear in mind what has been said by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. I appreciate that the life of Back-Bench Members is one of great frustration. It is my constant desire to ensure that as many of them as possible are called. It would be of great help to the Chair if I had the authority under the Standing Orders to limit the length of speeches. I regret what occurred last night, but I hope that in future the Chair will be supported.

Rural Development

9.41 am

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): I beg to move,

That this House calls upon Her Majesty's Government to pursue policies and procedures to ensure an ordered phasing of development in those rural areas which will need to accommodate a growth in population, to encourage agricultural diversification and promote enterprise in the rural economy, to facilitate the provision of the necessary rural services, infrastructure, employment and housing, and to co-ordinate the work of those various agencies and departments which have a direct interest in rural affairs and rural land use.

I should like to begin by declaring an interest in this subject since I have lived and worked in a rural area for some 25 years and I am mindful of the quality of life that I and many millions of other Britons enjoy. I want to see that quality of life maintained for future generations. I am also privileged to have been on one of the first enterprise agencies ever established in rural areas. I am referring to the Fens business enterprise trust, which has been established for five or six years. I know from first hand experience what great work can be done by such agencies in rural as well as urban areas.

What is rural development? When is a case rural as opposed to urban? For areas outside the metropolitan areas and the conurbations there is little difference between the two. In economic terms, one cannot divorce a market town from its rural hinterland or have meaningful rural policy for jobs and settlement and the rural economy as a whole without taking into consideration the influence and impact of the market towns. Therefore, I take as my canvas for the debate a definition of rural areas to include those parts of the country outside the borders of large cities and conurbations.

Within that definition there is a tremendous variety. There are the remote, sparsely populated highland areas of Wales, the Lake District and many parts of Scotland and the flat, lush, agricultural fen area of my constituency. Those great variations of topography, soil and climate yield distinct geographical sub-regions with a variety of land uses. Therefore, no one single solution is applicable in terms of rural affairs. The emphasis should lie with flexibility. In the last resort, decisions will depend very much on local information, local input and local decision-making.

Within the definition of rural areas there are two fundamental and distinct problems. First, there are the immediate problems, which tend to be on a wider or more macro scale, and, secondly, there are the future problems which tend to be on a smaller scale and more localised. The immediate issues are well known to all who represent rural constituencies. They pertain particularly to those more remote areas characterised by depopulation, inadequate housing, high unemployment rates, decline in rural services, poor transport and communications and a host of other problems.

Very often, those problems are with us in areas that are not so remote. Cambridgeshire has a highly prosperous south and a relatively — I emphasise the word "relatively" — deprived north in the fenland area. We have problems in certain villages in the affluent south in accommodating our young people in housing at low cost. We have problems with housing our elderly. Therefore, even within the prosperous areas there are problems that need a solution. The Government have identified and acknowledged the existence of those problems and, through the Development Commission, have identified and established the rural development areas throughout England. Wales and Scotland are treated slightly differently.

The future problems are not so far into the future that they are not already exerting a strong influence on events. I wish to refer to a recent publication which talks in terms of a population increase in England and Wales of 2 million people by the year 2001. I do not wish to be alarmist, but that figure is startling. Of that projected increase in population, 88 per cent. is deemed to be going to three regions. East Anglia will take 14 per cent., the south-west will take 22 per cent. and the south-east region will take a staggering 52 per cent. Therefore, within the next 13 years an extra 1 million people will have to be accommodated in the south-east.

The conclusions from that evidence are obvious. The pressure on the green belt, particularly the metropolitan green belt, will be enormous. The regions of East Anglia and the south-west will also have major problems in accommodating substantial population increases. There will be pressure on the infrastructure of roads, transport, rural sewerage and housing. There will be pressure on agricultural land such as we have never seen before, and there will be a need for thousands of new jobs in rural areas if we are to avoid commuting on a truly vast scale.

Of the balance of that increase, 45 per cent.—almost 1 million people—will be in the shire counties, outside the south-east region. Most of those shire counties already have well identified rural development areas. In other words, the Government have already established the fact that many of the shire counties have problem areas within them, and here we are seeking to relocate and accommodate within the next 12 or 13 years almost 800,000 new people within those same areas.

The largest increase of any county is that of Cambridgeshire. If the figures I have given are accurate, Cambridgeshire is likely to experience a population increase of 25 per cent.—156,000 people—by the year 2001. It is like trying to locate the population of a city the size of Peterborough within the county boundary. We face an enormous problem.

I see present hon. Members who represent other counties and I shall run down the list of the population increases with which they may have to cope. Second to Cambridgeshire is Cornwall, with a projected increase of 17·4 per cent. Seventy five per cent. or more of Cornwall is identified as a rural development area. Shropshire is close behind, with a 17·1 per cent. projected increase; and more than 40 per cent. of Shropshire is a rural development area. For Lincolnshire, 50 per cent. of which is a rural development area, the projected increase is 15·4 per cent. For Somerset, 20 per cent. of which has been identified as a rural development area, the figure is 16·4 per cent. If those population projections are accurate, we shall face tremendous problems in housing large numbers of people in those shire areas in which serious problems have already been identified.

Running parallel to those problems and across all rural areas — remote and less remote — are the current difficulties being experienced in farming and agriculture. Those difficulties — the CAP reform, the strong

environmental lobby, the new process of stabilisers, the set-aside schemes that are being discussed, and quotas—are putting an increasingly downward pressure on farming incomes. That is leading to a loss of jobs in agriculture and allied industries and to changes in land use and practice. There are 8,000 job losses a year from agriculture and farming in England and Wales alone, and that trend will go up, not down.

The problem concerns not only the loss of jobs in farming today. In normal circumstances, farmers' children could look forward to taking over the farm in the future. If the farm goes bankrupt, we must compensate not only for the jobs lost today but for those of the children of farmers and farm workers in the future. We must plan to create more jobs for that reason alone.

This Government have done more than any other to flag the problems of the rural economy. They should be commended on having brought forward proposals to help to solve the difficulties. They have done so in a very responsible way, by seeking to achieve a healthy and acceptable balance between economic measures and development and a concern for the environment. These proposals are apparent in the new powers given to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in the content of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, in the Farm Land and Rural Development Bill, which will shortly be debated in Committee, in the strengthening of the Development Commission and in the Department of the Environment's publications on new planning guidelines for agricultural land. All those measures seek to offer alternatives to farmers to enable them to diversify into new businesses. At the same time, they protect and conserve all that is best in our natural environment.

All those factors need detailed and thorough consideration. The problems will not be solved by planners alone. Planners tend to react to circumstances; they are not strategists or pro-active decision-makers.

The scale of the issue is so large that even local government politicians will not be able to cope. The Government need to bite the bullet on this problem, and hon. Members need to address themselves fairly and squarely to the problems that I have outlined. It is up to hon. Members to make decisions for the future and for the benefit of our nation.

I shall take hon. Members through the key components affecting rural development. They are, in no particular order of importance, the problems of jobs, housing, rural infrastructure, rural services, land use and planning.

With regard to jobs, there are a number of important trends currently working in favour of rural areas. There is an increasing demand for businesses to be located in pleasant rural surroundings. The new high-tech industries can be small scale and can be located in rural areas without harming the environment. Expanding activities such as tourism and recreation can work alongside measures to conserve the natural environment.

Among those promoting the rural economy and rural enterprise in England is the Development Commission, which has a budget of about £30 million per year. Half that budget goes to small factory building through English Estates. The rest goes to advisory services such as COSIRA and into projects in rural areas submitted by the rural development programmes groups within RDAs.

In many rural areas, however, there is a shortage of suitably sized factories. In many areas, rents are so low that they rule out altogether any speculative building by the private sector. English Estates builds only within the rural development area boundaries. Those boundaries do not include towns with a population of over 10,000, and thus exclude the market towns, which feature strongly in the economy of rural areas. No building by English Estates takes place in market towns, which is a major oversight.

In some areas, the vetting of potential leaseholders and potential businesses to occupy English Estates factories is very stringent and extremely inflexible. When we challenge the Development Commission and English Estates about that, they tell us they are only following the rules set by the Treasury. What happens in many circumstances is that the entrepreneurs, whom we seek to encourage in market towns and rural areas, are not given freedom to set up established businesses. The Development Commission, together with its counterparts in Wales and Scotland, does a wonderful job, but its budget is limited and the scope of its activities is restricted. More is being done to broaden its base, which I welcome. The Development Commission is being expanded to give advice on marketing and is placing consultants in rural firms to help with marketing, finance and other key factors involved in running a business.

That is a significant step and it should be commended. However, there are glaring faults in the present policy. Factory building is way behind local needs and is a major constraint on the establishment and growth of rural businesses. I do not know why we had to lose the small workshop scheme. We must press the Minister for the reintroduction of a similar scheme for the future.

There has been positive advance in rural development areas, but they have failed to encompass the needs and contributions of our market towns. A survey by the DTI, entitled "Small Workshop Scheme", concluded that the private sector supply of factories was three times what it would have been without the scheme. It concluded that there was a shortage of units below 1,000 sq ft in the majority of locations.

Rural development programmes drawn up for the rural development areas by the local committees have shown what can be achieved by bringing together the various agencies—COSIRA, local authorities, rural community councils, English Estates, enterprise trusts and other relevant bodies. That has been a success story and we must build on it.

New housing has been curtailed in many rural areas because of the spending controls exerted by the Government. Although I subscribe to the view that we need to press forward with home ownership and the development of private housing, there are problems in the rural areas for those who cannot make the first step on the ladder of home ownership. Often, public and private housing has been restricted by county planning policies. I welcome the Minister's decision to do away with county structure plans.

There is a shortage of housing for young married couples and for the elderly. The poor employment prospects in some rural areas have encouraged a drift to the towns, leading to the well-known problems of homelessness, crime and other related matters. In many rural areas there has been an increase in retirement and second homes. In many instances, that strengthens the local economy and its social fabric, but it tends to force up the price of land and houses beyond the reach of local people, particularly in rural areas characterised by low wages.

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): I am interested in my hon. Friend's point. Does he agree that it would be a good idea to say to people contemplating moving on retirement that, because of the social, planning and housing difficulties, which my hon. Friend has rightly mentioned, they should think carefully before moving from the areas where they have worked, and where their friends and relations live, into the new rural areas?

Mr. Moss: My hon. Friend makes a sound point with which I agree. Many elderly people move on retirement to coastal regions where they have problems in finding a social life which they can enjoy in retirement. Many towns come alive only in the summer months.

Housing associations make a negligible contribution to solving housing problems in rural areas, and this needs to be redressed. About 20 per cent. of our population live in rural areas, yet the areas receive only 2 per cent. of Housing Corporation money. I understand the priority of urban housing problems, but housing problems exist in rural areas, too. We need to improve much of our private housing stock in rural areas because there are serious problems with substandard private housing. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister, in setting the minimum sizes for the home improvement areas, will carefully look at not setting too high a limit which would prevent small-scale rural improvements being made.

The Development Commission's support for agencies such as the National Agricultural Centre Rural Trust—something of a mouthful, and I hesitate to pronounce the abbreviation NACRT because of what it sounds like—is to be commended, but it needs building on. I draw attention to an excellent scheme, about which I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister is well aware, at Chipping Campden in Gloucestershire, where a new 50 per cent. shared equity scheme was developed and run by a housing association. The key was the denial of "right to staircase"—the right to sell on the full freehold was not allowed in the agreement. This means that 50 per cent. shared equity house can be sold to another couple who will benefit from the same 50:50 deal. All too often in the past, these first-step homes for young people have been taken out of the housing scenario because the "right to staircase" has been exercised and the full freehold has been passed on, so the first rung on the ladder of home ownership has been lost. We must encourage similar schemes.

The amount of agricultural land in use has changed little over the past 20 years. It remains at about 15 million hectares, of which 75 per cent. is used for farming and the rest for forestry and other activities. The amount of land transferred each year from agriculture to urban use has been falling and, contrary to the belief of most of our people, we are not losing massive amounts of agricultural land to concrete. The average has fallen from 10,000 hectares in the period 1975-80 to 5,000 hectares in the period 1980-85.

The loss of land to building has been partly offset by more land being brought into cultivation, but that has been to the detriment of many of our wild habitats. Far too much land has been brought into cultivation and the countryside and habitat have suffered. The loss of land has been offset also by derelict land being brought back into use. The Government's derelict land grant of up to 100 per cent. has helped to reclaim some 7,000 hectares in the past five years alone. There are other influences such as the land register, whereby a register is kept of publicly owned unused land. There are the urban development grant, the urban regeneration grant and the urban development corporations. Once again, the Government are to be commended for these imaginative and effective schemes.

Under the Government, the green belts have increased dramatically. In England they have increased from 1·8 million acres to 4·5 million acres—an increase of 150 per cent. — since 1979. The metropolitan green belt around Greater London has grown from 750,000 acres to 1·2 million acres—a 58 per cent. increase. The green belt around London is equivalent to the size of the Principality of Wales. Cambridge's green belt has increased by 500 per cent. in the same period—and constituents ask me why house prices are so high in Cambridgeshire. The answer is staring them in the face. The Government have pledged that green belts will not have houses built on them, and I suspect that the majority of Conservative Members concur.

There has been a steady decline of public services and local facilities in many rural areas because of depopulation and the economies of scale available in larger settlements, but, as facilities disappear, further depopulation is encouraged, thus contributing to a vicious circle of decline. We all know what is declining in rural areas. Village shops and sub-post offices—often one and the same thing—and village schools are closing. I came across the staggering information that the closure of a village school for about 25 children saves the LEA £12,500.

An interesting article in *The Economist* contrasted the costs of saving village schools with the amounts paid through the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to hill farmers in hill farm subsidy. For the same money paid in hill farm subsidy for 6,000 farms we could keep 1,000 village schools open. I am not against the hill farm subsidy—I say that quickly before I am challenged. I fully support it, but the point of the article was that the costs of the two actions have not been compared because no one has taken an overview of the relative costs.

Medical services have declined as well. The facilities of a hospital in my constituency—Doddington hospital will be severely curtailed. Constituents in parts of north Cambridgeshire, where there is a poor rural bus service and few railway lines, have to travel to see relatives in Peterborough hospital and have to make six or seven changes of bus, none of which connects at the right time. A journey to see a relative in hospital can take a whole day.

The rate bases of rural local authorities have tended to be weak and therefore placed greater reliance on rate support grant. Unfortunately, the old formula seemed to discriminate against rural areas. District councils in rural development areas had a 29 per cent. reduction in real terms in RSG between 1981-82 and 1986-87 compared with a 4 per cent. growth in real terms for English local authorities as a whole. At the same time, those rural district authorities had a 45 per cent. reduction in capital allocation.

Much is said of the role of planners in solving today's problems. We cannot blame planners for all our ills. In the main, they do the best job that they can, given the circumstances. Decisions about where things should go are made by politicians. I hope that local government politicians will take that fact on board. It is not up to officers of local councils to make decisions; it is up to the politicians who run councils. Planners have not yet embraced the new thinking, particularly about the use or change of use of agricultural land.

We do not now need the same quantity of land. I have a copious postbag containing letters from constituents who are trying to develop agricultural land in north Cambridgeshire. Their applications have been totally rejected by planning authorities. Of all the assets that are now held by farmers, the only one that is worth anything is their land—land for development. A more relaxed view of what agricultural land could be redeveloped would help many farmers' liquidity—they could pay off some of their borrowings—and it would assist their incomes. That is a positive help when they are under severe pressure.

For the past 40 years, the principal objective of our planning system has been to control the amount of agricultural land that is taken for development. That policy has been supremely successful. We now need a planning system that will enable us to accommodate new and expanding development. Of course, we do not want uncontrolled suburbanisation. We do not want ribbon development. But, within the context of the new planning guidelines that have been put out by the Department of the Environment, there is a way forward.

What can we do to solve the problems and prepare for the inevitable growth of development? The most critical problem is how to accommodate the projected increase in population by the turn of the century. It must be accommodated by a relatively small part of our total land area. I remind hon. Members that the census of population predicts that, by the year 2001, over 1 million more people will want to settle in the south-east region. If the metropolitan green belt is to be sacrosanct—so far, that has been the Government's stated policy—that growth can take place only within the metropolitan area, that is, within Greater London, or it must be forced to the periphery of the south-east region. That means that it must go to the counties of Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Kent and east and west Sussex. Those areas will have to take those 1 million people. No doubt the Minister is kept awake at night by the howls of protest of those counties already bombarding his ears.

Much has been said of the use of derelict and reclaimed land in inner cities. I have already said that substantial work has been done in that regard. More can be done. At the end of the day, within Greater London there is a limit to the amount of land that can be used for housing. In the past 10 years, London has lost 250,000 people. At the same time, the east has gained 500,000 people. That trend is well established. Neither controls, direct or indirect, nor the planning system will change that well-established trend.

At the risk of being accused of committing a sacrilege and bringing the wrath of many of my colleagues upon my head, I question the inviolate nature of the green belt. I fail to understand the logic of a policy that has evolved over the past eight or nine years, before the full import of population trends and patterns was established, which bans development of any kind from an area the size of Wales. In so doing, it guarantees more high density development and commensurate dramatic effects on the rural environment immediately outside the green belt outer periphery.

Such conflicts of interest are not confined to the south-east. They are beginning to manifest themselves in East Anglia and the south-west. The twin processes of population growth and declining agriculture will inexorably lead to massive changes in land use patterns. We need to be aware of such changes and co-ordinate our planning to ensure fair, balanced and sensible development.

It is no good Hertfordshire cutting by half the anticipated number of houses because it knows that it will have to trade up at a later date. Cambridgeshire says, "We are not having them if Hertfordshire says that they are not having them." So it goes on. Each county is protecting its own green belt—its own rural area—at the expense of others. Somebody must come up with a fair and balanced view of where development must go.

It is not just an agricultural problem. I hope that I have said enough to demonstrate that it is a major problem that the country will face over the next 12 or 13 years. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is responding to farming problems, and is doing a good job in a positive way, but I question its expertise across the range of issues that we face. I question whether it should be the leading Ministry. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) led many developments when he was Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. No doubt he will shoot down in flames some of the things that I have said. MAFF should not be the leading Ministry in this regard.

We have a land use problem. More naturally, it falls within the responsibility of the Department of the Environment. It is not a small land use problem; it is a major land use problem. It will involve massive changes in England, particularly in a line drawn from the Severn to the Humber, which is about one third, if not more, of our total land area. Because the problem is so large, it almost merits a department within the Ministry all to itself—a department of rural affairs or countryside development. It is not a new idea, but it needs consideration. The job of such a department would be to co-ordinate MAFF's proposed measures for agriculture, planning regulations, housing needs, development, the green belt, other land use policies, the work of local authorities in rural areas, the provision of infrastructure in rural areas, and the work of the many agencies involved, primarily the Development Commission.

Because substantial population growth is predicted for those shire counties that already have rural development areas, it seems sensible and logical to promote the Development Commission as the leading agency to develop policies. It would continue its work in RDAs but expand to other rural areas and, I hope, expand to include the market towns that are vital to rural communities. Obviously that needs to be financed. But, now that we are at last embarking seriously on CAP reform, funds can be diverted from agricultural price support and other subsidies to the funding of a rural aid programme, which is just as important and necessary as the urban aid programme.

The key to progress is a radical change in how we perceive current land usage, particularly the usage of agricultural land. The Government have already accepted that we do not need as much land in agricultural production, but they still say that the best and most versatile land has a special importance and should not be built on unless there is no other site suitable for the particular purpose.

Whoever thought up that strategy did not consider the dilemma that now faces Cambridgeshire, which is largely made up of grade 1 and grade 2 agricultural land. We do not have any grade 3 land. We have the best quality land

[Mr. Moss]

in the country, and we face a 25 per cent. increase in population. We will have to house 156,000 people by the turn of the century. Where shall we put them if the Government's policy is that grade 1 and grade 2 land is sacrosanct? Will someone tell me? I should like to know. It should be possible to accommodate small-scale new housing in rural areas and to ensure better standards of layout for the landscape. It is no longer necessary to pack new houses at 20 to 30 an acre. The more land that is made available, the more acceptable will be the development and the cheaper will be the land and the houses that are built on it. People in rural areas object to the forcing of high-density housing into villages and market towns.

I am told that there is a great demand for large country houses with between five and 20 acres of land. Estate agents say that they cannot find enough houses to meet the demand. In the past such houses were built without planning permission. They are now an unobtrusive feature of our landscape. Indeed, much the best environmental husbandry has emanated from the large houses and estates.

I commend to the Minister for his consideration the release of farmland to allow the building of big houses with between five and 20 acres. I realise that we must do whatever we can to protect land from being further developed for housing in future. However, I see merit in allowing houses with large acreages of land to be built because there is a great demand for them and because the people who invest in those establishments will ensure that the landscape is protected.

We also need more land for public open space. If the projected growth in population occurs, we shall need more recreational areas, and they need to be planned. We need more footpaths and more bridleways. An interesting idea was put to me only yesterday by some farmers. If there is to be set-aside, why not have set-aside so that a group of farmers together can have land taken out and reconstructed into bridleways and footpaths and each have the responsibility of maintaining his own section, planting hedgerows and increasing environmental habitat and providing access to the countryside that is vital for the future?

As for employment, we desperately need more factories. The Development Commission needs to have a higher budget to build more in the RDAs because it is not keeping up with demand. We should allow the Development Commission to use its capital receipts obtained from selling some of its factories to build new factories. At the moment, if it sells factories to a new entrepreneur, it cannot spend that money. That needs to be examined. After all, we are reinvesting in the building infrastructure of our communities. We need to bring back the small workshop scheme or something similar. There is a case for allowing 100 per cent. first year allowance on factories up to 2,500 sq ft, and thereafter on a sliding scale to 60 per cent. for factories up to 10,000 sq ft. We need a hierarchy of factories of varying sizes so that as new companies grow and develop they can move as they expand.

We need housing associations to develop in rural areas in the way that they have developed in urban areas. We need to allow district councils to use housing revenue accounts, only when they are in surplus, to build for rent, which I realise is a contentious point—or to use capital within the housing revenue to invest in joint ventures with housing associations. I anticipate eagerly the Government's new Housing Bill and its effects on freeing the private rented sector, but there is a real and immediate problem of the lack of housing for young people on low incomes.

The Minister is aware of the excellent shared equity scheme at Chipping Camden. I commend that to him and hope that more such schemes will come forward. If we are to cope with the growth in rural areas, we need to address the real inadequacies of much of the rural infrastructure. We need more investment in roads, water supplies, flood protection and first time rural sewage. If we are to have settlement policies outside the new townships where many services are provided within the cost of the total development, we need to develop the infrastructure and services and face up to how we can cost them and provide the expenditure for them.

In my region, there is concern that after water privatisation and the setting up of the National Rivers Authority adequate funding should be made available for flood protection schemes—not only coastal protection, but the fenland area drainage system which is vital to our agriculture. I seek an assurance from the Minister that proper funding will be made available to the NRA.

We need an overall review of rural services and policies. Are we being realistic in expecting the conventional perception of village life to exist in the future? Has it not already died? There are already commuting villages. The trend has gone so far that we may not be able to redress the balance. There are those who believe that such trends can be reversed and that the future can be built on the stable, fruitful and productive character of the cohesive social groupings that we call villages. Free from the constraints of economic and market forces determining the location of businesses and industry, villages and market towns have a unique and challenging opportunity.

I believe that there is a future for the rural environment, through new housing schemes and employment. We need to move very carefully in the way that such development takes place, and more than ever before we need co-ordination of the various agencies. I commend the motion to the House.

10.26 am

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss). I congratulate him enormously on choosing such a vitally important subject and on the lucidity of his speech. Far be it from me to tear to pieces what he said. I cannot think of anything in his speech that I wish to criticise.

I wish to speak only briefly and to emphasise one of the points my hon. Friend touched upon. I do not want to discuss the economics of rural areas. We have heard a good deal about that over the years and it is still very relevant today. I wish to concentrate on a new danger to our rural infrastructure, which I am glad to say was a major and integral part of the motion tabled by my hon. Friend. My hon. Friend referred to the alteration in village life over the years. We have had many debates about that in the past.

I believe that the threat to rural structure and rural life is now moving away from the villages towards the market towns. I was particularly interested in my hon. Friend's reference to the importance of maintaining the social

structure of market towns. I wish to stress that point. We have often had debates on the matter and I remember that Sir Peter Mills, who, sadly, is no longer a Member of the House, used to talk about the loss to villages of the various Ps — the demise of the primary schools, the petrol pumps, the parson, the post office, the passenger bus and the pub. I think that he had some more examples but I cannot remember them. Those are sad changes. Many of them happened because of the march of history and the march of time. My great concern is that we must not allow that trend to spread to the small market towns. In particular, I am thinking of what I believe is a new threat which has hit me in the face in the past few months—that is the new threat to secondary schools in some of the smaller market towns.

We all know that throughout the country there is a great surplus of school places. That is one of the great problems facing the Department of Education and Science. Our local education authorities have been told, in my view quite rightly, that they must do something to reduce a large number of those empty school places. However, there is a danger to the rural communities if certain local education authorities concentrate their solutions to the problems of empty school places on closing smaller rural secondary schools. That seems the easy option for them to take, but I believe passionately that it is the wrong one.

In my constituency in the county of Cumbria we have over 6,000 empty school places. The local education authority has taken the easy option by proposing to close several of the smaller rural schools. Many hon. Members who know the Lake District will know the size and nature of the towns I am talking about which face proposals to close their secondary schools. The schools in the four small towns of Sedbergh, Coniston, Kirby Stephen and Cartmel are threatened with closure. Each one is a much-loved, successful school with fine achievements both in their academic records—I monitor those each year—and in what I regard as the admirable behaviour of their children. I quote those schools as examples, but I am sure that all hon. Members could find comparable examples.

I visited all those schools recently to discuss the appalling prospect confronting the people who care for those schools and who work in them. I was greeted at all of them with strong expressions of view that the policy is wrong. Indeed, at one school at Cartmel I was greeted by over 250 of my constituents who had turned out with placards to demonstrate firmly that their school should not be closed. That view was typical of all the areas affected.

The supporters of those schools are especially concerned that, having seen so many village primary schools closed already, the next step now seems to be to close the secondary schools in their local towns. They see that step as a hammer blow for rural life in their areas, and I agree. The contribution that smaller schools make to rural life is enormous. Quite apart from the education provided, the facilities for sport, adult education and community amenities are irreplaceable in most cases. The contribution of those schools to local employment, and the intellectual and social contributions made to rural life by the individuals who work in the schools is, again, immense.

People very much resent the fact that in tackling what is, in fact, the county and countrywide problem of empty school places which, let us face it, exists in urban and rural areas, the solution seems to be to make the biggest chops of all in rural areas. That has to be wrong. At the same time, local education authorities often ignore the fact that, in closing a school in a small town and moving the children to another school, the second school is already nearly full. The education authority must then provide millions of pounds worth of new facilities to accommodate the children in the new school.

The problems of empty school places must be met by getting all schools to make sacrifices. I have told the House about four schools in my constituency. I have told those schools that they should all be prepared to dispose of surplus facilities and that they must find ways to help meet the problem. I believe that all the schools in my constituency that are threatened with closure are prepared to do that. I have also told them that if they are determined to seek to keep open a small rural school, they must be prepared to accept that there may well, in future, be a loss of the wide range of subjects that are offered in that school when compared with the bigger schools in the more urban areas. I told them that they may also have to accept in the future the possibility of a less generous staffing level than at present. All those things are unpalatable, but those schools accept that if they are to continue to exist they may well have to accept such conditions.

As I have said, I guess that Cumbria, which I have given as an example because I know it best, is only one part of the country where this new threat exists. I predict that it marks the beginning of a new trend which may well threaten the facilities in the smaller towns, where such threats have not previously existed. I believe that we have gone far enough in cutting the facilities of rural life, and that the time has now come to call a halt. I hope that the Government will respond to this debate in a way which covers my point about rural secondary schools. However, I perfectly understand that my hon. Friend who will reply to the debate may find it difficult to get deeply involved in education matters because that is not his departmental responsibility. However, I hope that we shall get a favourable response from the Government as soon as possible.

As I have said, people resent the fact that local education authorities may be tackling such problems in ways that hit at the heart of the rural infrastructure. We should not allow that to happen. I am glad to have had this opportunity of bringing the problem to the attention of the House.

10.37 am

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) on bringing this matter before the House today. It is an excellent subject and requires much discussion and thought. It is wide ranging and important, but I shall find it impossible to cover everything as well as the hon. Gentleman did.

I should like to make a few general remarks and then to concentrate on two or three issues that the hon. Gentleman raised which are of particular interest in terms of the problems of planning in rural areas. I am concerned, as I believe we all are, to reverse the decline that we have seen in some rural communities, with a loss of jobs and of housing, young people leaving, schools closing—as we have just heard—and a loss of shops, local services and public transport.

The Department of the Environment and the Minister have stated their wish to relax planning controls on

[Mrs. Ray Michie]

development in the countryside. We must be careful about that. Clearly, the issue of the green belt is important and controversial. I believe that in the south of England the concept of the green belt must be maintained. I do not believe that people want an excessive relaxation of planning control in that area. It is important that we maintain the countryside as a place in which to live and work. That means adopting planning policies to keep alive small and remote rural areas which, if left to their fate, would become, at best, dormitory areas for commuters and weekenders and, at worst, isolated ghettos of the old and the jobless.

In England and Wales there is a wish to see county structure plans adhered to, so that there should not be a free-for-all. However, those plans could do with revision, although they do not need to be overturned. On the one hand, it is important for viable communities to live and work in the countryside, and too rigid a planning procedure will prevent that happening. On the other hand, we must not destroy our environment and our environmental heritage in the countryside.

Planning involves commitment to regeneration as well as to procedures. The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) spoke about housing. It is often ignored that in rural areas there are a great many sub-tolerable, sub-standard houses and poverty that is not easily seen. Many people still have the idea that those people in rural areas live in nice little cottages with roses round the door. However, the inside of many such houses is as bad as anything in the worst city-area high-rise flats.

Too often, plans are made for urban areas by people who live in urban areas who then try to apply them, most unsuccessfully, to country areas. As the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East said, there is urban aid, but no rural aid, for which there is a desperate need. Too often, urban planners see the countryside as a place to drive to and move through and not as a place in which the economy must be strong in order to sustain the people who live there. I shall give further examples.

Planning policies often work crazily against each other. One small example is the tenant's right to buy, with which I agree. When a teacher in a remote rural area with the right to buy his house does so and then retires and a new teacher is needed, there is no house for that teacher. That is an example of how plans can work against each other. I come from the lovely tourist area of Argyll and Bute where there are many second homes. That causes tremendous problems for local people and a great deal of resentment. Those people cannot afford to buy the homes when they come on the market. However, they can be bought by people from the south or from some other part of the country.

During election campaigns, I found it tragic to knock on door after door on islands such as Tiree and to have to ask, "Do you live here or are you on holiday?" If the person was on holiday, I wished him a good holiday. However if local people and youngsters have to move out, we lose not only the indigenous people but a whole culture and way of life, and traditions and worthwhile values disappear. Those people have been brought up in the area and have an empathy and understanding for it.

Secondly, school closures were mentioned. Recently in my constituency and in that vast region of Strathclyde, we fought a long campaign to keep our rural schools. On the whole, we were successful. In Argyll for example, the closure of a rural school tears the heart out of a community and many dreadful things follow. The sub-post office closes, the shop and the petrol station close, and young families do not move into the area. Then we see the death of another little village community.

Then there is the problem of land use and competing claims. At the heart of life in any area, and especially in Scotland, are the farmers and crofters. They are the foundation on which the economy exists. Of course, tourism plays a large part, but the tourist industry would not flourish without the people who form the infrastructure of the area. Farmers and crofters are the true conservationists.

I become worried when I hear Ministers from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food talk about reducing agricultural surpluses and reforming the common agricultural policy. I agree that we have to do that, but I become worried when I hear Ministers say that we must have set-aside schemes, take land out of agriculture and diversify. I am not sure that they realise that, especially in less-favoured areas, we do not contribute to the surpluses. I do not want to see a blanket policy for the whole United Kingdom to take land out of agriculture. Nothing is more ludicrous than ending up with not enough milk in the west of Scotland to make Scottish cheddar cheese for which there is a large market. It would be ludicrous if we started to import French cheese.

My argument, in turning back to planning and land use, is that the family farm is now more than ever the backbone of the industry in less-favoured areas. It follows that its health and vitality are essential for all the rural areas.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): I am listening with care to the hon. Lady's speech. I am curious to know where she proposes that set-aside should be increased if not in the west of Scotland. If it is not to be on her doorstep, where does she suggest that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food should concentrate his attention? I hope that she does not mean that it should be concentrated in Sussex.

Mrs. Michie: The farmers in my area are not cereal farmers. They raise sheep and beef cattle. On the whole, they are not arable farmers and I accept that one of the great surpluses is cereals. The area in which the Minister chooses to cut these surpluses is a matter for him and for the people concerned. I am trying to point out that people in less-favoured areas have to live and work there. We cannot take everybody out of farming, and I do not suggest that.

There is talk of diversification, but trees cannot be grown on the isle of Tiree because they would blow down in no time. Golf courses cannot stretch from one end of Argyll to the other. If that happens, we will lose the people. The Minister should look at the crofting community because it is a prime example of a farm community that has been able to diversify. Crofters have taken other jobs and are now moving into fish farming and so on. That is a good example of how farming communities can diversify.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): The comments of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs Michie)

precisely reflect Government policy — to provide the widest possible series of chances for farmers to choose for themselves whether they wish to diversify. If farmers in the hon. Lady's constituency find that that is a valuable thing to do, they will have the opportunity to diversify, We want a voluntary system, so that farmers can choose for themselves, and not a Government system which forces people to do what we think best.

Other Opposition Members have said that the Government should do more to encourage diversification, more set-aside and more trees in the very area about which the hon. Lady is speaking. It is difficult to get that right because hon. Members say, "Give everything that we want to our people, but also make sure that they have everything that they have now and that the disadvantages of overproduction go somewhere else." There is a great NIMBY policy—in other words, not in my back yard—although I prefer to call it the NODAM policy — in other words, no development after mine. I beg the hon. Lady not to make the issue too difficult for the Government who must make the decisions.

Mrs. Michie: I understand the Minister's comments, although I am not sure whether he has understood mine. I am not saying, "Not in my back yard". Our less-favoured areas are not contributing to the surpluses in the common agricultural policy.

There are so many competing agencies operating in the countryside that their complexity is bewildering. Many of them do not appear to be subject to planning control and, apparently, are often unaccountable. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Forestry Commission, the Countryside Commission, the Nature Conservancy Council and the Crown Estate Commissioners, often generate conflict where there should be none. In Scotland, we badly need a land-water use strategy.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has in the past strongly defended the Crown Estate Commissioners. I am not attacking the people in that body. I have met a number of them. My constituents ask me, "Who are the Crown Estate Commissioners?" I have a dim recollection that their origins go back to Edward the Confessor, but I am not sure about their history.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: They go back to Robert the Bruce.

Mrs. Michie: No, I believe they are to do with the south. The Crown Estate Commissioners came along, for example, to a widow who has a private slipway down to the water. That slipway has been there for 22 years, has been well maintained and is not used for commercial purposes. Suddenly the commissioners started to charge rent for it. My constituents ask me, "Why are they doing this?" Only within the last week the commissioners have raised the charges for mooring boats in my constituency and part of the Clyde. My constituents ask me, "Who allows them to do this?" The members of one club, many of whom are pensioners, suddenly find that they have to pay rent to moor their boats. Perhaps the Minister can explain that.

The Crown Estate Commissioners are involved in fish farming which has been an excellent thing for the economy of the Highlands and Islands, but it now appears to be developing in a haphazard manner. Where is the control and accountability? My constituents tell me that the commissioners are to put a fish farm in the middle of the beautiful and world-renowned Tobermory bay on the island of Mull. Again, my constituents ask me, "How can they do this?"

There is conflict between the Nature Conservancy Council and agricultural development programmes, nowhere more so than on the island of Islay. There is conflict between farmers and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds because the geese are eating the grass. Four geese eat as much grass as one sheep and the number of geese is increasing while the number of sheep is declining.

We require plans for development and conservation. I was glad to hear from Lord Sanderson, Under-Secretary of State at the Scottish Office, that the Highlands regional council is preparing a land-use strategy for Islay. I am sorry that no Scottish Office Minister is present today, but, no doubt, the Ministers who are here will pass on any points which relate particularly to Scotland.

We want flexibility, planning and consultation, but above all, we must involve the local people in land use. Community councils in Scotland and parish councils in England must be involved, and local authorities must be the final arbiters. We must consult all those bodies, but the local people have the understanding and knowledge of what is required.

10.56 am

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I should like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss), on his good luck in coming first in the ballot. I congratulate him particularly on his choice of subject, which is both important and interesting. It is strange that he should refer so much to the Farm Land and Rural Development Bill, which is about to go through this House and which deals so much with farm diversification.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend on his helpful remarks on the green belt system. He stressed the importance that his constituents attach to the preservation of that system. I did not intervene at the time because he was making such an impact on the House. It is all very well to have an extended green belt system and for the Government to appear to be actively promoting its extension, which I support, but the quality and the rigidity of the rules surrounding that system must not be relaxed. There are many extra hectares of green belt land in Britain, but what use do they serve when there are frequent examples of unwanted planning applications being granted for large sites in green belt areas? I am thinking particularly of the green belt around the city of Leicester, where the local council has recently given permission for a large development. Green belts are fine, providing they are strictly preserved and their character is maintained.

My hon. Friend also referred to the need to preserve sub-post offices, as did Sir Peter Mills when he was in the House. He used to emphasize how necessary the three Ps were to village life and to describe a sub-post office as one of the cornerstones of villages and small rural community life. Without it, and certainly without the village school, village life, which has much to be admired, starts to crumble and the country is the worse for it.

My hon. Friend referred to the problems facing sub-post offices in his constituency and we have exactly the same problems in Leicestershire. Many of my sub-post masters and mistresses are uneasy about the plans which

[Sir John Farr]

the Government occasionally revive to introduce credit cards to enable pensioners to draw their pensions automatically from a machine, without having to use a post office. I hope that that plan of the DHSS will not come to fruition because the loss of regular visits from many pensioners could lead to the early closure of many post offices.

What my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) said about village schools is worth emphasising. A small community or large village depends on its school which holds together, if not the village, then family life. It is what living in Britain is all about. Everything that is good stems from village schools. I am sure that all hon. Members would do whatever they could for such schools.

I have been through this problem, and have lost village schools. I even took a delegation to see the Minister then responsible for village school policy. We were fortunate enough to visit her on her birthday and to know that it was her birthday so we took her a large box of chocolates, but we still lost our village school. One can only hope that, by continuing to stress how valuable village schools are to small communities, even if they are a little more costly to operate, we can succeed in retaining them for the general good of the community.

The motion refers to planning for the development of jobs. It is absolutely right to do that. It is right, too, that the House should know that, despite the Department of the Environment issuing several helpful circulars guiding local authorities on how to provide new jobs through farm diversification and projects in rural areas, there is growing evidence that local authorities continue to go their own way. I shall not weary the House with a debate which we had on this subject on 1 February, but what I stressed then has since come even more to my attention.

The Minister's letter of 21 January states:

"Since 1980 we have consistently urged planning authorities to treat applications for the re-use of redundant farm buildings sympathetically . . . Permission for the re-use of redundant farm buildings should therefore be granted, unless there are specific or convincing planning objections."

As I said on 1 February and as other hon. Members have said since, local authorities are objecting to these applications. The Minister gave the clearest indication of the Government's wishes in his letter and the excellent circulars which he has already sent to local authorities have been directly worded. Again I urge him to consider whether the time has now come at least to issue a forceful reminder to local authorities, which still seem to believe that redundant farm buildings permanently out of use are an attractive sight. They simply do not seem to be prepared to cope with the problems of the late 1980s and the 1990s.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East dwelt on housing in rural areas. It is essential to have good housing available, not for holiday homes, but for those who will work and live there, whether on the west coast of Scotland or elsewhere. We want people to have a good job and a decent house. On the other hand, land continues to be used for non-agricultural purposes at a great rate. As my hon. Friend said, that is not happening as quickly as in 1985, but of a total area of 24·4 million hectares of United Kingdom land, 80 per cent. is used for agriculture and 10 per cent. for forestry. Land is being lost at the rate of 5,000 hectares a year.

We are disturbed that it is often the choicest land of the highest quality that is used for housing estates around some of our big cities. A housing estate of 100 or 200 houses is what I would call a blister on many rural villages. Unfortunately, it is a feature of many parts of the east midlands, particularly Leicestershire and Northamptonshire. When those blisters of modern housing estates are attached to ancient villages, obviously, they provide an injection of children for the school and even help to keep the pub going and possibly the village policeman, as Peter Mills used to say. Nevertheless, it has a detrimental effect on village life.

Can my hon. Friend the Minister find time to persuade — if not to direct — the developers and major house building companies that are so active in the home counties and certainly in the east midlands, increasingly to concentrate their developments on derelict land in inner-city areas? That is easy to say. Indeed, there was a document called "This Pleasant Land", which I am sure my hon. Friend knows, produced last autumn by several Members of Parliament who are worried about these developments. It is no use ignoring the fact that some of the current types of development are intolerable. In my constituency in southern Leicestershire, over 1,000 acres are likely to go for housing before 1995. That will mean about 15,000 houses. The land chosen for such development is the choicest green field land, agricultural grassland with a high agricultural value.

While we may no longer need every acre of land for food, it is still essential to promote what I would call farm and village industry. The ceaseless appetite of developers in Leicestershire, encouraged to a certain extent by officials from the Department of the Environment, to submit more and more plans to gobble up green field sites with huge housing estates, is deplorable and to be resisted.

It is much easier for a developer to build on a green field site. He will not want to mess around in some derelict inner-city area, where there may be worked-out services, pipes, old drains and cables to be removed first. Moreover, his houses will sell better in a green field area. There is money in it for him. People prefer to be able to see the village church, even from some distance away, and there are at present no hedgerows in derelict inner-city areas.

"This Pleasant Land" contains 19 recommendations. I urge my hon. Friend, who may have seen the document, to tell the House that he has taken it on board. It highlights some key points. For example, it recommends exemption for five years from the national business rate for newly constructed commercial or industrial premises in inner-city areas. Another recommendation is tax allowances for the repair and conversion of inner-city dwellings and industrial premises. It also recommends the establishment of what are defined as protected green belts beyond the strategic development boundaries in which no significant development would be possible, and it suggests that agricultural land, open space or woodland separating adjacent rural communities should be given permanent green belt status. This excellent little leaflet also calls for the establishment of a national land use survey to determine what land is available for housing and other purposes, and the introduction of a public auction notice system to bring publicly owned land on to the market and to secure its development.

The document makes a number of other points with which I shall not weary the House. I can easily provide my hon. Friend with the leaflet and the report, if he has not already received them.

I know from conditions in the east midlands and Leicestershire that within a very short time many hundreds of additional houses will be built on green field land, which could just as well be built in the city of Leicester or one of the big neighbouring cities. They would then be far nearer to the station, and just as close to the motorway.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East hs done an excellent job. He has produced a cogent and lucid proposal which is full of common sense, and I know that we shall all look forward to his coming first in the ballot again, when we may enjoy a similarly stimulating debate initiated by him.

In his motion, my hon. Friend refers to the need to discuss

"farming diversification and infrastructure in rural areas".

Farming diversification and, to some extent, infrastructure are, of course, dealt with in detail in the Farm Land and Rural Development Bill. I hope that my hon. Friend will be on the Standing Committee, because I am lucky enough to be a member of it. I understand that consideration of the Bill is due to start shortly. No doubt we shall then have some useful discussions, and my hon. Friend will be able to give the Committee the help that he has given the House today. I suppose that his reference to infrastructure in rural areas relates to a series of sites of special scientific interest, environmentally sensitive areas and areas of outstanding natural beauty. No doubt we shall discuss those in Committee. Clause 2 covers in detail farm diversification, particularly woodland diversification. When that legislation is on the statute book—as soon as possible, I hope — the powers will be effective from October this year.

It would not be right to consider the future of the countryside — housing, farming diversification and infrastructure—without saying a word about what could loosely be described as country sports. It is not possible to plan the countryside. Our countryside of today was never planned; it happened, and it will continue to be a beautiful place for years to come. But many sports are possible in the countryside—on horseback or on foot, or, indeed, sedentary occupations such as fishing beside a river or canal. Such occupations are all part of a country structure, and they will not go away. Whether hon. Members like it or not, we must learn when we plan—as far as we are able—the future of this beautiful countryside of ours that we must do so hand in hand with all who are lucky enough to take part in the many useful country sports.

11.17 am

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): First, it is my pleasure to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) on his success in the ballot, his choice of motion and his skilful and comprehensive presentation. Despite the distance between our constituencies, I believe that, some 20 years ago, he had the opportunity to teach my brother in law in Tiverton, 10 or so miles from where we now live, but this morning I have sat at his feet and learnt much.

My hon. Friend made some interesting points about possible departmental changes involving the Minister of Agriculture and the Department of the Environment. I do not think that my farmers would forgive me for biting the hand that feeds them, but my hon. Friend had a point to make. No other sector of industry has a whole Department to itself, and, as the debate has shown, the countryside involves factors relating to a number of Departments—not simply productive industry, agricultural or otherwise. I feel, that my hon. Friend's remarks should be considered seriously.

My hon. Friend pointed out that the countryside faces both problems and opportunities, and referred to the problems facing the children of today's farmers. I must start on a sombre note and make some constituency points.

I hope that the House, and my hon. Friend the Minister, will excuse me for having to leave shortly after midday to attend a meeting of local councillors in my constituency, along with the management of Dairy Crest. As some hon. Members will know, as a result of cuts in milk production, following the introduction of quotas, Dairy Crest is closing five creameries, two in Wales, one in Carlisle, one in Cornwall and one in Wellington, in my constituency. The other four areas all suffer from higher unemployment than my constituency. None the less, 99 redundancies, including those of people who have committed their working lives to the company, is a tragedy for the town, which is now recovering so well from closures at the start of this decade.

The meeting this afternoon is not to shout at the gods, or, more particularly, at the EEC, because dairy quotas are here to stay, and the farming community seems to welcome that. The meeting is to consider how the various agencies, including the company and the Taunton Deane borough council, can provide job opportunities or training for those to be made redundant. In this respect, it is relevant to this debate that the industrial estate at Chelston, close to the M5, seems to be proceeding towards obtaining planning permission without objection, and I welcome that.

While on the subject of employment and in particular of the interdependency of certain types of manufacturing industry and agriculture, I shall refer to a typical product of my constituency. Although my hon. Friend the Minister is not responsible for the Budget, he will at once appreciate the relevance of that event. In my maiden speech, on the Housing Bill, I spared him reference to cider, but today he will not be so fortunate. The cider industry does not contribute massively to the gross national product or the balance of payments, but on its prosperity depends the direct employment of some hundreds of my constituents and those of other hon. Members, and the success of aspects of farm diversification.

The motion refers to the encouragement of farm diversification and the promotion of enterprise. Those who have understanding of the cider industry, and I confess that my knowledge is in its infancy, know that the development of cider apple orchards requires years of planning and preparation.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: And tasting.

Mr. Nicholson: Yes, and tasting. I will simply reinforce what my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) said in an oral question to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 11 February. It is that a discriminatory rise in the tax on cider would, as happened in 1984-85, have serious consequences for employment and for the forward planning of diversification in that industry.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Mr. William Waldegrave): My hon. Friend mentioned a subject that did not come up in his maiden speech on the Second Reading of the Housing Bill. Something else which did not come up, owing to the incompetence of the Minister concerned, who happened to be myself, was a proper tribute to that maiden speech in the winding-up speech. I take this opportunity to say that that was an excellent speech, and we regret that my hon. Friend is not on the Standing Committee considering the Housing Bill, because we would greatly have profited by his advice.

Mr. Nicholson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, particularly as I may not be here to hear his speech. While I may have been deprived of the pleasure of sitting on the Committee considering the Housing Bill, I am happy to say that I shall be on the Committee considering the Farm Land and Rural Development Bill.

It is a sad but not wholly inaccurate reflection on our political system that those who are chiefly concerned with the prosperity of agriculture are sometimes least concerned with that of manufacturing industry, and vice versa. I hope that the two examples that I have given help to bridge this division, because recession in both costs jobs, and production cuts in the United Kingdom, when accompanied by foreign import penetration, weaken the balance of payments.

Another consequence of recession is far more severe in agriculture and the countryside. When an industry declines, it leaves behind it the debris of industrial sites and buildings, but those sites can be, and are, developed for new uses in the way that redundant mills in my native north-west have been. If agriculture were to face a depression like that of the 1930s, we would very swiftly see a dramatic deterioration in our countryside.

In the 1930s, there were relatively few inhabitants of suburbs or inner cities with the mobility to notice or care, but we should soon hear today from the 15 million people a week who visit the countryside if such a deterioration were to take place. That is why I hope that my hon. Friends will encourage Ministers at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to defend our farming interests robustly. That is why we welcome the, albeit modest, measure of the Farm Land and Rural Development Bill. This Parliament sees the Department of the Environment, and other Departments, leading the revival of our inner cities, but if we can at the same time revive our rural communities, we can start to check the inevitable spread of suburbia which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) pointed out in a timely Adjournment debate the other night, threatens to run together such towns as Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell into one suburban megalopolis.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge, North-East referred to the latest Office of Population Censuses and Surveys population projections, published in January 1988. These suggest an increase in population in the south-west of 486,000 between 1985 and 2001, the second largest rate of increase of any standard region in England—10·8 per cent. compared with East Anglia's 14·9 per cent. The increase for the current decade, 1985-6, is also the second largest at 7·4 to 10·4 per cent. Within the south-west, Somerset has the third largest increase, after Cornwall and Wiltshire, of 16·4 per cent. up to 2001, and 11 per cent. up to 1996. That is an extra 73,000 people up to 2001.

Are these new souls to be housed in the larger towns or are they to help to expand and revitalise the smaller towns and villages? That is the key question for planning over the next decade. Until recently, in my area, and no doubt in those represented by many hon. Members, the tendency has been for large towns such as Taunton to grow further and further out, enveloping or linking up with one-time villages such as Bishop's Hull or Staplegrove. This constant tacking of bits on to the town is becoming politically unacceptable to many of my electors, irrespective of their party support. Many of my hon. Friends will have experienced the same factor.

The challenge before us is whether we can ensure that after the present round of planned suburban extensions, which are not without controversy and may not see the light of day, we can contain the spread of the larger towns and concentrate more development in the smaller towns and villages. In this context, like the Taunton Deane council, I was bitterly disappointed last year when the Department of the Environment inspector rejected an application to develop a housing estate in the village of Oake. In the view of the council, if ever there was a village that, in respect of its environment and facilities should take the pressure, it was Oake. The inspector admitted that Oake was not perpetually reprieved, and developments may have to come in future years.

If villages are to see development, it must often be on a more modest scale than some of the planners and the national building firms prefer. My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) made the point about blisters of 100 houses being tacked on to villages. Are we giving small-scale builders enough encouragement to build on more modest plots?

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): No.

Mr. Nicholson: I believe that my hon. Friend is right. Smaller scale builders need such encouragement.

The experience of the farming community with planning authorities which are slow to recognise the wind of change which is now blowing in the countryside should be mentioned. The Somerset and South Avon county branch of the NFU is worried at the number of barn conversions which are refused, and at the trouble with applications, often made for good social and economic reasons, to establish a mobile home on a farm. Often only a temporary provision is required. In one or two cases, refusal was clearly justified, such as a proposal for a barn conversion into a holiday let only 10 yds from another family's home. I understand that Taunton Deane and West Somerset have a better record with regard to granting such applications than certain other districts in Somerset and Avon.

The Somerset and South Avon NFU has given me some fine examples of potentially successful diversification. A young couple have turned their farm into an open education centre for children. A south Somerset farmer has started a motor cycle race track across his farm and a ride for horse riders. My two children, aged three and one and a half are now starting to learn to ride horses. I am sorry to say that the only occasion on which their father sat across such a four-legged beast was in Jordan some 15 years ago. I am convinced that the beast had been left over from the first Crusade. The same farmer grows willows for cricket bats.

Another farmer wanted to convert old veal buildings into an indoor bowling arena, but ran into difficulties with

planners. Many successful businesses farming worms are springing up. They use slurry from dairy cows, which is fairly common in the west country. We are beginning to beat the French at snail farming. It is being pioneered by a French emigré—M. Jacques Aubree—at Rode near Bath. He ran into considerable difficulties with planners about a one acre plot and a 6 ft weavo fence to keep the dogs out. Planners originally refused to recognise snail farming as a proper agricultural pursuit. I am happy to say that the NFU persuaded them to change their minds. I hope that those examples are encouraging to my hon. Friends and the Minister.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East dealt with housing in some depth. I shall not repeat what I said in my maiden speech about the plight of rural communities, particularly regarding young families and the elderly. My hon. Friend put the argument well. I am not sure whether calling on the retired to think again before moving to the countryside would work. I am not sure that we would want to pursue that line. It is more a case of supply than demand, and there might be a case for providing that council houses which are to be sold should be aimed at certain families and should not be bought for second homes.

We need more money for rural housing associations. We need mixed funding and enough grant to provide housing at attractive rent levels. The problem in the countryside is that, on the whole, people have lower incomes and cannot afford rents that the private sector might require without some form of help.

There is a policy, which I believe was started in the London boroughs of Brent and Bromley—so it must commend itself to both sides of the House—which has been practised in Taunton Deane and elsewhere. Discounts are offered to help council home occupiers to buy into the private sector, thus vacating their council homes, which are usually the larger ones such as are in short supply. I understand that there have been 30 or 40 such transfers in Taunton Deane during the past year.

Several of my hon. Friends, but especially my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) spoke about rural schools. There is a dilemma. My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East might be less critical of the hill farm subsidy if he had the odd hill in his constituency. There may be hope on the way for rural schools which achieve a high standard through the Education Reform Bill and its proposals about admissions. I believe that it would be possible for rural schools such as Nynehead and Langford Budville in my constituency, which are fairly close to Wellington, and which are of a high standard but are well below capacity, to attract children from a wider area because of their excellence. Legislation may help rural schools in that respect.

I pay tribute to my namesake, my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) who has taken up cudgels about sub-post offices and so-called community post offices far more vigorously than I. She has an extensive rural constituency. I have corresponded with the Post Office, and I am not entirely happy with the present state of play. I proposed that it might make its offer of limited hours of work, and therefore limited income, voluntary so that if there was difficulty finding somebody, somebody could run a sub-post office full-time or part-time according to their needs.

I am afraid that I had the usual and understandable reply about the cost of keeping rural sub-post offices open. It was admitted that the limited hours option would operate as sub-post offices became vacant. The Post Office has, however, confirmed that its policy is to keep more sub-post offices open. My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West told me last night that that policy has been successful and that some 40 offices which might have closed have been kept open. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will watch that matter closely. I hope that we shall resist strongly the closure of rural sub-post offices by the back door, as was attempted a few years ago.

I have tried to draw attention to several of the factors which affect the development of the countryside. None of us wants a dying countryside through the decline of agriculture or the departure of population, but nor do we want a summer holiday weekend cottage countryside, with a part-time population. With new technology, more people will find it possible to work at least part-time from many parts of the country. They do not have to be stuck from 9 am on Monday to 5 pm on Friday in an office a few milies to the east of here.

That offers great hope to the countryside and its schools, post offices, shops and all the enterprises that I hope will be developed there. Of course, it will create social changes and difficulties with people from far away coming into a settled traditional community. But those who complain about that in my constituency and elsewhere should consider the traumatic changes in the inner cities during the past 30 years. Our compatriots who live there have seen vast tracts of the cities demolished and often rebuilt in an unsatisfactory style and large areas of them settled by people from the Commonwealth, which has caused great tensions.

I commend my hon. Friend on his choice of subject. This has been an excellent debate so far, and I am sure that it will so continue.

11.40 am

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I welcome the debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss), who had the good fortune to win the ballot and the good sense to choose this subject. It is a special pleasure to take part in the debate because about a year ago I visited my hon. Friend's constituency to speak to the Conservative association and he was kind enough to come to Wisbech on an extremely cold winter day when the wind, as is usual up there, was coming straight from the Urals. A year later, we have a sunnier day, which is perhaps due to his benevolent influence on his new constituency.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning is here to reply to the debate. He has shown his interest in and concern for rural housing, and I shall concentrate on its problems during my speech. My hon. Friend will appreciate the problem of rural housing even in — or perhaps because it is in — a constituency so close to London. He has said that the Housing Bill may not solve rural housing problems and that they should be tackled in their own right at some stage. I hope that this debate will push the matter further up the agenda.

We have heard today, and it is clear to people inside and outside the House, how much Britain's countryside has changed during the past few years. Only this week, we

[Mr. Mark Wolfson]

had the latest stage in negotiations on the common agricultural policy. The British farming industry so effectively fulfilled its post-war brief that the result is farm surpluses in Britain and in Europe as a whole. The need to cut the subsidies which create those surpluses means that change in the rural economy is bound to proceed faster in the future.

The economic prosperity of the countryside, which hon. Members who have spoken in the debate want and which those who live there wish to enjoy, depends on social well-being. New businesses and jobs cannot be sustained in the countryside without schools, shops, transport, libraries and, critically, affordable housing. The lack of such affordable housing is a great problem. More and more people, in addition to the young, the elderly and the less well-off, find it increasingly difficult to live and work in rural areas. I shall discuss the problem in more detail and give the House some hard information.

The rented sector, public and private, has all but disappeared and owner-occupation has been pushed beyond the reach of many people who live in rural areas. New housing that is built in villages is usually detached, more expensive, executive-style houses or retirement bungalows. To be profitable for the developer, small starter homes must be built on a large scale. But to fit in with village life and not to create blisters on the edge of villages we need small-scale development of houses that people can purchase from incomes derived from rural jobs, and those incomes will not be high.

Housing associations have not ventured far into our villages. They are largely urban-based and have not yet met all the needs of the towns and cities. But in about eight counties rural housing associations have been established to build for rent in small villages. They have harnessed the efforts of parish councils and some appear to be working well. I commend further similar developments to the Government. Those schemes have demonstrated the extent of the hidden need that is revealed when the people living in rural areas realise that there is a chance that their housing needs will be met. More of them are saying, "This is where I want to live, but until now I have seen no hope of doing so." Their need has not been fully perceived.

Shared ownership housing, where someone purchases 50 per cent. of the equity and pays a subsidised rent for the remainder, could be developed much more in villages. That form of tenure accepts the values which are dictated by the market. It enables people on lower incomes to become part-owners. But the Department of the Environment sets unrealistic values for those houses, and it has not yet been possible to design houses which the district valuer could place within the lower Department of the Environment limits. I hope that the Minister will answer that point. Another problem with shared ownership is that the subsidy required to keep rents low carries with it a Department requirement that the occupier must be given the right to staircase — the chance to progress to full ownership. If that happens, the house ultimately becomes part of the privately owned sector and can no longer be used as low-cost housing reserved for local people.

I want to consider important statistics that will back up my point. In October 1987, the Association of District Councils published a research paper from the Bristol School of Advanced Urban Studies, which showed that only one third of working people—and I mean people in work, the real sense of working people, not the pejorative sense used by others — in the south of England could not afford to buy their own homes. There was a great need for rented housing in the non-metropolitan areas.

In the three northern counties, very few households in work appeared to be unable to finance house purchase in 1986. The survey showed that the position had been much the same in 1982-83. The picture in the midlands, according to the survey, was less clear. Slightly more households were unable to purchase and the position had deteriorated between 1982 and 1986. In the south, and in particular in Essex and Hampshire, substantial proportions—up to one third—of households in work could not be expected to purchase at prevailing prices. That proportion had doubled between 1982 and 1986. That does not surprise anyone. We are all aware of the pressures and my figures back up what is happening.

In spite of the more favourable incomes and general prosperity in the south and because of the particular expression of the north-south divide in house prices, there is a substantial problem of access to the mainstream housing tenure of owner-occupation in southern rural areas.

I want to suggest several ways in which greater impetus can be given to solve some of the difficulties. Obviously far more must be done to help people on lower incomes who need housing in the areas to which I have referred. I have already referred to the need to discover the extent of the real need. District council lists do not always provide an accurate indicator of the housing needs in rural areas. The councils are not looking ahead at ways in which to deal with the problem. As local housing planning authorities, councils should undertake systematic surveys of local housing need to reveal the true picture. They should then produce clear strategies for meeting those needs within their own development plans or their housing investment programmes.

I also suggest that district councils should be allowed to expand their housing programmes in rural areas and in particular to provide small numbers of dwellings suitable for the elderly. It is enormously important to elderly people that they should be able to continue to live, so long as they are physically able, in their home village. It is very traumatic for them to be moved away. They are more likely to receive neighbourliness and family support if they can remain in their own village.

Local authorities should work more closely with private developers, self-build groups and others to increase the housing stock. It is crucial that discussions should take place within the villages between the local authority, the housing developer or the self-build group to address the reasons for wanting to develop a small group of houses and so produce a scheme to assist villagers on low incomes to obtain housing. The anti-argument to developments in so many villages — I hear this all the time from constituents in my rather comfortable area — is that when the houses are built they will be bought by well-off people from outside. The people who live in the villages have proper consciences about the local people they know and like and they want their children to continue to live in those villages in which their parents have been fortunate enough to live. If we could show that the building and financing arrangements would ensure that houses are available for local people, most of the anti-argument to

development would disappear. If it does not disappear, we can give people a very bad conscience and that could be no end of a help to achieving a positive decision to allow development.

Although I am a strong supporter of the Government's aim to sell council houses to tenants—and that has been exceedingly successful in towns and cities—that aim has produced a real problem in some villages—a problem which, clearly, came out of the woodwork during the election. I called on satisfied parents who were delighted at the opportunities that had been provided for them but who were worried about their children being able to stay in the village as they had done.

We need a programme that takes us beyond the present stage of merely selling council houses. I suggest that local housing authorities should be permitted and encouraged by the Government to spend a proportion of the proceeds from the sale of council houses—certainly more than the present 20 per cent.—on meeting current housing needs in their area. The Treasury must be pressed to take a new view of the problem and to give the social priorities about which we are talking a higher profile in its considerations.

Those are the main points that I wished to make. I could have covered many more. At this stage the rigour of key settlement policies needs to be examined with a view to allowing more organic growth of settlements and, hence, the survival of some of the key services and of the social balance within communities. Planning policy needs to be flexible enough to ensure that local needs for housing or jobs can be met. Where substantial growth is contemplated, the scale of development must not be such as to swamp the services or the social structure of a settlement or to damage significantly the visual amenity of the countryside.

The development in rural France is interesting. There are so many more small builders who build individual houses on village plots that have had the infrastructure provided by the local authority. As a result, there often seems to be a better fit of small-scale development with the existing environment. In this country, all too often the big boys are interested only in large-scale developments.

We have all heard—I am sure that it will continue—the way in which hon. Members attach importance to the maintenance of rural services. There has been some success in halting the decline of shops, post offices, surgeries cottage hospitals and bus services. To a large extent, rural post offices are now protected. Proposals to charge for school transport have been withdrawn. There has been an encouraging growth in community-based services such as community shops, parish minibuses, community newsletters, village halls being used for a multitude of purposes and there is more parental involvement in the running of primary schools.

However, there is still a continuing decline in many rural services that are run by public agencies and commercial firms. We all agree that the retention and strengthening of services in villages remains a fundamental objective. That includes the encouragement of self-help and co-operation. Rural communities must not expect to sit back and let things be done for them. They are entitled to the same level of statutory provision as everyone else in the country, but they will have to be ready to put forward their own views and to supplement the publicly provided services such as those that volunteers and community enterprises can provide. There is no lack of willingness to do that among people in villages. It is one of the attractive sides of village living.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling)—how nice it is that he retains the old name of Westmorland in the description of his constituency—spoke about the problem of secondary schools possibly being closed. I give him my full support in the points he made because I know his area of the country intimately. Because of my link with Cumbria, may I give an unrepentant puff to a project in my right hon. Friend's constituency which is known and supported by him. It is run by Brathay Hall Trust at Ambleside. It is a development training centre with which I have been involved for many years and of which I am a trustee. It is accredited to the Manpower Services Commission. Part of the wide-ranging work that it has done over the past 18 months has been to provide for 40 people—next year it is planned that it will provide for 80 people—a training programme to enable them to get back into work and, in many cases, to be self-employed. Its approach is to emphasise the ability of the individual, to encourage his or her self-confidence and ability to seek out the skills and skilled training necessary to obtain work in their area.

It has often found that unemployed people in rural areas do not necessarily know where to start. The Government have provided many of the opportunities and agencies at which they can obtain the necessary skilled training, but those people do not always receive personal support to give them the encouragement and self-confidence to seek that training. In its first year of operation the course has found work for 90 per cent. of the people attending or has encouraged them to make work of a profitable nature for themselves.

I hope that hon. Members will not feel it inappropriate for me to conclude my remarks by talking about how support is needed for individuals living in rural areas and how the Government are providing, through the Manpower Services Commission, specific tutorial support training for people to enable them to develop an effective and fulfilling life at work in their areas.

12.2 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I am pleased to be able to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this point of the debate and to follow the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson). I agree with almost everything that the hon. Gentleman said. It is always a source of surprise to me—given the hon. Gentleman's remarks—that we do not see him in the Opposition lobby more often than we do.

This is an important debate about rural areas and the lack of services in them. It is a debate to which the central thrust of Government policy cannot be applied because rural areas will always be at a disadvantage. Rural areas will always need extra help because the market cannot be left to look after them.

I shall go through some of the services that need to be considered. With regard to housing, the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) said that the provision of council housing should be aimed at particular families. The hon. Member for Sevenoaks mentioned how difficult it is to keep local people and families in rural areas because of the difficulties that they face obtaining a house. The logic of these problems leads one to say that every local authority should have a minimum amount of council housing that it can rent to local people.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): So that the hon. Gentleman is not under any misunderstanding, I should tell him that I represent a 2,000 sq mile rural constituency. The sale of council housing has not changed anything because the people who bought their houses would not have moved out of them anyway. The argument is how we provide houses for those who wish to stay. The fact that council houses were let by the council or bought by the people living in them has changed nothing.

Dr. Marek: The hon. Gentleman is fortunate, but in many other places, especially small villages and rural areas, council houses have been sold, only to be put on the market as soon as possible. The statistics show this, although I do not have them with me. The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) represents an area that is very far from London, but those of us who live nearer to the rich parts of the United Kingdom know of the constant complaint of local councils, whether Labour or Conservative, that they wish they had some council houses to allocate to local families who cannot afford to buy. Those families have no chance of staying in the area and have to move out into bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Young married couples have to live in the front television rooms of their parents' houses.

This is a serious problem, and there should not be any dogma about it. I do not object to people owning their own house. I would encourage it every time. The hon. Member for Sevenoaks said that there should be incentives to encourage people in rural areas to buy their own houses, and he went through the matter in detail. I am not against that, but there should be a stock of council housing at the disposal of local authorities so that they can properly look after their areas.

It is a pity that the Conservative party considers this as a matter of dogma. Conservative Members say that they are concerned about housing, yet they troop through the Division Lobby—I do not know whether they are just in awe of their mistress or whether they do not realise the illogicality of their case—to exacerbate the problem. I have seen this repeatedly since I was elected to the House in 1983.

The previous Secretary of State for Wales, who has now gone to the other place, issued a circular on executive housing in the Principality—not for the people who cannot afford to buy their own houses. He thought that there was a demand for executives and executive housing in the Principality. Of course executives want their houses on green field sites. The matter was referred for consultation. Every local authority and almost every body in Wales, with the exception of the Land Authority for Wales and perhaps two other groups, said that there was no extra demand for, or perceived shortage of, executive housing in Wales, whether in the rural areas or elsewhere. That circular is still in existence.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): It may well be that the Welsh Office is seeking to modify that circular. Does my hon. Friend agree that, apart from being a major intrusion into normal planning law, the concept appeared to be half-baked, as though it arose from, say, a weekend conversation at a golf club or in a chamber of commerce? There was no evidence seriously to suggest that executives had difficulty in finding appropriate homes. It is especially puzzling that the Welsh Office was going ahead with the executive homes idea while selling off council houses and reducing the flexibility in the countryside that a supply of council houses provided.

Dr. Marek: My hon. Friend makes the point well, and I agree with him. There need to be second thoughts about that circular.

An adequate stock of housing should be available to local authorities——

Mr. Anderson: And to housing associations.

Dr. Marek: —and to housing associations—to look after their people in the rural areas. Planning authorities are usually conscious of this need. I know a number of members of various local authority planning committees who are constantly concerned about being able to look after their communities. They are worried. They know that if they can get money to build council houses in rural areas for families who need them, after about four years huge capital gains will be made. Such houses will probably be sold as second homes and be used for purposes other than the one for which they were originally built.

The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) is shaking his head.

Mr. Bill Walker: I represent north Tayside, Pitlochry, Aberfeldy, Dunkeld, and all the beautiful highland glens. If anyone is looking for a beautiful highland home, one would have thought that there would have been substantial evidence of it. There is no evidence.

Dr. Marek: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says. He must visit my constituency and other parts of rural Wales. He will find a different story.

Mr. Anderson: Because it is close to Birmingham.

Dr. Marek: It is close to Birmingham, but it is much closer to London. My hon. Friend and I speak from experience within our own areas.

I am not trying to pull the wool over hon. Member's eyes. It is a serious problem throughout almost all of Wales.

To put it bluntly, the Government's policy is to give local education authorities as little money as possible. If local education authorities were to paint schools and provide decent pupil-teacher ratios, there would be such a great grant holdback that they would probably cease to have any grant at all, or at least they would be severely penalised for trying to provide a proper service. It is probably accepted throughout the country, if not by hon. Members, that local education authorities have a great deal of difficulty in doing their work properly, with the result that there is a move to try to close small rural schools. That is sad. In many cases, small rural schools are the lifeblood of communities. I accept that it is difficult to justify keeping open a school that has perhaps seven, eight or nine children. As a society, we should be able to say that a primary school with 15 or 16 pupils deserves to be kept open. Such a school would have a good pupil-teacher ratio.

In urban parts of my constituency, pupil-teacher ratios are high. Certainly, the county of Clwyd has one of the worst pupil-teacher ratios in the country. It is probably the worst in Wales. I do not blame it for that; it has many difficulties. Small schools should be taken into account. A low pupil-teacher ratio in one town should not result in an

adverse pupil-teacher ratio in a neighbouring town. It is a problem, and the Government have not faced up to it. I hope that the Minister will say something about it.

The closure of some secondary schools causes problems with regard to children travelling to school. It is a good idea to have sixth form colleges or centres of tertiary education. However, it involves travel. Tertiary education centres should be sited so that travel is not excessive. Of course, it depends on how one defines efficiency. Some Ministers will say that they want as few as possible, because it will save costs and teachers, never mind that pupils have to travel 20 or 30 miles each day. That is wrong. We must examine the matter carefully, with a view to providing a service to all parts of the rural community, so that children travel the minimum necessary distance.

I have heard Conservative Members talk about post offices. It is a good social service. There is a post office in almost every village. No matter where one lives, letters are delivered to one's house. What is more, a first class letter costs only 18p. It will be interesting to see what the Government will do when they reconsider the Post Office's monopoly. If they lift the monopoly from the Post Office, will they tie one hand behind its back and allow cowboys to cream off the easy meat and the rich pickings in the City yet starve the Post Office of funds to provide a proper, comprehensive system for the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Anderson: The comprehensive service is not the only concern. There is also concern about a difference in postal rates between inner cities and remote rural areas, which necessarily will reduce the quality and attractiveness of life in rural areas.

Dr. Marek: My hon. Friend anticipates exactly what I am about to say. If the Government do not tie one hand behind the Post Office's back and allow it to compete, it is absolutely certain that the letter rate to rural areas such as Pitlochry will increase to £1 a letter. I shall be very surprised if the rate will not be £1 a letter in my constituency of Wrexham. The hon. Member for Tayside, North shakes his head. I hope that I am not being rude when I suggest that he thinks carefully and makes appropriate representations to the Prime Minister before anything is done to break the Post Office monopoly.

There would be no payments by the Post Office to sub-post offices to keep them open. The Post Office will say that anyone who wishes to provide a service will have to pay the Post Office for a franchise. If that happens, how many local village post offices in rural areas will be lost?

Many Conservative Members are concerned about postal services and about the ability of local post offices to carry letters to and from any address in the United Kingdom. They should think it through carefully before they troop through the Lobby and vote for yet another privatisation measure that will be put before the House in the next Session or the one after.

I should like to say a few words about transport, which is a difficult and serious problem in many rural areas. It is a problem that has to be faced by ordinary working people who do not have a lot of money, and by the unemployed, who suffer most. It does not affect people who have houses in rural areas as second homes or who live in rural areas because their salaries are large enough to pay for two cars or a chauffeur, and can work in a city but live in convenient rural areas. The problem affects people who are not rich and do not have big salaries, and, after housing, it is one of the most serious problems in rural areas.

More money needs to be spent on rural roads. Not much has been said about the roads, but many of them are neglected. There is an inadequate programme for the upkeep of roads. I do not blame the county councils and the transport authorities because they have limited money and have to make political decisions about where it is spent.

It is easy for them to decide not to upgrade or resurface a particular country road this year, and to say that it will have to last for another year, hoping that the winter is not too bad. It is a great pity when that happens, and that we do not have more improvements in some of the black spots on the A roads in the United Kingdom.

I speak with first-hand knowledge of the road system throughout Wales and of quite a few of the roads in rural areas in other parts of the United Kingdom. A great deal of money easily could be spent on improving sections of the roads which must have caused many thousands of deaths during the preceding years.

As for the railways, there are not many railways in rural areas after Beeching. We need many more rural railway stations. We need to get away from the insane idea that money spent on carriages and engines is capital and therefore must be used. Capital spent on engines and rolling stock is used if it is waiting in any particular place just to take account of any mishap that might occur. An engine could, for example, break down or something might go wrong with another train. British Rail should be able to say, "We have a spare engine 15 minutes' away. We can get there and get passengers on their way to their destinations." If something goes wrong on the line from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth the chances are, especially if it is a local train, that the nearest spare engine is in Bescot which, as we all know, is near Birmingham. It will probably take anything from one and a half to four hours for another engine to reach Aberystwyth. British Rail is aware of such problems, but the facts show that when such things happen, passengers are inconvenienced, not just in a minor way and not even in a moderately major way. They may have to wait two or three hours or the whole train may be cancelled in which case they have to wait four or five hours for the next train. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) will confirm that on the central Wales line there are only four services a day each way between Llanelli and Shrewsbury——

Mr. Anderson *indicated assent.*

Dr. Marek: Yes, it is something like that. That service is not of great use to the local population and there should be much more frequent services. I know that that would cost money and that it would not be considered efficient by the Government, but it is important in rural areas.

As I have already said, we cannot let the market dominate the rural areas because those areas would die if that happened. We must provide for those areas and, as a society, recognise that we have a duty to ensure that a minimum level of proper services is available to all our citizens, wherever they live.

I know that time is getting on so I shall pass quickly to my next subject. The price of petrol is another problem. When will the Government insist to the petrol companies

[Dr. Marek]

that the price of petrol should, if anything, be cheaper in rural areas than in urban areas? For far too long those who have to travel to work by car, or who share cars, have had to pay a premium for travelling longer distances to work. *[Interruption.]* I know that the problem is not as bad as all that and that different figures have been produced by different organisations, but there is no argument whatsoever for having higher-priced petrol in rural areas.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman has just said that there is no argument whatsoever for having higher-priced petrol in rural areas. The argument is that it costs more to get that petrol to those areas. I have now listened to a whole catalogue of various things that the hon. Gentleman wants done—all of them costing money—but the House has not yet been given a single example of where the hon. Gentleman will get the money. Those things will only mean higher taxation for my rural constituents who do not want higher taxation.

Dr. Marek: There we have the naked voice of Thatcherism. Of course we want more money for rural areas; there is no question about it. As the Minister knows, farming could not survive if money was not provided for the farmers and the rural areas to enable them to undertake their very necessary functions.

Mr. Anderson: I know that my hon. Friend is about to give this response: It comes ill from those who are constantly saying that all is now well economically and that the Chancellor has £x billion to give away, to say that necessarily there must be increased taxation if the quality of rural life is to be improved by additional public expenditure as my hon. Friend has outlined.

Dr. Marek: My hon. Friend is quite right. In a few days' time, on the Ides of March, we shall have the Budget. Figures have shown that the Chancellor will give away anything up to £11 billion — *[Interruption.]* Yes, he could have about £11 billion. That is the top estimate that I have seen. However, he will probably be cautious and give way perhaps £4 billion or £5 billion. Although this is off the subject of the motion, I hope that he will give £2 billion to the National Health Service. By all means let him lower the rate of taxation from 27p to 25p, provided that he does those other things. The Chancellor has the money this year to give extra money to the rural areas to provide decent housing, education and transport. I am surprised that the Minister laid himself open to such an obvious reply to his initial criticism, and I hope that he thinks about it. The rural areas cannot survive on their own. They need our help and it is our duty in this House to make sure that they get that help.

In terms of the common agricultural policy, I hope that the Government will not sell out British farmers. I hope that, if stabilisers are placed on sheepmeat, it will be done on a Community-wide basis. It is vital for our rural areas that sheep farmers are able to compete throughout the Community. For that reason stabilisers must not be placed on the United Kingdom alone. I hope that I have Conservative support on that point even if I do not have such support for some of my other points.

Local planning authorities look after the general interests of the rural community. I suspect that the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) was annoyed about my local authority turning down a plan for a motorcycle race track. I can understand why that race track was not allowed. The factors to be considered are where it was to be located and whether it would annoy people. I am quite confident that planning matters should be left to representatives elected by local people. There is far too much interference by central Government who tell local authorities what they should and should not do.

This is an important debate. Far too often rural areas are left out of deliberations in the House and I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak in this debate. Even if Conservative Members do not agree with some of the points that I have made, I hope that they will think about what I have said. Perhaps they will admit that there is at least a case to be argued even if at the end of the day we agree to disagree.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Speeches have been rather long and may prejudice some hon. Members who have been here from the beginning of the debate and wish to take part.

12.26 pm

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): I listened attentively to the speech of the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and could not help thinking that it would be a bad thing for Britain if he were ever to run a business and took into it his ideas of confusing capital and current accounts. I was left with the impression that the hon. Gentleman could not have been in the Chamber when the Chancellor of the Exchequer made his autumn statement, because in some of the sectors that the hon. Gentleman talked about there have been increases in funding.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) on raising this subject for debate, having come first in the ballot. He made many interesting observations. In particular, I recall his warning that if the green belt is leapfrogged up to 1 million people in inner London might have to look for new accommodation in the home counties. That is a grave statistic to conjure with.

There was only one occasion on which I was tempted to intervene and it was when my hon. Friend said that many coastal resort towns came alive only when the tourists arrived in the tourist season. That is not the case in many southern coastal towns in which there are active communities caring for the elderly in the most lively fashion.

First and foremost, the debate is about change. For the last eight or nine years the main task of the Government has been to persuade the nation to face inevitable changes in technology, markets, working practices, education and in many other aspects of our daily lives. The debate is entirely consistent with that theme because it is the changing structure of British agriculture, which in turn is related to changes in agricultural production worldwide, that has focused attention on the increasingly urgent need to make other uses of the rural environment. At the same time, changes in technology that in many cases enable commerce and manufacturing to revert to a cottage industry basis have had an impact.

We have come full circle from the 19th century concentrations of raw material and labour in the great conurbations to the possibility of isolated workplaces

which are nowadays linked by on-line computer facilities and which, in some cases, specialise in small-batch production. Moreover, the change in our transportation network of improved trunk roads and modernised railways has enabled city dwellers to spread into rural areas. They have taken up the houses vacated by people who have left farm work and have built more houses around them, so that the distinction between town and country has progressively become blurred.

The relationship between where people live and the sort of work that they do no longer conforms to the old geographical patterns that remained relatively stable for generations. The fabric of rural society is altering, as is the face of the landscape, and it will continue to do so on an accelerating basis.

In the face of that change, the Government have given a clear sense of direction. They have encouraged a healthy rural economy and a protected rural environment for those who live in it and for those who visit it. They have also encouraged a sense of realism. The Development Commission for Rural England has said that rural unemployment will, in the main, be solved off the farm, not on it. The consultation document about the farm woodland scheme, produced a year ago, referred to incentives for alternative uses of agricultural land and more diversity in the rural economy. That has resulted in the Bill now going through Parliament. The concept of set-aside is at last being taken seriously and, similarly, the Department of the Environment guidelines about rural enterprise point to the shifting demographic patterns and the changing character of the rural economy.

In spite of the measures being taken, it is far from clear whether people have grasped the extent of the changes that are beginning to take place in rural parts of Britain or whether they understand the pace at which the changes are likely to be brought about over the next few years. Above all, it seems that few people understand or sympathise with the pressure on British farmers today, yet there will be far-reaching consequences of that pressure which could create lasting damage to the rural environment unless careful controls and support are maintained.

This week, agreement has been reached in the European Community for more stringent controls over CAP spending in each of the 10 major farm sectors so that, by 1992, the CAP should reflect only 56 per cent. of the Community budget, rather than the figure of almost two thirds for which it accounts at present. That agreement will rightly be applauded because the notion of huge sums of money being squandered on surplus food mountains continues to be offensive. In the past few days, the media have shown relatively little awareness of the direct effect those farm spending controls are likely to have on the countryside as set-aside grows and some farmers already living on a marginal profit and loss account decide to give up and go out of business.

The lack of understanding between town and country about those impending changes in the rural economy is common everywhere, but it is well illustrated in my constituency. Many residents in Bexhill express the belief that farmers are sheltered from the harsh reality of competition and live a perpetually subsidised existence, yet those same people would be appalled at the thought that the rapid demise of unprofitable wealden farms might lead to the disappearance of any of the beautiful Sussex countryside nearby which they like to visit regularly.

For years, change has been taking place in the Sussex weald and elsewhere in the country. Most of the farms are still there today, but the three dozen or so farming villages around Battle have gradually seen many of the farm workers leave and their places in the community taken by commuters, retired couples and weekend visitors. So far, the changes have not had a major visual impact, apart from a gradual infilling of housing development within some of the villages. What is likely to happen over the next decade, in spite of sensible county structure plans, will depend largely on what happens to agriculture. If the occasional loss of a farm becomes a stampede and there is an exit from agriculture, in an almighty hurry major property developers in London will cast increasingly covetous eyes at the home counties and most definitely at nearby east Sussex.

That point concerns me. Developers' interests will have been further fortified by the excellent improvements to local communications and a succession of much-needed bypasses on the A21, for example, and by the electrification of the Hastings or Tonbridge railway line. Those developers will no doubt hope to fill in the gaps between the roadside villages. If they succeed, my own gloomy prediction, which I call the Orpington factor, is likely to come to pass. Orpington is a wonderful place. I have known it for most of my life, but neither I nor the vast majority of people in Kent and Sussex want to see Orpington creep yard by yard down to the Kent and Sussex coastline.

What, then, can be done to ensure that rural development proceeds as the carefully calculated adjustment which the Government rightly intend it to be? There are four principal initiatives which must be maintained, all of which have been touched on already in this debate and which the Government have repeatedly acknowledged previously. Nevertheless, they deserve to be headlined again: the concern about farmers; the potential that exists for tourism; the scope to be found in computerised outwork in private homes; and the role of local authorities.

It is important for the House to recognise that farmers are not crying "Wolf". They understand the need to curb production and to reorganise output throughout the EC. They can recognise the good sense in the Government's emphasis on set-aside and the need for stabilisers in each regime. But the position of many farmers remains precarious, particularly those who are highly geared with bank borrowings. The storm damage in Kent and Sussex last October was devastating. Uninsurable outbuildings, glasshouses and growing frames were damaged and much woodland was so damaged that the clearance costs alone are prohibitive so that replanting remains an academic proposition.

Milk production has stabilised successfully since the last quota reduction, but further painful changes must inevitably be on the way. Pigmeat prices are at their lowest for five years. The system of MCAs works against British pig producers, as does the import from outside the European Community of cheap manioc as feedstuff. Therefore, while fully supporting the Government's commitment to the restructuring of the CAP and the policies outlined in last Monday's debate on agriculture, I hope that the Government will have every sympathy for farmers when they consider a devaluation of the green pound. Pitched right, it will enable rural development to proceed at a manageable pace, but, pitched wrong, it could

[Mr. Charles Wardle]

mean that some farms — for example, in the Sussex weald—will no longer be viable, with all that that would imply.

Tourism is a huge industry with the great merit of being spread throughout the country. It has a larger GDP than the automotive industry. It offers scope for initiative and enterprise, and can absorb many young people who can learn the necessary skills as they work. One great advantage of the Channel tunnel and the development of the Dover to Honiton south coast trunk road is that they should bring a further influx of tourists into southern England. That is an opportunity not to be missed in rural areas.

I hope that in the not too distant future all manner of employers in London and the other major centres will carry out feasibility studies of their administration departments to establish whether they can run their offices more cheaply and just as efficiently by putting personal computers, word processors and fax machines into employees' homes, thereby creating more jobs in the suburbs and rural areas and reducing the pressure on commuting.

In east Sussex the Rother and Wealden district councils are doing an excellent job with housing. As well as looking after their housing stock, they are mindful of the need for more private rented accommodation and for housing that is suitable for first-time buyers. They are aware of the importance of community services in villages and they have welcomed the Government's initiative of the past few years on bus transportation. In east Sussex, that has led to an improvement in rural bus services.

One area of anxiety is planning. It is a question not of the decisions taken by the local authority, but of the increasing number of appeals against refusals for planning consent which are finding their way through the planning inspectorate to the Secretary of State's office. As that number increases, one is bound to look back at the idea of property developers from London and at the Orpington factor. I am not talking simply about district council planning decisions; the same tendency applies to county council decisions. Recently in a neighbouring constituency there was clearly a disagreement between the county council's planning office and county engineer's office, and the Department over the choice of a preferred route for a bypass. There may have been good reasons for that, but it is a sign that we must be prepared to heed what local people have to say about planning decisions.

Those are the four headlines that will keep the all-important rural initiative on the right track. The House will, I think, accept that change in the rural environment is inevitable, but the pace and nature of that change is ours to influence. If we get it right, we shall earn the gratitude of future generations; but if we get it wrong and disfigure the landscape, we shall rightly be condemned.

12.40 pm

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate, and for the opportunity to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle). He spoke a good deal of sense, like most hon. Members on both sides of the House —which, in this debate, means on our side. I hope that the "composite hon. Gentleman" who, for most of the debate, has been wholly sustaining the Labour party, the hon. Member for "Jarrow, Holborn and St. Pancras"— sometimes he has a beard and sometimes he does not— will have a role to play in the debate. Perhaps he will say something about how inner cities can help inner problems.

It will come as no surprise to my hon. Friends if I stick to the subject of the planning system. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) introduced the motion, and I congratulate him on the way in which he did so. He did an important service in portraying the trend—especially the population trend, of which too little notice has been taken recently. If his conclusions are rather different from mine, it is because he was extrapolating from the present trend, whereas I, like some of my hon. Friends — in particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) — believe that we can influence and change that trend if we can develop the political will to do so.

I start by referring to the problem of overdevelopment in rural areas, which is a major issue in the south and other parts of rural England. An invading tide of concrete is reaching parts of our precious environment which no one has hitherto thought that it could penetrate. Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire, Berkshire, Wiltshire and Dorset now contain very little of the remote countryside that they contained only 20 years ago.

At the same time, there is a flow of people, economic activity and infrastructure away from the old manufacturing areas—primarily, but not exclusively, in the north and the inner cities—into the green fields of what are seen, for the moment at any rate, as the more desirable pastures of England. Those two trends are working together to change the face of Britain's environment, fuelled by the accelerating success of the British economy. Perhaps, indeed, we are fortunate to have the problem. It is nevertheless a serious problem, because our country is, by international standards, crowded and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East pointed out, may become even more so. But our countryside is a major, if diminishing, national asset: as Mark Twain observed some time ago, they have stopped making land.

I have two propositions, with which I shall begin and end my speech. First, one of the essential answers is the re-creation of our inner cities—perhaps this is the subject on which the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) will make his contribution—so that they become, as they once were, places where people in every income bracket want to live and work. In that sense, our inner cities and our countryside are directly connected, and the Government's raft of inner city policies are a major step in the right direction.

My second proposition is that at the heart of organising and maintaining our environment is our planning system, which has become strained in recent years as overdevelopment has continued. No longer is it a capable instrument for the task in hand. It is out of date, developer-driven and in urgent need of radical reform. It should enable us to protect the countryside, limit, if not halt, large-scale moves of population for no economic reason and, at the same time, encourage developments — some of which hon. Members have referred to — in rural as well as urban areas, where they are wanted. However, unless people, through their local representatives, feel that they have a say in deciding the shape of their environment, they will

abandon their belief in their community and their support for it, ultimately with serious social as well as environmental results.

We must maintain the action that we have started for the re-creation of our inner cities. If Liverpool fails to be a place in which people wish to live and work, other parts of the country will pick up the social pieces. There is no more mournful fact about the increasingly less pleasant area of Bournemouth, Poole and surrounding areas than the number of displaced, unhappy Liverpudlians who now live there, far from where, in many cases, they would prefer to be. There is also the problem of people retiring to such areas, which has already been discussed adequately.

Regrettably, local planning decisions are being overturned in far too many cases, and this strikes at the heart of local government. It is no longer an issue that the Department of the Environment can avoid. We want responsible local government, but in planning, too often, local government is losing heart and losing the will to make its own planning decisions. We should devise a greater say for parish and town councils.

I can give one example, which is a national if a small example, of the way in which decisions are being overturned, to the detriment of local communities. When amusement arcades are created in a small town, they have a great effect on the behaviour and make-up of community life. I know of a number of cases where local authorities have refused permission for amusement arcades, and those decisions have been overturned on appeal by the Department. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will look at that matter.

I hope that my hon. Friend will continue, on a much more fundamental basis, the review of circulars that his colleagues have diffidently started. In many respects, circulars are unclear and out of date, and they are particularly out of date in their definition of demand. The demand for housing should not be that set out by the National Housebuilders Federation or consortium developers. That is just one of the ways in which our planning circulars, which are an important bible for local planners, are leading them astray and diminishing the control that local authorities have over the shape that their community should take.

Some excellent points have been made on what can be summed up by the slogan, "Village homes for village people". Local councils are no longer the best authorities, and council housing is no longer the best way, to provide for those who need housing, and will continue to need housing in rural areas. I should like to see the speeding up of the improvement of the private rented sector, for which many of us have pressed for so long, and my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) put the point well.

The way forward lies through the greater encouragement of housing associations and shared ownership schemes. If it is necessary, because of the land prices, for the taxpayers' contribution to housing association schemes to be raised, we shall have to face it. That is the best way forward, because such bodies retain the ability to select the tenants to whom the housing will be made available.

My hon. Friend the Minister knows that I believe that we will have to have a much tighter planning framework, whatever form it might take. My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough kindly referred to the pamphlet entitled, "This Pleasant Land" which I wrote. I do not intend to dilate on it now. Indeed, I hope to have an opportunity soon to discuss the detailed proposals in it with the other authorities and my hon. Friend the Minister. We cannot get away from the need for a much greater and more effective overview of the need for development and for a land use strategy which was outlined in that document.

There is a major job to be done in reforming the planning system to protect our countryside and to encourage development of our inner cities and other areas where land development is required and wanted. If we do nothing, much more of our countryside will continue to be lost while the life-blood drains from our cities until the countryside has gone and the tide turns back. If we want our children to enjoy a pleasant land, rural and urban, we must take action now.

12.51 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) on his success in the ballot and on choosing this important topic for debate.

Last year, my hon. Friend had a spectacular electoral success. He has shown this morning that it was no fluke, but due entirely to his ability, which he has demonstrated today. I found his speech extremely interesting. It covered all of the issues about which hon. Members have expressed anxiety.

My hon. Friend said that there has been a population explosion in some areas. The same is true of part of my constituency. In the south of Ryedale, in the north York suburbs, what were a collection of sleepy villages 25 or 30 years ago now have a population approaching 50,000. There are enormous pressures on the infrastructure, especially leisure.

Housing has been mentioned. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. One of the problems which loom is the proliferation of property which is bought for holiday lets. In some villages in my constituency, there is anxiety, especially at parish council level, that too many houses are left unoccupied through the winter because they are bought for letting during the summer. I wonder whether the planning system should consider that problem.

If there is to be a reduction in the agricultural work force, we must remember that many of those concerned live in tied accommodation. I should be interested if my hon. Friend the Minister could tell us what measures in the Housing Bill tackle that issue.

Many hon. Members have spoken about land use. I add my support to the suggestion of set-aside so that land might be used for leisure. Green belt land might be used for leisure activities. A landowner in my constituency has written to me in this regard. Perhaps some committee or review will consider that matter under the aegis of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

But we should not kid ourselves that the set-aside scheme will solve all the problems of land use. In the debate of agriculture on Monday, my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) quoted the Country Landowners Association, drawing attention to the fact that some of the suggested leisure uses for land tackle only a tiny part of the great set-aside difficulty. It said:

> "Even if 300 new golf courses are built and 10,000 tennis courts and 1,000 camping and caravan sites, they will account for no more than 30,000 hectares, leaving 5,970 hectares facing a fate which the French call desertification."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1988; Vol. 127, c. 782.]

I shall concentrate on six words on the Order Paper—

[Mr. John Greenway]

"promote enterprise in the rural economy."

If I have one criticism of my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East, it is that he chose the title "Rural Development" for the debate instead of "Rural Enterprise'. The Government are committed to a major initiative on urban renewal in the inner cities, and it is right that they should be. All hon. Members from rural constituencies wish their initiative every success. But the rural economy also causes concern, and the debate gives us an opportunity to remind the House that people face hard times in rural areas as well as in the inner cities.

For many years, the prosperity of the countryside depended largely on agriculture, but it was recognised some time ago that agriculture could not provide all the employment needed to sustain rural communities. Initiatives in tourism and leisure activities generally have already brought considerable benefits. A recent English Tourist Board survey showed that tourism in Ryedale supports about 8,000 jobs and involves about 40 per cent. of the district's work force. Much of the success of tourism in Ryedale is due not only to its natural heritage of countryside and history but to the initiative of Ryedale district council and its tourism and leisure department, which last year distributed more than 250,000 brochures. It is impossible to say whether all the tourism potential of Ryedale and the country at large has been fully explored. But it is clear that there are dangers in becoming too dependent on tourism, just as there are in becoming too dependent on agriculture.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): Bearing in mind what the hon. Gentleman said about tourism and the number of caravanners who visit his constituency, does he believe that it is a good idea for the Government to levy the poll tax on those for whom caravanning is their only leisure enjoyment during the year?

Mr. Greenway: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. I have already written to the Minister responsible because the matter causes great concern. But it is not the subject of this debate.

Not all rural areas lend themselves to tourism as naturally as Ryedale does, and even in my constituency in some communities the tourism potential is limited. Not all communities are natural tourist attractions, and not everyone wants to be involved in the industry. To those who have been involved in working the land we must offer an alternative beyond bed-and-breakfast accommodation, caravan sites and gift shops, important though those things are. We need a rural enterprise initiative to build on the work that is already being done by several agencies, some of which have been mentioned in the debate, to help to establish new businesses and to provide employment and prosperity in rural communities.

One reason why I question my hon. Friend's use of the words "rural development" is, that, unfortunately, the word "development" is associated in many people's minds with the concept of substantial construction projects. When the Government launched their farming and rural enterprise initiative last year, in which the need for exclusive use of land for agriculture was questioned, alarm bells rang throughout the countryside because it was thought that it might be the prelude to unwanted and unwarranted major building projects. I am sure that the Government did not have that in mind, as the document "Rural Enterprise and Development" clearly states.

Establishing workshops, craft industries, small manufacturing units and homes for small businesses does not mean that we have to change the face of the countryside with swathes of concrete and brick. It means making use of derelict farm buildings and other accommodation which can be renovated and restored to preserve, not destroy, the character of our rural communities. It may mean some new build, but that can be designed to blend in with the setting or with existing structures. Either way, it will bring employment, activity, people and prosperity to declining rural areas. It will also bring training and job opportunities for the young who might otherwise move away to find work.

During the debate several hon. Members have referred to the problem of retaining local services including shops, post offices and petrol stations in rural areas. Those services can be sustained only by people working in the community.

The term development also has connotations of large-scale handouts of public funds. Financial assistance must be selective, not automatic. The advice and help of consultants and experts are a much more appropriate use of resources as they help to ensure that projects will succeed and, in the longer term, ensure that that success is sustained and built upon.

Hon. Members may claim that COSIRA, the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service, the small firms service and the regional tourist boards are doing that work already. Indeed, they are doing that very successfully in many ways. However, is not the fact that we are discussing the issue today proof that more work is needed?

I question the use of the word development. Laudable though the Government's previous initiatives have been, have they had the impact that was needed? The Development Commission which has responsibility for rural England prepared another excellent document called "Action for Rural Enterprise". However, I wonder whether the message has got through. My impression is that the real problem stems from confusion over who has departmental responsibility for rural enterprise.

The foreword to "Farming and Rural Enterprise", which was published last year, contains the signatures of no fewer than five Ministers. However, the signatures of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who is responsible for enterprise, do not appear. We have heard reference to the interest of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in this matter. I am sure his interest extends beyond the fact that he represents a large rural area. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) referred to the problem of schools. Therefore, including my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, nine Ministers should have an interest in this matter. All those Cabinet Minsters should be involved in any initiative to develop the rural economy. Clearly my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning bears a heavy load on his shoulders as he has to answer for so many distinguished colleagues.

I am not suggesting that the initiatives have lacked effort or imagination. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and his colleagues deserve much praise for their work in

introducing diversification schemes and obtaining finance for grants for farmers to look for other enterprises beyond agriculture.

I question whether all the good work has had the necessary impact. I believe that the message from the debate should be that the Government should consider appointing a Minister with direct responsibility for developing the rural economy. That would beg the question which Department should have the responsibility for such an initiative. Those primarily concerned with conservation might suggest that the Department of the Environment should take that responsibility. I question that because any enterprise initiative will create conflicts over planning matters—and that has been referred to during the debate—in which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has a quasi-judicial role. As already suggested, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has made great efforts to stimulate diversification. However, it is concerned primarily with farming interests.

Mr. Anderson *rose*——

Mr. Greenway: I will not give way, because I am coming to the end of my speech.

The Department of Employment has responsibility for the tourism that has been developed to such great effect in my constituency and elsewhere. However, what is needed goes beyond tourism, state benefits, employment and training schemes. Having taken on the huge task of reviving our inner cities, I suggest that my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry should next turn his attention to the development of the rural economy. His recent White Paper redefined the Department's primary objective, which I believe goes to the heart of the debate. It says that the needs and demands of society can be met only by increasing prosperity.

That objective is just as relevant and important to the rural economy as it is to industry and commerce. We now need one Minister to bring together, harness and co-ordinate the work being done by all the agencies and organisations. The Minister should champion the cause of a broad-based rural economy in which workshops and small manufacturing units can flourish alongside agriculture, tourism, recreation and conservation interests. Only in that way will we truly establish a rural enterprise culture.

1.6 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I shall not do battle with the hon. Members for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle), for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) and for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) because they have all made constructive speeches and I agree with much of what they said. However, the hon. Member for Ryedale appeared to suggest, along the lines stressed by those who say that the Conservative party is really the English Nationalist party, that the Department of the Environment should be the sole Department responsible for agriculture, excluding, as it were, Wales and Scotland.

All the hon. Members made important points about the EEC. Some of us are sceptical about whether the agricultural portion of the Community's budget will really fall, as anticipated, from two thirds to about 50 per cent. of the total budget. However, if the agricultural portion of the budget were to fall significantly, it would be bound to have important implications for the countryside, whether in terms of set-aside or rural incomes. Given the timescale of four years and the financial forecasts that are available, the Government might consider producing a White Paper, perhaps a think piece, on the implications for rural development of the package that was agreed recently at Brussels. It will certainly have implications. I would be interested to know whether that idea commends itself to the Minister.

The hon. Member for Ryedale mentioned planning and rural enterprise. In addition to the bodies that he mentioned, one that I would suggest is worthy of study is the Mid Wales Development Board. It is a non-controversial organisation in party terms and it has had substantial success in bringing together the various components of the economy within mid Wales. That precedent is well worth studying.

The hon. Member for Ryedale said that we should encourage rural enterprise. One of my hobby horses is the encouragement of craft industries in the countryside. Local authorities should try to bring together in one building opportunities for a number of individuals who might be involved in craft in the countryside. I have seen one such example in Cirencester. I believe that it is extremely helpful to individuals who otherwise would not be able to market their products within the countryside. Such marketing is carried out extremely well in the French countryside. Tourist centres are located in one area so that local crafts people can market their wares. Often one-person enterprises assist rural enterprise and development.

Another theme that has emerged from the debate is the decline in the rural economy. Clearly this happened, not in 1979 but, for a series of objective reasons, over decades. We tend to forget the changes in the electoral configuration as a result of that decline. One has only to consider what has happened in East Anglia and parts of rural Scotland and Wales to see that that is so. In that regard, I think particularly of the Forest of Dean where much of the underpinning of the area—the railways, local shops and schools has gone and the traditional rural communities have been replaced by commuter groups, who bring their different ideals and purposes to rural areas.

We tend to idealise rural communities and forget the substantial social problems in them. Post Offices with general stores attached to them simply cannot compete with large supermarkets in nearby towns. Therefore, a rural facility disappears from what in the past has been a vibrant village community.

Those problems cannot be solved by market mechanisms. I recall attending, when I represented the rural constituency of Monmouth, a meeting in a village and discussing the local bus service. Some articulate individuals were saying, "We have our cars—perhaps two or three cars—so we do not need a bus service." A number of individuals whom I knew were retired or poor and had no cars. After the meeting, I said, "You did not speak. Why did you not raise your problems?" They were afraid to voice their problems.

There is a danger—we have seen this among some Conservative Members—to think of a countryside that is fit only for executives. One hon. Member talked rather idealistically of on-line computers and the ability of people who live in rural areas to have easy communication with their head office in London or wherever. There are some people who, because of their formation and education, are

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

not able to handle on-line computers. There are some who in the past would have done the simple jobs of the countryside. We should ensure, so far as possible, if there is to be a balanced and mixed community in the countryside, that we do not forget the ordinary folk.

That point is particularly true with regard to two matters. The first concerns housing. There has already been an exchange with the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) about the effect of the right-to-buy provisions on housing. I concede that there may be different regional repercussions of the right-to-buy legislation. It may not be a factor in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but I can assure him that it is in parts of rural and west Wales, where all the planning authorities are concerned about the availability of reasonably priced housing for local people. They are concerned that once council houses become marketable at the end of the requisite period they will be snapped up by people from outside the area. They are also concerned about the collapse of council house building in many parts of the rural countryside as a direct result of Government policy. I shall not be ideological about that.

Mr. Bill Walker: I trust that the hon. Gentleman will consider carefully what he is saying. I understand those fears, but the fact is that people do not easily give up council houses in country areas. Their jobs are normally in those areas and they want to remain there. They do not want to sell their houses and make themselves homeless. Many tenants live in their houses for a long time so that they rarely become available for letting.

Mr. Anderson: I accept that the majority of people will continue to live in the same houses whether they are owned by the local authority or not, but a proportion of those houses that formerly would have been available to local councils will no longer be available. Coupled with other objective demographic factors, such as the aging population and smaller households, and non-objective factors, such as the collapse of council house building as a direct result of Government policy, this scheme will put a squeeze on individuals in rural communities who, in the past, had a reasonable prospect of acquiring a house from a local authority.

I ask only for some flexibility. It may well be that the appropriate provision will come from housing associations and that the local authority will have its normal right to nominate members. The right-to-buy policy may not be a problem in Tayside, but it is in a number of areas. I suggest that the Government consider whether it is a problem—just as most people on the spot do—and, if they think that it is, take steps to remedy it.

I fear that, because of the twin pressures on our railway and bus services, some people in rural communities are more isolated now than people have been for a century. I am talking not about the commuter families, who are mobile and may have several cars, but about the "wee folk"—If I may use that phrase—the ordinary folk in the countryside. The statistics show that income levels in the countryside are normally lower than in towns, yet a number of goods are more expensive in the countryside—for example, groceries are more expensive and a car may be needed, with all the associated costs of petrol, and so on.

There are twin pressures on people living in the countryside. There are considerable problems of isolation for those who do not have ready access to a car—not only for the elderly and the disabled but for the wife whose husband uses the car for work some distance away. Such problems have been exacerbated by Government policy towards the railways. There has been a substantial reduction in subsidies and the board of British Rail has shown alacrity in going further than the Government wanted. There are exciting experiments with Sprinter trains, but the general pattern in rural railway services has been one of decline in recent years.

The same picture is painted for bus services. I ask the Government to monitor the effects of deregulation in rural areas. I have no doubt that deregulation will benefit areas such as mine, an inner-city area, resulting in a large number of buses going through, at least at certain times of the day. It is lucrative for the various bus operators to undertake those services, but the Government need carefully to consider the availability of buses.

County councils are able to make grants in appropriate cases, but the Government must carefully monitor the effects of deregulation on available rural bus services, particularly at weekends and, say, after 5 or 6 o'clock in the evening. The Government must ask whether, by appropriate intervention in respect of rail or bus services, they can solve what for many people is a real problem — rural isolation. I am convinced that market mechanisms will not solve the problem. There is a need for appropriate and selective Government intervention.

1.20 pm

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) on initiating the debate and on his splendid contribution to it. I endorse and, possibly, reinforce his call for housing association activities to be extended to rural areas. I take on board his points about the green belt. The green belt is fine enough, but it tends to put extra pressure on areas just outside it, including areas such as Stroud, which I represent. In calling attention to development problems in rural areas, I advise my hon. Friend that the problem is singular. There is rather too much development.

My constituency is justifiably regarded as rural—indeed, it is beautiful. It includes some level reaches along the river Severn, a steep escarpment covered in beech trees, and the Cotswolds. I ask hon. Members to imagine the pressure for development, bearing in mind that Bristol is just to the west of my constituency. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Minister is in the Chamber; I am about to describe Bristol as something of a problem. To the north of my constituency are Gloucester and Cheltenham, and just outside it is Swindon, another town vying for the title of fastest-growing town in Europe. Although the area that I represent comprises about 180 sq miles, it contains 85,000 constituents. It increased by 3,500 between the 1983 and 1987 elections. Therefore, scope for a further increase in population must be limited if the area is to retain its rural character. Demand for a rural environment is insatiable. The demand cannot be met, at least in certain parts of southern England.

Of course, in a debate such as this, it is difficult to generalise on many matters. Often, towns in the same area may have completely different problems. I acknowledge that Stroud, the main town in my constituency, could do

with some more jobs. However, anybody with a particular skill or training is unlikely to be without a job for long. By comparison, Tetbury has more available jobs than people to fill them. A few months ago, there was an application to build a chemical factory that would have provided about 200 jobs. I was pleased when the application was turned down. Surely something such as a chemical factory would be better suited to an area that already has heavy industry. No doubt, had the application been granted, there would soon have been yet another application to build 200 houses. I doubt whether a factory and 200 more houses would have been for the overall benefit of the town.

Unfortunately, several ancient market towns, with their fine old centres, corn halls, market crosses, and lovely gabled merchants' houses tend to be lost in a sea of modern developments. I am not making a particular complaint. People have a right to live in a pleasant environment and problems arise only when the scale of development is such that the beauty of the area is threatened.

As has already been pointed out, we must recognise that the local planning authorities have overall responsibility, and we must not interfere with their activities except in general terms. The Department was entirely right to encourage the conversion of barns and farm buildings for residential use. In my area that has resulted in many splendid and individual homes that are much appreciated by the purchasing public, judging by the prices that they are prepared to pay for them. It must be right that development is preferable to dereliction.

We are less clear in our thinking about woodlands. In certain rural areas there is tremendous potential. Well-managed woodland needs about one person for every 100 acres of woods. Unfortunately, the extremely well-organised conservation pressure groups — which often have widely differing views about what constitutes conservation—have advised us that fir trees are bad and deciduous trees are good. Perhaps we should call fir trees pine trees. Perhaps pine forests would be generally acceptable. If we throw vast amounts of public money into hardwoods, in 30 or 40 years' time we shall end up with vast areas of hardwood scrub, when we need timber suitable for paper, as currently we produce only 9 per cent. of our requirements. We must not repeat the mistakes of the past where square miles of hillside were blanketed with conifers. We must use a certain amount of style and precision.

In future, it is likely that more people will work from home. That possibility is inescapable. I believe that in 20 years' time, it will be quite normal for people to work at home and transmit their copy by a fax or whatever, to a head office in London or elsewhere. We must take that important point into consideration when planning for the future. It must be recognised that people cannot always expect to have a house built on a green field site and then to work nearby in a factory that is also built on a green field site. Such an arrangement cannot be the norm.

The best way to protect the countryside must be to develop and improve the existing urban areas. There are many depressing areas in Gloucester — I have not mentioned Bristol this time—that may be developed. It may be more expensive to develop areas with complicated ownership patterns than simply to dig into a green field site, but the policy of developing and improving city areas quickly must be pursued or we shall all be losers.

1.28 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important subject, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) on selecting it.

It is clear from the debate that there are different problems in different rural areas, yet there are areas which have a number of common problems. Those common problems present us with common challenges and opportunities. A problem is often a challenge and an opportunity for change. We are in the midst of such a challenge.

I remind the House that the part of Scotland that I represent—2,000 sq. miles of beautiful Highland areas—is where the Highland clearances began. I remind hon. Members who do not remember the Highland clearances, or have not read about them, that that was when the glens in my constituency were cleared of people, and sheep were put on the hills to replace them. Sheep became a fundamental factor in the local economy. However, today we have a threat to the sheep. If we cannot find an answer in the negoitations on the sheepmeat regime, or if the negotiations go badly, there will be a second Highland clearance, which would leave our glens without people, and without sheep.

When my hon. Friends are involved in negotiations about the green pound, it is important that it is acknowledged and accepted that Scotland's farmers are not asking for anything special. All they want is equal opportunities. The green pound anomalies must be removed. If the green pound is pitched wrongly, it will create massive problems for Scotland's farmers and drive many of them out of business.

I remind the House that there are large areas of grouse moor in my constituency. We hear a lot about grouse moors from the Opposition Benches, but it is not often acknowledged that those moors provide many valuable jobs in my part of the world, and in other parts of Scotland. We wish to protect those valuable jobs, which can continue for ever if we husband the resources that provide them.

That is also true of the rod fishing that takes place in many parts of my constituency, and it applies not least to the salmon fishing on the river Tay. I welcome the changes that have been made recently to ensure that more salmon come up the river so that they can be caught. I congratulate my hon. Friend Lord Sanderson of Bowden, who is in charge of that issue at the Scottish Office, on the measures that he has taken recently. I hope that he will continue to take such bold measures to ensure that the fish actually get up the river so that the rod fishermen can catch them, because that will mean that those fishermen will return—and they provide more jobs in my constituency than people realise.

Indeed, tourism — in that I include all leisure and recreational activities — is the largest employer in my constituency. When one realises that tourism covers areas of activity such as skiing, canoeing, sailing, climbing, walking, riding, hang gliding, camping and caravanning, one realises that the list is almost endless, but all those activities have in common the fact that they provide job opportunities.

In our debates on rural areas, it is important that we recognise that not all rural areas have similar problems. I should welcome some of the problems that I have heard

[Mr. Bill Walker]

about. I should welcome people wanting to come to live in my constituency, especially if they wanted to live in some of the more remote parts. One problem that we have faced in the Scottish Highlands has been trying to ensure that people stay in our glens. It is important that we get a balance in the glens, and tourism has a role to play in that.

We have heard a lot recently about forestry. I advise the House that forestry has provided work and lifeblood for many of my constituents in terms of income and opportunities. Again, forestry must be seen for what it is. It provides an essential part of the economic balance. We should recognise that in Scotland, which constitutes about 40 per cent. of the land mass of the United Kingdom, there are opportunities for forestry planting. We should look after the nation's long-term need for forestry and wood pulp, and that provides opportunities.

However, we should also recognise that planting too many conifers could present problems for the rural balance, which will be distorted. One aspect that we have taken note of recently is the impact on the whisky industry of conifers that have been planted too close to water courses. The whisky industry is probably Scotland's most important single industry. It employs 16,000 people and exports £1 billion worth of whisky every year. In addition, it gives the Chancellor of the Exchequer a £1 billion contribution towards his coffers every year. Because of that, we must ensure that conifers are not planted too close to the water courses. They have an effect on the water which, of course. is an essential ingredient in the manufacture of whisky.

It is of concern to my constituents that the European Community fondly imagines that the Highlands of Scotland begin at the Drumochter pass. Nothing is more nonsensical. Every school child in Scotland and, I hope, throughout the United Kingdom knows that the Highlands begin at Perth, which has always been known as the gateway to the Highlands. That creates problems because if EC recognition does not embrace the whole of the Scottish Highlands, we should not be surprised if we find farmers in Rannoch, Glen Lyon, Drumochter, Glenshee and Strathardle farming in conditions that make it more difficult for them to make a living. That applies in many areas apart from what the European Community fondly imagines are the Highlands of Scotland. It is not surprising that farmers in those areas feel that they are not getting an even-handed deal.

Much has been said about housing problems. There has been much scaremongering. My constituency is the only area about which I can speak with authority. Every time the problem that would be created by the sale of council houses has been brought to my attention I have investigated it. As I told the House, I found that the people in the council houses felt the same, whether or not they had bought their house. They have no intention of moving because they have nowhere else to go. Anyone who suggests that people living in my remote glens will sell their houses and leave themselves homeless miles away from their jobs and from everything else is not living in the real world. People in the remote parts of Scotland generally do not want to move. That is why they want to retain the sheep and the balance that I have been talking about.

There are needs. Aberfeldy has no employment problems. It has full employment, but there is a need for housing. That does not necessarily mean council housing. There is a desperate need in the rural parts of Scotland for more private letting. Housing associations and the measures contained in the Housing (Scotland) Bill will encourage private letting. There is much empty property in rural Scotland and it would be helpful if we could get it on the market. That is what I meant when I said that problems can create challenges and opportunities.

We must continue to husband our resources, including rural amenities such as schools, hospitals and post offices. They are the lifeblood of a community. I would add to that the kirk, because although in some parts of the United Kingdom it may not be so, we still think that our kirk is important, and the Minister is still held in some respect. That may surprise some of my hon. Friends, but as a majority of my constituents voted for me and support me, the House will realise what sensible people they are. Some of them do not support me, but not many.

Hospitals, schools, post offices and kirks are essential to maintain our communities. Therefore, when we talk about opportunities we are talking not only about jobs and Government initiatives, but about creating the right economic environment in which people can take the risk of setting up businesses and creating opportunities. The Government have created that environment, and my constituency has benefited substantially. I should be happy to take any hon. Member to remote glens in which he could see people working with computers or to areas where craft industries are flourishing. I should be happy to show anyone all the benefits in my constituency.

1.38 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Thanks to the speech of the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), I have discovered that Aberfeldy is in his constituency and I now know what Burns meant in the poem entitled "The Birks of Aberfeldy."

I am happy to contribute to the debate, although there have been some doubts about my interests in the matter, as I represent Holborn and St. Pancras. However, I can at least lay claim to representing Chalk Farm, Oak Village and Lincoln's Inn Fields. I also represent a wildlife site. It is one of the curiosities of this country that there is a high proportion of wildlife sites in the inner cities, indeed, a larger proportion than in most rural areas.

I wish to address the problems, not of my constituency, but of rural areas in which about 25 per cent. of the population live. The population of those areas has grown substantially in recent years. In one 10-year period, 1 million more people moved into rural areas. The balance of the population between urban and rural areas is now what it was in 1901, so it is shifting back in the other direction. There is now a drift away from urban areas into rural areas, when we have been used to a shift in the opposite direction.

Many people in rural areas are prosperous, but there are also substantial numbers who are not. Most people living in rural areas, whether prosperous or not, remain dependent on the provision of public services, either by central Government, local authorities or the National Health Service. There are many problems in rural areas, as Conservative Members have been willing to point out. There are nodules of high unemployment in a number of rural areas. In some small towns and villages, the proportion of unemployed people compares unfavourably with virtually any part of the country.

Because of the long distances involved in travel, access to retraining and reskilling for unemployed people in rural areas is not as easy as it is for people living in urban or suburban areas. There are also quite a number of people living in poverty or on the edge of poverty in rural areas. Many people living in those areas pay considerably over the odds for the goods and services that they buy, compared with people living in the suburbs.

There are problems with the National Health Service, social services and transport. Recently, there was a considerable threat to free school transport, which was eventually fought off in the other place. It is worth remembering that that proposition was initiated not by the Government, but by some of the Tory education authorities, as a way of saving money. There are problems with maintaining an adequate comprehensive education service in rural areas, as the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) said. He is not present at the moment, as he has had a serious operation and did not want to stay throughout the debate. I am sure that all hon. Members wish him a speedy recovery.

Some services in rural areas, as in other parts of the country, are held back by lack of resources and low levels of spending. However, some basic problems about provisions of services for people in rural areas will remain, whatever the level of spending. The wide dispersal of the population means that the provision of services is not such a paying proposition as it is in the cities or the suburbs. The long distances to be covered in providing those services make them sporadic and more expensive. That applies to the private sector and to the public sector with the provision of schools and hospitals.

Many Conservative Members have said, although the hon. Member for Tayside, North did not seem to agree with them, that the lack of cheap housing in rural areas has always been a problem and is growing. They referred to a lack of housing for young people on low incomes, particularly those who have grown up in rural areas and want to stay there. They find it increasingly difficult to stay.

When I served on the Environment Select Committee in 1980-81 we took evidence from some local authorities about the likely effects of the sale of council houses and their non-replacement. The most telling evidence was not, as one might have expected, from some inner-city authorities, but from the Allerdale and South Lakeland councils, which foresaw problems if they were forced to sell houses in villages in the Lakeland national park. They feared that if a proportion of houses were sold, outsiders would come in and low-cost housing would no longer be available. They foresaw prices gradually rising higher and higher and that as the process continued it would be difficult to find anyone to deliver the milk or post, to teach in the local school, to nurse at the local hospital or to work for a local firm on lower than average industrial wages, as is usually the case in the countryside.

The Lake District special planning board, in an effort to counter this threat to locally born and bred people being able to stay in their area, tried to get local occupancy conditions written into the structure plan for Lakeland, but the Secretary of State for the Environment, presumably knowing better than the board about the problems of Lakeland, deleted that part from the plan. That has certainly been damaging to the provision of houses for ordinary people in the Lake District.

Last year the university of Lancaster produced a report entitled "Housing Dilemmas in the Lake District" which points to the difficulties that have occurred as a result of the forced sale of council housing and its non-replacement by any other form of low-cost housing in the villages and small towns that needed it in the first place. I suspect that that process has gone on further and faster in the Lake District than in many other rural areas, but they may well be catching up. As practically every Conservative Member said, we need to consider seriously what we can do to ensure a renewed and continuing supply of cheap housing for people who cannot afford expensive housing.

Unless we replace the houses that have been sold the position will worsen. I am not sure how this applies to rural areas, but on average a local authority needs to sell 15 council houses to raise the money to build one new one, because of the curious ways in which the money is shifted about. We need more building by housing associations, although the right to buy also applies to housing associations other than charitable ones which provide housing for specific groups.

Many of the proposals in the Housing Bill are likely to worsen rather than to improve the position in rural areas. It is crystal clear that unless one is well off in a rural area, the free market will not deliver many goods or services. It certainly will not provide housing, particularly in areas which are becoming increasingly attractive to commuters.

The provision of health services illustrates many of the problems of providing a good quality service in rural areas. This week, my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) published a list of 300 hospitals that have been closed since 1979. It is clear that a substantial majority of the hospitals on the list are either in rural areas, or in small or medium-sized market towns which have traditionally provided health care for rural areas, as well as for the community in which they were located.

The problem is not entirely to do with the level of resources. We need to consider how we deliver a health service to those areas. Those people need treatment, even if they do not have enough sick relatives and friends living nearby to attract doctors to move into their areas. They need hospitals, even if they or their families will not use them as intensively as would people living in a densely populated town or suburb.

There are two ways in which sick people receive professional treatment. Either they go to the treatment, or the treatment comes to them. Neither process is easy for someone who is badly off, such as a rural pensioner, woman or child. We need to improve the position in two ways: by providing more resources, and by adopting a more flexible approach.

I shall not go on about the level of resources, because it is a general matter. However, the decline in the provision of hospital and clinic services has been dominated by the policy of concentrating resources in district general hospitals and health centres, which, while it is wholly appropriate for the inner cities and suburbs, is by no means always appropriate for rural areas. For a rural area to contain a population large enough to sustain a major health centre or a district hospital would require an enormous catchment area, and people would have to travel vast distances to get there.

In theory, that process of concentration has been slowed down. In practice, however, it has been speeded up, because many health authorities have had to economise on

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

small hospitals to keep the big ones going—although, theoretically, their plans involve the existence of satellite hospitals for a long time to come.

We must ensure that we do not try to impose on rural areas solutions for health provision—or, indeed, for the provision of other services — which, while they are appropriate for suburbs and inner cities, are not appropriate for rural areas. Even in my area, for instance, where Underwoods the chemist has adopted the policy that no branch of Underwoods should open unless it is in sight of the next branch, it can prove quite difficult to go to the doctor, obtain a prescription, get it made up, go home and take the medicine, particularly if one is very ill. In rural areas, the same process can involve hours of travel and waiting around. Although there have been some improvements in rural dispensing—partly as a result of the rural dispensing committee that was started on its way by the last Labour Government—people in rural areas still suffer considerable inconvenience, and we should do more to help them. Few of the Government's responses to the points made to them about the development, or lack of development, of the Health Service make any reference to the particular health needs of rural areas.

The right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale referred to the problems of rural schools. It is the case in any community, but more particularly in rural communities, that the school is the centre of the community, and the community as a whole suffers substantially by the closure of the school, be it a small primary school or a bigger secondary school. Although some Conservative Members have welcomed the provisions of the Education Reform Bill, I ask them, not in a party political way, to have another look at some of the possible consequences of that Bill on rural areas.

Let us take the idea of open-entry schools. In theory, anybody who fancies going to a particular school will be able to go to it, and that school will be allowed to expand while others will, consequently, be run down. The right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale has already referred to the problems of maintaining a wide curriculum in small rural secondary schools, and that problem will be made worse under this system, as will the planning of a proper delivery of an education service over a widespread rural area. Conservative Members representing rural areas should look carefully at that.

Mr. John Greenway: I can only assume that the hon. Gentleman was not in the House during education questions on Tuesday, when this matter was addressed fully by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. In answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst), my right hon. Friend said positively that there would be no problem and that children in catchment areas for rural schools would still be entitled to go to them.

Mr. Dobson: They certainly are entitled to go to those schools, but some of those schools will be going into decline. If some of them decline very far, and some have scarcely viable rolls at the moment and need to decline only a little further, they will be closed by the education authorities because they will be too expensive. Therefore, even parents who opt to go to the smaller schools will find it impossible, because some of the smaller schools will automatically be blotted out as the result of the open-ended open-entry system. Opting out will also pose significant difficulties. Say there is a popular school in Ryedale, and the parents decide to opt it out. Supposing that it is a Roman Catholic school, of which there are not many in rural areas.

Mr. Greenway: There are none in my area, as far as I am aware.

Mr. Dobson: I know that, but the hon. Gentleman should remember that he has a large number of Roman Catholics in his constituency, who might wish to exercise their right, under the law, to send their children to Catholic schools. If one of those Catholic schools opts out, the distances that Catholic children will then have to travel if they cannot get into the opted-out school could reduce parental choice. I do not say that it is bound to happen, but it could, and Conservative Members representing rural areas should look at this carefully.

People living in rural areas face the problems that all of us face in our lives. They get sick, they grow old, they suffer from disabling accidents or illness. Generally speaking, they suffer from low pay because those working in rural areas are usually worse paid than people working in urban areas. Family poverty goes along with all these conditions.

Being poor is bad enough, but being poor when quite a number of other people are poor and services are provided to make things easier is far better than being poor in a relatively prosperous area where such services are not provided. In many rural areas, the services which are provided for the badly off are not very extensive. I shall take school meals as an example.

The law, although it will change in April, provides that education authorities can exercise a discretion to offer free school meals more widely than to children whose families are statutorily entitled to supplementary benefit or family income supplement. Dorset, for example, offers discretionary free meals to no one, as does Lincolnshire. Kent offers meals to a grand total of 45 children, Norfolk offers 16 and Suffolk offers 26. The contrast with some Labour-controlled counties is startling. In Gwent, for example, 3,500 children are offered free school meals. No fewer than 6,000 are offered such meals in Cleveland and the figure is 4,833 in Derbyshire. That is an indication of the extent to which living in certain rural areas is a considerable disadvantage if one is not well off.

The same applies with regard to other services such as home helps. By the Government's own calculations, we find that most Labour rural counties provide at least twice as many home helps per 1,000 people aged over 65 as do Tory counties. I am not comparing urban areas with rural areas but Labour rural areas with Tory rural areas.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that people in Highland Scotland do not look to the local authority to provide what they have traditionally helped each other with and that, because they are still a caring society, they do not need people? They look after themselves.

Mr. Dobson: The pattern of voluntary and non-voluntary care varies in different parts of the country. I accept that, but I have not referred to what prevails in Scotland.

We have heard this morning about the difficulty of people who are getting on and find it difficult to look after

themselves. They are sometimes driven out of the village in which they have spent their life because of that. The provision of day care can be a relief to people in those circumstances. It can help them to remain in the area in which they were brought up.

We should consider the record of some Tory county councils on the provision of day care. Hereford and Worcester provides none. Shropshire provides none. Kent provides practically none. Surrey provides none. West Sussex provides none. Suffolk provides none. I cannot believe that there are no people in those counties who need day care and who can be assisted to remain in the villages in which they were brought up.

Mr. Wolfson: In Kent, day care is provided—and very effectively too—by voluntary associations and the NHS.

Mr. Dobson: The NHS is also providing a service in all other areas—at least I hope it is. If not, people living in other areas are subsidising a service provided in Kent that is not provided elsewhere. I cannot believe that that is the case.

I do not claim that the patterns of need are indentical throughout the country, but the services that are provided for many not very well-off people—some of whom may have been comfortably off until they reached old age—are indefensibly poor. They are likely to beome worse as a result of further pressure from the Government to cut local government spending.

I used to have a greater interest in rural affairs than I do now, and I used to receive the minutes of parish council and Women's Institute meetings which discussed the provision of better services in rural areas. It was clear—this was not the view of a Socialist Member, but the view of people who were interested in the problems of their areas — that people did not want market-place competition answers to their problems. They wanted public services with, in some cases—perhaps this deals with the point made by the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) in relation to Kent—the local authority or health authority providing a base from which more effective voluntary efforts could be made. But all that is in decline.

The substantial changes in the role and general physical fabric of rural areas will cause many changes in their social fabric. Besides talking about development, we should consider the poor services being provided in some areas. It is no good talking about the far blue yonder of development when many people living in rural areas, some of whom may be reasonably well-off, are being denied important public services.

I hope that the Minister will reply to some of the points that I have made as well as tackle the pressing problems which were brought to our attention by Conservative Members. Above all, he must ensure that people who grew up in rural areas can continue to live there in housing that they can afford.

2.7 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Mr. William Waldegrave): The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) made a long speech and repeated several of the points that were made by my hon. Friends. I have a constitutional difficulty today, because the wide open green spaces opposite me make it difficult for me to address those who have participated in the debate. The hon. Gentleman made a thoughtful speech, but the truth is that in rural areas the Labour party hardly exists and is no longer even the principal opposition to the Conservative party, although that opposition is less than it was thanks to the efforts of my hon. Friends the Members for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) and for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway).

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East introduced the debate with a thoughtful speech. Indeed, it is a thoughtful motion. He said some challenging things, and when people read *Hansard* they will find them rather more challenging than they may have thought at the time. He uttered the unthinkable thought: is every inch of green belt inviolate? The Government have made it clear that their policy will continue as it is, but it is welcome to have people willing even to think those dangerous thoughts. My hon. Friend also drew our attention to population figures. The Government are not responsible for that, except in so far as people are living much longer, which is a tribute to the success of the Health Service. My hon. Friend was right to say that inviolable green belts place additional pressures on other areas.

Although hon. Members are right to draw attention to the problems of rural areas, let us not start from the position that the English, Scottish and Welsh countryside is in a state of collapse and decay. That is rather like the way many Opposition Members say that the country is a complete disgrace and no one could possibly want to live here, yet they also press us to weaken immigration controls so that many tens of thousands more people can come and live here. As the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras rightly said, the truth is that more people have been moving into the countryside. The 1981 census shows that the population of the countryside is rising again. Things cannot be all that bad.

We must start from the background that we have some of the most attractive living conditions in the world in the countryside of the United Kingdom. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) was right to refer to the smaller market towns. They are the particular and almost unique contribution of the British tradition to a style of living that is very attractive indeed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) made a point that I welcome. He said that this is a debate about change. We must begin by saying that things are not too bad. The prediction of writers about 50 years ago that there would be megalopolises all over the country have not come true. Those predictions were made by H. G. Wells and by Richard Jefferies who wrote a novel of gloom and doom about the south of England at about this stage of the century. None of the predictions has come true. Those writers lived through a period of real and dramatic change. Cities like Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow exploded out of virtually nothing. Indeed, "exploded" is the right word for it. Those writers did not imagine that things could not continue in that way.

We should pay tribute to the planning system, despite our criticisms about it. I cite my county of Avon as an example of the success of the British planning system. Avon contains the fine, large city of Bristol and a small suburb of Bristol, Bath, and many smaller towns. It has beautiful countryside. A similar number of people live in Avon as live in the city of Cleveland, Ohio in the United

[Mr. William Waldegrave]

States. However, we think of Avon as having identifiable cities and a pleasant rural environment. It is a triumph that we should consider Avon in that way rather than as a concrete mass. We must consider the criticisms against a background of success and then decide on the improvements.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle said that this was a debate about change. My hon. Friends the Members for Cambridgeshire, North-East and for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) said that we should consider the changing shape of industries and the opportunities that modern technological communications systems provide for spreading industry. That will surely save many rural areas in which the old staple industry of farming is declining to some extent as the source of income. We must develop our institutions and planning system to meet that change.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton has shown that my Department is sensitive enough to modern developments to allow Britain to lead in the great snail race. Several other rather more high-tech industries are being welcomed into the countryside.

Many of my hon. Friends have said that they welcome the steps that we have tried to take, for example, to promote the conversion of redundant farm buildings to make space for industries and, in some cases, homes. Many local authorities have not got the message yet. I confirm what several of my hon. Friends said on that point. In those cases, my Department will often give permission on appeal. If my hon. Friends claim that too many cases are allowed on appeal, they should consider the statistics which reveal that a relatively large proportion of such cases are granted on appeal, whereas the number of housing appeals, at the smaller end, is much lower. We need to consider the statistics carefully before we say that in every case it is wrong for cases to be overturned on appeal.

I find myself in some difficulty in responding to Scottish Members. Although I know the constituency of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) very well, it would be brave of me to mention any policy matter to do with it except to state that she rather alarmed me by saying that a great deal of Cheddar cheese is produced there. It seems to me that Cheddar cheese should, if possible, be made near Cheddar, preferably by my brother. However, that is a different matter.

The main theme of the debate has been housing. I welcome the wording of the motion. It has raised the question how we make the planning system sensitive enough to accommodate the increase in households and population. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North feels strongly about that, and he is right to do so. However, the developers do not invent the demand. They can sell the houses only because people want to buy them. We must recognise that the more we clamp down on developments in the places where the market takes them, the more the prices will go up for the houses that already exist. There are increasing pressures for intervention and to place increasing constraints on people's freedom to move so that houses become cheaper. Down that interventionist line, which to some extent we have to follow, lies the diminution of the freedoms for which our party stands. Therefore, we have to be careful.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) talked about the subject with feeling and knowledge. He agreed with one of the controversial but correct points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East—that it is the quality of the housing that often contributes to the level of opposition. My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire North-East said, rightly, that perhaps we should consider the release of a little more land so that the quality of the housing is better and so that there is an opportunity to build housing that fits in with the traditional styles of building. Often it is the urban density of a village that gives such offence. I sympathise with that. However, as I have said it may sometimes mean that a little more land is released.

My hon. Friends mentioned an admirable pamphlet on this subject which I have studied. That makes it seem as if all problems can be solved by urban development. About half our housing is developed on re-used urban land and that is welcome. That is happening much more than it did in the 1960s or 1970s. However, it has its limits. Building on urban land often means creating higher density housing in the constituencies of hon. Members in outer London areas, who see gardens or green space disappearing, and of hon. Members in inner London constituencies. In such areas people may defend vigorously the last bit of what may to an outsider appear to be derelict land but which may seem an opportunity for green space to someone living close by. Let us not believe that that is a complete answer.

There is a scandal of unused and derelict land. At long last it is being dealt with as a result of the initiatives of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his predecessors. The urban development corporations are putting pressure on local authorities to sell land, and other things are afoot as a result of the Audit Commission's report on the mishandling of land by many local authorities. That is right, but it will not solve all the problems.

The extra hundreds of thousands of households in the south-east which have been predicted by the OPCS cannot all be housed in constituencies such as that of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras or of mine in the centre of Bristol. Land will have to be taken. The challenge is to do it sensitively and carefully.

Perhaps we should be looking again at the idea of planning new settlements a little more carefully. There comes a time when the expansion of existing villages must end if they are not to turn into towns and have their nature changed. There are villages in England that have not yet returned to their pre-black death population. We should provide the proper services and do things carefully with quality development such as that discussed by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East. That may be a better way forward.

There is no easy answer to any of this. This year we have asked the Housing Corporation to consider the problems. We must provide more money for rural housing associations because that is the way to provide the often small amounts of additional accommodation needed in villages. It might be charitable housing association accommodation, an example of which I opened at Timberscombe, which is in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. It was for the benefit of elderly and young people of the village. Stock can be provided by local community housing

associations to meet people's needs for rented accommodation, which is a good way forward. The Development Commission is giving money to assist the growth of rural housing associations, which is welcome.

Many proposals in the Housing Bill will help to provide more rented stock and will encourage the private and public sectors to put funds alongside Government funds to expand the role of housing associations. Recently, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), I opened a development that had received a 30 per cent. subsidy. It provided low rents relevant to the needs of the people of that market town. Measures such as these can be taken, and we must expand this line of proceeding.

So many other subjects were raised that it is difficult for me to deal with all of them. I believe that calls for a single Department are a red herring, which derives—if this metaphor is not too mixed—from the perception that we must co-ordinate policy properly.

If we tried to invent a Department to deal with rural affairs—as my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale said—the Treasury would have to be involved, as would the Department of Trade and Industry. One would end up with large bits of other Departments and a rather small, cosmetic Department, such as the old Department of Economic Affairs, which we had under the Labour Government. Power would rest with the Departments where the planning system policy, the industry policy or, the agricultural policy lay. One might find that the rural clout had diminished rather than increased, because it would be a rather small animal in the Whitehall jungle. I doubt whether a new Department is the answer.

The request for better co-ordination is legitimate and we are increasingly trying to meet it. I assure hon. Members that when the farm woodlands scheme, farm diversification grants or policies for the environmentally sensitive areas—all of which are policies deriving from and led by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture—are brought forward, there will be close and detailed consultation between my Department and the other relevant Departments about the effects of those policies and how to take them forward.

The range of problems—this was mentioned by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras—is no less because they are scattered. It may be easier to see the concentrated problems of individual areas. The full range of skills of all the Whitehall Departments must be directed to those who live in country areas, rather than say, "There is a separate animal called a rural person who has his own Department and he is not of interest to the Department of Health and Social Security or the Department of Trade and Industry." I believe that it would be a mistake to go down that route.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough and my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale mentioned schools. The Education Reform Bill, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale said, will help with regard to opting out and particularly open enrolment.

In our armoury we have a full range of policies aimed at dealing with potential rural problems. The Development Commission is spending about £14 million per year on the factory programme—this was first raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East—which is a major increase over the £4 million that it was spending five or six years ago.

There must be advance building of small factories and workshops, and we are now increasing the output of those. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle rightly said, we need to encourage tourism. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale reminded my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle that holiday lets, which are necessary for tourism, can sometimes be a problem. However, tourism is one of the industries of the future.

One of the most traditional of all employers in the countryside, alongside agriculture and high-tech industry, which we need and are getting, is country sports. I agree with my hon. Friends the Members for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) and for Harborough that country sports can provide jobs in the most remote areas. When I was doing a conservation job, I found out what an important ally the grouse moor owners are to those who want to maintain the traditional ecology of the moorlands and to fight back the bracken. It was right to mention that and to remind the many urban experts on the countryside that it is wise, when lecturing country people on how to behave, to go carefully on some aspects which are a little different.

We have had a useful debate. I have given only the briefest of surveys on the many excellent points which were brought up. Hon. Members have recognised that the principal problem which is causing anxiety is housing, followed by planning. Planning is difficult because one man's enterprise is another's development. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale said, enterprise is good but development is bad. I welcome the notion because it recognises that careful use of the planning system is the way through that dilemma, although there will never be total agreement about it. I welcome even more the debate because the Government are considering bringing forward ideas on rural housing as a package. This debate has given a welcome stimulus to that process and reminds us how important it is.

2.26 pm

Mr. Moss: I am grateful to Conservative Members for their support of my motion and to Opposition Members for their contributions. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on the splendid and robust way in which he answered most of the points. I was especially pleased to hear him talk in terms of initiatives and policies to arrive at some solutions to the housing problems in rural areas, about which so many Conservative Members spoke.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House calls upon Her Majesty's Government to pursue policies and procedures to ensure an ordered phasing of development in those rural areas which will need to accommodate a growth in population, to encourage agricultural diversification and promote enterprise in the rural economy, to facilitate the provision of the necessary rural services, infrastructure, employment and housing, and to co-ordinate the work of those various agencies and departments which have a direct interest in rural affairs and rural land use.

High Technology Industry

2.27 pm

Mr. Timothy Wood (Stevenage): I beg to move,

That this House recognises the major benefits obtained by the country through scientific and technological innovation welcomes the recent initiatives of the Department of Trade and Industry which will further stimulate technological innovation and co-operative ventures to that end, but regrets the uncertainties which still exist in relation to the British development of space technology; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to clarify its policy regarding space research and development so that industry and research institutions can formulate their programmes with some confidence as to their future prospects.

Clearly, in the time available, it is impossible to develop arguments on the motion. Over the past 150 years new developments and innovation in a variety of ventures have helped us to create our present prosperity. For a country such as ours it is essential that, by increasing the value added to the various activities in which we are involved, we continue to give ourselves a high standard of living, whether in the towns, the cities or the country, about which we talked earlier.

We continue to have a number of problems, some of which the Government have tackled. There is no doubt that, in the past, there has been a poor relationship between universities and industry. There has been a lack of regard for technologies. I welcome the proposals for a national curriculum and the pressures that have been placed on universities to collaborate with industry. I welcome the various initiatives which have been taken, including the technical and vocational education initiative and the recent Department of Trade and Industry initiative for enterprise, but there are significant problems.

The future in space technology is uncertain. I have a particular interest in that subject because British Aerospace employs 1,500 people in the space and communications division in my constituency. It is fair to say that, for two or three decades, this country has been in two minds about the value of pursuing space activities.

Again, over the past year, we have seen question marks placed on whether industry and commerce in this country should pursue such activities. Indeed, British Aerospace sent me a comment today to the effect that, immediately following a Government statement, there was an advertisement in the local paper in Stevenage stating that jobs were available in Europe for high quality space technologists at three times the salaries that are offered in this country. Should I advise my constituents to join a move to Europe to pursue the activities in which they are so well qualified? I should like to be able to say that this country will provide a future in that industry in the coming years——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 24th February, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Orders No. 14 (Exempted business) and No. 15 (Prayers against statutory instruments, &c. (negative procedure)), Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Rifkind or of Mr. Neil Kinnock relating to Housing (Scotland) may be proceeded with, though opposed, for one and a half hours after the first of them has been entered upon, and, if proceedings thereon have not been previously disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall put successively the Question already proposed from the Chair and the Questions on such of the remaining Motions as may then be made.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

Council House Sales (Lambeth)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. William Shelton (Streatham): I shall make a clarification at the beginning of the debate. The House will hear certain criticisms of Lambeth council's services. They spring from the frustration that is suffered by my constituents and, indeed, by me. They spring from Lambeth's apparent inability to answer letters, answer telephones, make decisions, and maintain its services, especially housing services, which seem to be near collapse. I hold the political leadership of Lambeth council at fault. Typical hard Left leadership is involved in internal feuding and doctrinaire policies. There is a lack of management skills. However, the vast majority of officers of Lambeth council are hard-working and responsible, and they do their best in difficult conditions.

I applied for the Adjournment debate to bring before my hon. Friend Lambeth's failure to meet the legal wishes of council tenants to buy their own homes. About 2,500 tenants are waiting to have their applications processed. Some of them have been waiting since 1986. I am talking about those who have written to me. At least one has been waiting since 1984. Delays in processing the right-to-buy applications spring more from Left wing bias among the leadership of Lambeth council against home ownership than from inefficiency. In support of that, I adduce the fact that, since the right-to-buy was started in 1980, Lambeth council has sold fewer than 2,000 council homes to tenants. Since a year or two before 1980, neighbouring Wandsworth council, which is approximately the same size, on its own initiative, has sold about 10,000 homes —five times as many. That cannot be due to chance or a matter of efficiency or inefficiency. It must be a matter of political will-power.

Most of those who suffer aggravation and delay write to their local councillors, but a number write to me. I shall briefly refer to some of my recent letters. A family in Streatham Hill applied in September 1986. It had telephoned once a week, written to the Department of the Environment and to Lambeth council, but it has had no reply. Applicants in Kings avenue applied in May 1987. A surveyor arrived in August. There have been countless telephone calls. They were told that it will be at least another six months. Applicants in Kings avenue applied in January 1987, but they have heard nothing. An applicant in Dray gardens applied in June 1987, but has heard nothing. Another applicant applied in January 1987. The house was valued in July, but he has heard nothing.

Clearly, there is a great deal of delay, aggravation and frustration. I shall tell the House of my own experience with Lambeth council, which was rather unusual—in certain quarters, anyway. In August last year, I wrote to the director of administration listing a number of constituents who had approached me with difficulties over delay. He answered courteously a few days later saying that he had forwarded the letter to the chief solicitor, Mr. Robert Bloomfield who would contact me. Mr. Bloomfield did not contact me. At the end of September I wrote to him and received no reply. In the middle of October I wrote again to Mr. Bloomfield and received no reply.

In the middle of October I wrote to Mr. John George, chief executive of Lambeth council saying, "For heaven's sake, what is going on?" I received no reply. So I retreated and invited Mr. George to lunch. He was a charming man and was very apologetic. He promised to send me answers to the cases that I had raised. Again, I received nothing. In December, I received three paragraphs saying that I would receive a report by the end of the week. I did not receive it. On 22 December I wrote again to Mr George and received no reply. On 29 December I wrote to him again and received no reply. Eventually, on 27 January, six months after my first letter he wrote to me in response to one of the very many cases that I had sent to the chief executive. I wrote on 4 February about yet another case and, of course, I received no reply.

The House will understand why I am raising an Adjournment debate on the matter. I advised Mr. George some months ago that I would do so unless I received a reply. If a Member of Parliament, acting in the interests of his constituents, receives such discourteous, inefficient treatment, heaven help the residents of Lambeth.

The second matter that I wish to draw to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister of Housing and Planning relates to service charges. Lambeth is using service charges in an improper and unjust way to penalise those who have bought their council houses and to deter those who might be thinking of buying them. I gave as an example a block of flats in Bushell close, Palace road where a number of tenants bought their flats in 1982 and 1983. The residents were told that they would have to pay a service charge of some £500 a year for which they were invoiced and which they paid. Three years later, in 1987, they received a letter from Lambeth council saying that the matter had been looked into, a mistake had been made and that the service charge would be not £500 a year but £1,000 a year, and that that service charge of £1,000 a year would be back-dated to 1984. Therefore, the residents had to pay an additional £500 for 1984, for 1985 and for 1986. That service charge included costs for window cleaners and gardeners. The residents had seen no window cleaners or gardeners during that time.

I add that a number of those cases have been drawn to the attention of the local government ombudsman who, no doubt, is considering them and making a report in due course.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister whether councils have the right to raise such service charges against residents who have bought, are buying or are proposing to buy their council houses? Is there any way in which councils can be deterred from exercising that right? If there is no way of controlling them, a way must be found, otherwise councils can make service charges of £2,000, £3,000, £4,000 or £5,000 a year to frustrate the right-to-buy legislation, if they are doctrinaire and ill-tempered enough to do so.

It has been put to me, and I put it to my hon. Friend the Minister, that the increased complexity introduced by the 1986 legislation may, to some extent, slow down the progress of sales. I am told that the neighbouring borough of Wandsworth used to give a 10-year guarantee on every flat that was sold and, consequently, increase the valuation of that flat. That worked admirably and without any trouble for many years but the council can no longer do that because of the 1986 legislation. I am told that for flats the council must give an estimate of what may need to be done during the five years following the sale. We all know

[Mr. William Shelton]

how extraordinarily difficult that would be for private owners, let alone for a council. Furthermore, the law could be interpreted as saying that a full structural survey must be made. Even well-inclined councils are finding that it takes much longer to organise the sale of flats than it did before the 1986 Act, with its increased stipulations against which, I am advised, Wandsworth protested most vigorously during the consultation period before the legislation was promulgated. Its protestations were ignored.

I should be grateful if my hon. Friend would consider that fact to see whether it has caused, in part, some of the log jams in the processing of right-to-buy applications. It certainly gives a field day to the councils that are less well-inclined towards home ownership, such as Lambeth. It seems that the Act, which I supported strongly, encouraged demand, but also created new delays. Perhaps something could be done about that—indeed something certainly should be done in that area.

If Lambeth cannot respond to the perfectly legitimate interests of its tenants—who want to buy their homes and who are supported in that by two Acts of Parliament—either through inefficiency, which I doubt, or through lack of will—I believe that that is the cause of the delays—I urge my hon. Friend to consider Government intervention. As the House knows, the Government have such powers. They have powers to take over the management, to get sales moving and to sort out this situation, which is causing many problems for my constituents.

I suggest that we should consider whether we could privatise—I leave to my hon. Friend the question of whether it is possible to legislate to persuade councils to privatise—because it seems sensible to privatise the valuation of properties and the legal services used. I know that Wandsworth has tried that. I shall not conceal from the House the fact that Wandsworth found difficulty because of the complexity of the 1986 legislation which I have mentioned. However, that apart, it seems sensible to consider whether those valuations, which are at least straightforward, could not be performed by private companies, which are just as expert as the borough valuer. Of course, the borough valuer could then check them to make sure that they were not completely out of line.

The legal services involving the transfer of property and the land registry could also be performed by the private sector. I should add that the delays in Lambeth's land registry services are appalling. I believe that they are running at about 16 weeks whereas Wandsworth takes one week. In 1986, if my memory serves me correctly, Wandsworth carried out about 16,000 checks whereas Lambeth carried out about 13,000, although it has twice the number of staff in its land registry office as Wandsworth. Presumably, Wandsworth is computerised and Lambeth is not, but I do not know.

In conclusion, it is deeply wrong that Parliament's intention to grant home ownership, which coincides with the wishes of many of my constituents, should be frustrated in this way. I have used this Adjournment debate to bring that issue to my hon. Friend's attention and to urge him to consider what can be done to resolve it.

2.44 pm

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): I am grateful both to the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Shelton) and to the Minister for agreeing to my saying a few words on this subject. Firstly, please let me stress to the hon. Member for Streatham how much I sympathise with the very unequal exchange that he appears to have had with the chief executive for the borough, trading him a lunch for no reply to his letters.

It is very irritating, of course, in either central Government or local government when one does not get a response. I had, for example, exactly the same problem with the Home Secretary on a matter concerning the overcrowding of Brixton prison. I first wrote to him on 23 December. I reminded him again. I have had no reply and it has now been more than two months. I have had to put down a written parliamentary question on the matter, so, of course, it is not simply a matter of local government. None the less the hon. Gentleman has a substantive point in that he is entitled to replies.

I submit that one problem is that of staffing. Lambeth is a rate-capped borough and now has to undertake cuts in anticipated or actual expenditure by £60 million in this coming financial year. That will mean a reduction in the staff involved in housing from around 1,000 to just under 850 persons. Unfortunately, rather than being able to allocate the staff, it may get worse.

I think that the hon. Gentleman has a point on the valuer's staffing. If, indeed, there is twice the staff in Wandsworth, it is well worth looking at. On the other hand I submit to him that private valuation would be very two-edged. After all, there are always two or three firms in the local property market, and as Adam Smith once said, nothing is more certain when two or three producers or entrepreneurs are gathered together, even for merriment of diversion, than that they will seek to conspire against the public interest by a contrivance to raise prices. Perhaps in this case we might retain the safeguard of public valuation.

I have nearly finished these points but the other factors are simply these. Certainly, Lambeth was off to a slow start. There is no doubt that this reflected a certain lack of enthusiasm for sales, partly because—and I think that the hon. Gentleman would admit this—there is a difference here between the north end of the borough and Streatham, although there are big estates in Streatham. In my part of the borough of Lambeth we overwhelmingly have flats rather than houses and there are real problems on sales there. On the service charges, for example, I understand it to be the case in Wandsworth that flats are being sold and that sums of £1,000 are being charged for service charges. However, the hon. Gentleman has a good point when he says that these charges should not be retrospective.

The homelessness problem is really chronic in Lambeth. Naturally, there is a case for a plural housing sector—I finish on this point—of council, private, co-operative, housing association and others. But Lambeth's record is such that in 1986 there were 1,121 applications approved, as I understand it. In 1987 there were 2,575. It has gone up from an average of 93 a month to over 200 a month and I think that, even on the hon. Gentleman's own criteria, the situation is not quite so dire as he suggests.

2.48 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Mr. William Waldegrave): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Shelton) and to the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) for the way in which this important little debate has been introduced, because the situation in Lambeth is worrying. From the experience that we have had in the Department I can confirm a good deal of what my hon. Friend says.

First, I shall say why the right-to-buy policy can be of benefit to the borough. I was glad to hear the hon. Member for Vauxhall taking a pragmatic view of this. Certainly, the aim of a mixture of tenures in his and in my hon. Friend's area is a sensible social objective. What is more, in those areas where there is serious dilapidation and problems that often arise from badly designed 1960s estates and other estates, resources are needed. The right to buy and the receipts that arise from it, provide one additional source of such money. It is noticeable that the London boroughs with the most acute problems have been, for perhaps understandable political reasons, slowest to tap that source of money and that must be regretted.

I suspect that there is some political bias against the policy, which has meant that there is a little slackness in the administrative procedures. If there is no leadership, there will not be good organisation. There is another depressing statistic. If Lambeth council brought down the gap in relets to the average level, another 500 lets would be available each year. That would make a big impact, particularly on the bed and breakfast problem.

Something is going wrong in the housing department. The right-to-buy situation has deteriorated. Initially, there was not a great demand in Lambeth. The Department had no reason to believe there was any undue delay. At least, if the system was not very good, it was not very bad. The Department did not receive many complaints, which is a barometer of the situation. The number of complaints to local Members of Parliament is another, and perhaps better, barometer. When we set up the monitoring list, Lambeth was not included among the boroughs. In the initial stages of the right-to-buy process, Lambeth did not handle many cases and, therefore, there were few complaints.

The situation has deteriorated. Although there are now many more applications, there has been an increase in complaints. In the past few months, there has been a 100 per cent. increase in the number of complaints to the Department, in respect of Lambeth. Lambeth is now in the sad position of being in the top five, behind Camden, Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Southwark. That is not a competition that anyone wishes to win. That situation has developed as a result of weakness in administration and organisation and of a lack of political will.

It is difficult to obtain answers from Lambeth. The Department wrote to the chief executive on 23 November. We have not thought of offering him lunch. Perhaps that would be another ploy. After hearing the experiences of my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham, we might send him the bill. The Department requested that measures should be taken to improve matters. We chased things a good deal and eventually received a reply on 27 January. We have continued to take up cases with Lambeth, but without much response.

Like that of my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham, the patience of the Department is not inexhaustible. We shall have to decide whether Lambeth should go back on the list of monitored authorities. Ultimately, we have the doomsday weapon of intervention by the Secretary of State. My right hon. Friend watches these matters closely. Like my hon. Friend, we do not write letters just for fun. We try to ensure that the legal rights of our citizens, about which they feel passionately, are properly protected.

I should like to comment on two points raised by my hon. Friend. First, he suggested contracting out or privatising the process. It is open to local authorities to do that, if that is sensible. Compulsion to do so, when an authority is determined to be obstructive, might not work because there is bound to be a major role for the local authority in that process. It may find ways of making the life of an outside valuer or solicitor extremely difficult. We must try to get the council to do the job properly, one way or another, using our fallback powers if necessary. As many other Labour authorities throughout the country have shown, if they put their backs behind this policy, they can soon get sales going, even for flats.

My hon. Friend made an important point about service charges. I have had the same problem in my constituency in Bristol. We have not necessarily got the legislation right, but it is worth remembering why we took the step and disagreed with Wandsworth over this. We were finding that people were being given estimates for service charges which were instantly shown to be ill-considered, to put it mildly, and perhaps misleading. Bills predicted to be £200 or £300 turned out to be thousands of pounds. We said that the estimates must be binding, so that local authorities would take the matter seriously. As my hon. Friend said, that imposes a legal obligation on a local authority, which involves it in a great deal of work to ensure that the estimates are correct.

As a result of this debate we shall consider the matter again. There is a danger that local authorities could err so far on the side of safety or expense that they could frighten off buyers. The matter must be considered carefully and seriously because, as anyone in the private sector will know, service charges on flats can be high. People buy flats and find themselves landed with higher service charges than they had expected and then get into difficulties.

The intention of the Housing and Planning Act 1986 was to give people security and to stop an authority simply changing estimates radically as soon as a sale had been made. As usual, we had to legislate to deal with an abuse in a few authorities and by doing so we have probably made it more difficult for authorities which were behaving perfectly honourably and sensibly on the previous voluntary system. That is the frustration of this. One takes legislative powers to deal with abuses only to find that one has made life more difficult for those with no intention of abusing the previous system. We shall reconsider the position, but as it is not long since we legislated, perhaps we should let things settle down a little.

There is immense opportunity for Lambeth both to gain more resources for its housing needs, which are acute, and to establish local communities by increasing the level of owner-occupation. If the council followed that policy and put a little more enthusiasm behind the provision of the rights which exist in law, it could not only do good for tenants who seek to exercise their right to buy, but for the borough as a whole. Whether before or after lunch, I hope that the council will take note of this debate and remember

[Mr. William Waldegrave]

that the Government do not legislate for fun or provide themselves with back-up powers for no reason, and that if there is no sign of improvement it will be impossible for my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department not to consider taking further steps of a type most unwelcome to Lambeth, in order to assist my hon. Friend's constituents in achieving their legal rights.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 8 February 1988

TRANSPORT

Buses (Revenue Support)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list information available to him on the savings that have accrued from the changes in revenue support for bus transport since the Transport Act 1985 in *(a)* Shropshire county council and *(b)* Berkshire county council.

Mr. David Mitchell: The two councils have reported spending on passenger transport revenue support as follows:

£ million

	Shropshire	*Berkshire*
1985-86	0·787	1·613
1986-87	0·837	1·340
1987-88 (Budget)	0·880	1·083

Pin-ups

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will issue instructions for the removal of all offensive pin-ups in all his departmental premises.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Guidance was issued to all managers last July asking them to ensure that potentially offensive material is not displayed in the work place.

Aircraft (Passenger Seats)

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will raise at his next meeting with the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority the provision by commercial airlines of seats for passengers obliged to occupy smoking seats against their wishes.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There are no plans to do so. Generally this is a matter which is best left to the commercial judgment of individual airlines. The authority is able to take the views of users into account in all transport licensing cases where standards of services are at issue.

Road Costs

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all the motorway and trunk road contracts in England with a works cost of £1 million or more which his Department intends to award in 1988-89 showing, in each case, the total value of the contract and the expenditure likely to be incurred in that year.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The table lists schemes which we plan to start in 1988-89. The list is provisional and currently under review. Actual starts 1988-89 may differ from this list as progress is dependent on outstanding statutory procedures and other factors. Other schemes not on the list may start in 1988-89 if progress with statutory procedures is faster than currently expected.

£ million

Route	*Title*	*Works cost estimate*	*Forecast expenditure in 1988-89*
(A) Schemes for which statutory procedures have been completed			
M5	Widening—Catshill to Lydiate Ash	22	9
M20	Maidstone to Ashford (two contracts)	62	17
M40	Gaydon Bypass	28	11
M62	Eastbound Climbing Lane J21-22	3	3
M62	Westbound Climbing Lane J24-25	2	2
A1	Dishforth Interchange	5	2
A6	Barton Bypass	6	2
A11	Thetford Bypass	7	4
A16	Boston to Algakirk	7	3
A21	Robertsbridge Bypass	3	1
A27	Pevensey Bypass	6	2
A35	Charmouth Bypass	6	2
A36	Steeple Langford Bypass	2	1
A40	Swakeleys Road Junction Improvement	8	6
A41	Bicester Bypass Stage 1	3	1
A46	Newark Relief Road	27	12
A47	Guyhirn Diversion	3	1
A52	Nottingham Outer Ring Road, Abbey Street Grade Separated Junction	4	2
A282	Dartford-Thurrock Crossing Approach Roads	20	4
A303	Sparkford Bypass	6	3
A406	Chingford Road to Hale End Road	38	18
A435/A422	Alcester Bypass	7	4
A565	Derby Road Improvement	2	1
	Sub total (A) 23 Schemes	278	111

Route	Title	Works cost estimate	Forecast expenditure in 1988-89
(B) Schemes for which some statutory procedures have not been completed			
M3	Compton to Bassett widening	27	10
A30	Launceston to Plusha	6	3
A35	Axminster Bypass	6	0
A36	Beckington Bypass	4	1
A36	Codford Bypass	2	1
A43	Blisworth Bypass	11	0
A303	Ilchester to South Petherton	9	2
A435	Sedgeberrow Bypass	1	1
A604	M1 to A1 Link	60	15
A650	Drighlington Bypass	5	1
A696	Woolsington Bypass	9	2
	Sub total (B) 11 Schemes	140	36

(c) In addition, further contracts are expected to be let on schemes which will be under construction at 31 March 1988 as follows:

Route	Title	Contract cost estimate (£ million)
M40	Banbury Bypass Contract 2	23
M40	Banbury Bypass Contract 4	45
A2	London Boundary to M2 Improvement Contract 4	2
A19	Peterlee Grade Separated Junction Stage 2	3
	Sub total (C) 4 Contracts	73

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in the form of his answer of 2 April 1987, *Official Report*, column *571-72*, all the motorway and trunk road contracts with a works cost of £1 millon or more which his Department had intended to award in 1987-88 but no longer anticipated doing, with, in each case, an indication of when the contract might be let.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Construction has started or is expected to start as planned on 29 of the schemes listed in my answer of 2 April 1987. Current estimates of dates for start of works on the remainder are as follows:

£ million

Route	Title	Works cost estimate	Estimated date for start of works
(A) Schemes which had completed all their statutory procedures:			
M62	Eastbound climbing lane (Junctions 21-22)	3	Spring 1988
M62	Westbound climbing lane (Junctions 24-25)	2	Spring 1988
A2	London boundary to M2 Improvement Contract 4	1	Autumn 1988
	Sub total (A)	6	
(B) Schemes for which statutory procedures has still to be completed:			
M3	Compton to Bassett widening	27	Early 1989
A6	Barton bypass	6	Mid 1988
A27	Penvensey bypass	6	Mid 1988
A41	Bicester bypass	3	Autumn 1988
A52	Nottingham outer ring road Abbey Street grade separated junction	4	Spring 1988
A140	Dickleburgh bypass	2	Spring 1989
A435/A422	Alcester bypass	7	Autumn 1988
A696	Woolsington bypass	9	Late 1988
	Sub total (B)	64	

London Underground Ltd.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans London Underground Limited has for franchising or contracting the managements of stations to commercial or voluntary bodies.

Mr. David Mitchell: I understand there are no such plans.

Herald of Free Enterprise

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the items of cargo carried on board the Herald of Free Enterprise at the time of her sinking whose carriage on board a passenger vessel breached regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: My Department has been informed by the authorities in Belgium that although one lorry on board was carrying a cargo declared to be cyanide

solutions, they found it to consist of several drums and plastic pails containing substances that are banned from carriage in a passenger ship.

The Belgian authorities have asked for assistance in following up certain lines of inquiry in the United Kingdom. Since a prosecution is being considered in Belgium, it would not be proper to disclose further details.

Toxic Waste (Transportation)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he is satisfied that adequate checks exist over the manifests of cross-Channel ferries in order to detect the carrying of toxic chemical wastes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The onus to ensure that dangerous goods manifests are correct is placed upon the shipper and the ship operator in the Merchant Shipping (Dangerous Goods) Regulations 1981, as amended.

My marine surveyors do carry out spot checks on the dangerous goods manifests, but this can ensure only that the goods can be carried on the vessel inspected and that they are correctly located. It is not possible to detect from the dangerous goods manifest undeclared or wrongly declared dangerous goods.

ENVIRONMENT

South West Housing Society

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what public funds have been made available to the South West Housing Society Ltd., Bull Wharf, Redcliff street, Bristol BS1, for each year that funds were provided.

Mrs. Roe: In recent years the Department of the Environment has paid the society the following amounts in housing association grant, revenue deficit grant and grant in relief of tax:

Financial Year	*Grant Paid In Year (£)*
1972-73	77
1973-74	4
1974-75	Nil
1975-76	812
1976-77	479
1977-78	1,432
1978-79	Nil
1979-80	1,178
1980-81	50,000
1981-82	443,812
1982-83	2,005
1983-84	27,563
1984-85	86,842
1985-86	329,289
1986-87	200,886
1987-88	332,553

Local Government Employees (Greater Manchester)

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the number of employees of each of the 10 metropolitan borough councils in Greater Manchester broken down by function, subject and area.

Mr. Chope: The tables show the results of the September 1987 survey of the joint manpower watch for the metropolitan borough councils in Greater Manchester. Information collected under section 56 of the Local Government Act 1985 for these authorities is available in the Library of the House.

Joint Manpower Watch—Quarter 51
Numbers of staff by function: Bolton

Population—261,000 *12th September 1987*

Service	*Non manual*				*Manual*				*Total*	
	Full time		*Part time*		*Full time*		*Part time*			
	Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
1 Education—Teaching	3,010	52·5	450	43·1					3,460	27·6
2 Other	687	12·0	323	30·9	484	22·5	1,946	53·9	3,440	27·4
3 Construction	58	1·0	2	0·2	470	21·9	6	0·2	536	4·3
4 Transport										
5 Social Services	620	10·8	121	11·6	353	16·4	1,003	27·8	2,097	16·7
6 Total (1-5)	4,375	76·3	596	85·7	1,307	60·8	2,955	81·9	9,533	76·1
7 Libraries	125	2·2	58	5·6	23	1·1	96	2·7	302	2·4
8 Recreation	88	1·5	5	0·5	400	18·6	293	8·1	786	6·3
9 Environmental Health	65	1·1	5	0·5	25	1·2			95	0·8
10 Refuse	11	0·2			107	5·0			118	0·9
11 Housing	240	4·2	15	1·4	76	3·5	36	1·0	367	2·9
12 Planning	100	1·7	9	0·9					109	0·9
13 Chief Executive	31	0·5	2	0·2					33	0·3
14 Finance	171	3·0	13	1·2					184	1·5
15 Secretarial	112	2·0	31	3·0	51	2·4	94	2·6	288	2·3
16 Legal	13	0·2							13	0·1
17 Engineering	162	2·8	1	0·1	144	6·7			307	2·4
18 Architecture	76	1·3							76	0·6
19 Estates	27	0·5							27	0·2
20 Personnel	22	0·4	1	0·1					23	0·2
21 Management Service										
22 Computing	67	1·2	2	0·2					69	0·6
23 Consumer Protection	13	0·2							13	0·1
24 Other Administration	9	0·2	4	0·4					13	0·1

Service	Non manual				Manual				Total	
	Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time			
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
27 Technical Services										
28 Central Service (13-27)	703	12·3	54	5·2	195	9·1	94	2·6	1,046	8·3
29 Fire Service—Regular										
30 Others										
31 Other Services	27	0·5	3	0·3	15	0·7	134	3·7	179	1·4
32 Total (7-12, 28-31)	1,359	23·7	149	14·3	841	39·2	653	18·1	3,002	23·9
33 General Service (1-32)	5,734	100·0	1,045	100·0	2,148	100·0	3,608	100·0	12,535	100·0
34 Agency Staff										
35 Magistrates Courts	37	0·0							37	0·0
36 Probation—Officers										
37 Others										

Joint Manpower Watch—Quarter 51
Numbers of staff by function: Bury

Population—174,000 *12th September 1987*

Service	Non manual				Manual				Total	
	Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time			
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
1 Education—Teaching	1,723	51·7	194	25·7					1,917	26·4
2 Other	378	11·3	375	49·7	151	18·9	1,374	57·5	2,278	31·3
3 Construction	9	0·3			219	27·4	2	0·1	230	3·2
4 Transport										
5 Social Services	333	10·0	49	6·5	92	11·5	818	34·3	1,292	17·8
6 Total (1-5)	2,443	73·3	618	82·0	462	57·9	2,194	91·9	5,717	76·6
7 Libraries	73	2·2	40	5·3	2	0·3	12	0·5	127	1·7
8 Recreation	65	2·0	20	2·7	185	23·2	32	1·3	302	4·2
9 Environmental Health	41	1·2			4	0·5			45	0·6
10 Refuse	23	0·7	2	0·3	77	9·6			102	1·4
11 Housing	92	2·8	29	3·8	4	0·5	11	0·5	136	1·9
12 Planning	60	1·8	3	0·4					63	0·9
13 Chief Executive	46	1·4	4	0·5					50	0·7
14 Finance	136	4·1	3	0·4					139	1·9
15 Secretarial	30	0·9	8	1·1			48	2·0	86	1·2
16 Legal	23	0·7							23	0·3
17 Engineering	108	3·2	4	0·5	52	6·5			164	2·3
18 Architecture	58	1·7	4	0·5					62	0·9
19 Estates	25	0·8	1	0·1	1	0·1	4	0·2	31	0·4
20 Personnel	14	0·4	1	0·1					15	0·2
21 Management Service	13	0·4	[redacted]	0·7					18	0·2
22 Computing	14	0·4							14	0·2
23 Consumer Protection	9	0·3							9	0·1
24 Other Administration	6	0·2	1	0·1			1	0·0	8	0·1
27 Technical Services	49	1·5	8	1·1					57	0·8
28 Central Service (13-27)	531	15·9	39	5·2	53	6·6	53	2·2	676	9·3
29 Fire Service—Regular										
30 Others										
31 Other Services	5	0·2	3	0·4	11	1·4	86	3·6	105	1·4
32 Total (7-12, 28-31)	890	26·7	136	18·0	336	42·1	194	8·1	1,556	21·4
33 General Service (1-32)	3,333	100·0	754	100·0	798	100·0	2,388	100·0	7,273	100·0
34 Agency Staff										
35 Magistrates Courts	22	0·0	8	0·0					30	0·0
36 Probation—Officers										
37 Others										

Joint Manpower Watch—Quarter 51
Numbers of staff by function: Manchester

Population—455,000 *12th September 1987*

Service	Non manual				Manual				Total	
	Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time			
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
1 Education—Teaching	6,995	38·5	3,965	76·0					10,960	26·0
2 Other	3,057	16·8	715	13·7	1,108	11·4	5,948	65·7	10,828	25·7
3 Construction	769	4·2	8	0·2	4,379	44·9	21	0·2	5,177	12·3
4 Transport										
5 Social Services	2,037	11·2	293	5·6	1,159	11·9	2,498	27·6	5,987	14·2
6 Total (1-5)	12,858	70·9	4,981	95·5	6,646	68·1	8,467	93·5	32,952	78·1
7 Libraries	471	2·6	80	1·5	162	1·7	22	0·2	735	1·7
8 Recreation	537	3·0	53	1·0	1,277	13·1	157	1·7	2,024	4·8
9 Environmental Health	384	2·1	8	0·2	56	0·6	10	0·1	458	1·1
10 Refuse	110	0·6	5	0·1	944	9·7	5	0·1	1,064	2·5
11 Housing	843	4·6	23	0·4	243	2·5	34	0·4	1,143	2·7
12 Planning	163	0·9	2	0·0					165	0·4
13 Chief Executive	15	0·1	1	0·0					16	0·0
14 Finance	548	3·0	9	0·2					557	1·3
15 Secretarial	337	1·9	22	0·4	92	0·9	125	1·4	576	1·4
16 Legal	120	0·7	1	0·0					121	0·3
17 Engineering	631	3·5	1	0·0	136	1·4	4	0·0	772	1·8
18 Architecture	500	2·8	2	0·0					502	1·2
19 Estates	101	0·6	2	0·0	10	0·1	4	0·0	117	0·3
20 Personnel	32	0·2	5	0·1					37	0·1
21 Management Service	55	0·3	2	0·0					57	0·1
22 Computing	128	0·7	8	0·2					136	0·3
23 Consumer Protection	81	0·4			13	0·1	4	0·0	98	0·2
24 Other Administration	51	0·3	3	0·1					54	0·1
27 Technical Services										
28 Central Service (13-27)	2,599	14·3	56	1·1	251	2·6	137	1·5	3,043	7·2
29 Fire Service—Regular										
30 Others										
31 Other Services	181	1·0	6	0·1	183	1·9	219	2·4	589	1·4
32 Total (7-12, 28-31)	5,288	29·1	233	4·5	3,116	31·9	584	6·5	9,221	21·9
33 General Service (1-32)	18,146	100·0	5,214	100·0	9,762	100·0	9,051	100·0	42,173	100·0
34 Agency Staff										
35 Magistrates Courts	164	0·0	8	0·0					172	0·0
36 Probation—Officers										
37 Others										

Joint Manpower Watch—Quarter 51
Numbers of staff by function: Oldham

Population—220,000 *12th September 1987*

Service	Non manual				Manual				Total	
	Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time			
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
1 Education—Teaching	2,523	52·1	433	47·1					2,956	28·0
2 Other	510	10·5	289	31·4	370	18·2	1,650	60·1	2,819	26·7
3 Construction	114	2·4			518	25·5			632	6·0
4 Transport										
5 Social Services	508	10·5	70	7·6	337	16·6	772	28·1	1,687	16·0
6 Total (1-5)	3,655	75·5	792	86·1	1,225	60·8	2,422	88·2	8,094	76·8
7 Libraries	68	1·4	69	7·5	7	0·3	27	1·0	171	1·6
8 Recreation	110	2·3	7	0·8	327	16·1	123	4·5	567	5·4
9 Environmental Health	63	1·3	3	0·3	17	0·8	2	0·1	85	0·8
10 Refuse	11	0·2			167	8·2	2	0·1	180	1·7
11 Housing	148	3·1	8	0·9	101	5·0	44	1·6	301	2·9
12 Planning	100	2·1	4	0·4					104	1·0
13 Chief Executive	34	0·7	1	0·1					35	0·3
14 Finance	231	4·8	15	1·6	4	0·2			250	2·4
15 Secretarial	68	1·4	9	1·0	9	0·4	20	0·7	106	1·0
16 Legal	30	0·6							30	0·3

Service	Non manual				Manual				Total	
	Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time			
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
17 Engineering	137	2·8	4	0·4	131	6·4	5	0·2	277	2·6
18 Architecture	31	0·6							31	0·3
19 Estates	31	0·6							31	0·3
20 Personnel	20	0·4	1	0·1					21	0·2
21 Management Service	22	0·5							22	0·2
22 Computing	33	0·7							33	0·3
23 Consumer Protection	15	0·3							15	0·1
24 Other Administration	9	0·2	3	0·3					12	0·1
27 Technical Services										
28 Central Service (13-27)	661	13·6	33	3·6	144	7·1	25	0·9	863	8·2
29 Fire Service—Regular										
30 Others										
31 Other Services	27	0·6	4	0·4	46	2·3	100	3·6	177	1·7
32 Total (7-12+28-31)	1,188	24·5	128	13·9	809	39·8	323	11·8	2,448	23·2
33 General Service (1-32)	4,843	100·0	920	100·0	2,034	100·0	2,745	100·0	10,542	100·0
34 Agency Staff										
35 Magistrates Courts	40	0·0	2	0·0	2	0·0	16	0·0	60	0·0
36 Probation—Officers										
37 Others										

Joint Manpower Watch—Quarter 51
Numbers of staff by function: Rochdale

Population—206,000 *12th September 1987*

Service	Non manual				Manual				Total	
	Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time			
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
1 Education—Teaching	2,437	50·3	373	38·3					2,810	26·7
2 Other	512	10·6	368	37·8	404	26·1	1,671	52·6	2,955	28·0
3 Construction	74	1·5			215	13·9			289	2·7
4 Transport										
5 Social Services	546	11·3	67	6·9	224	14·5	1,172	36·9	2,009	19·1
6 Total (1-5)	3,569	73·7	808	83·0	843	54·5	2,843	89·5	8,063	76·5
7 Libraries	78	1·6	66	6·8	10	0·6	22	0·7	176	1·7
8 Recreation	108	2·2	12	1·2	286	18·5	56	1·8	462	4·4
9 Environmental Health	59	1·2	2	0·2	40	2·6	62	2·0	163	1·5
10 Refuse	22	0·5	1	0·1	146	9·4			169	1·6
11 Housing	245	5·1	32	3·3			9	0·3	286	2·7
12 Planning	80	1·7	6	0·6					86	0·8
13 Chief Executive	4	0·1							4	0·0
14 Finance	156	3·2	12	1·2					168	1·6
15 Secretarial	86	1·8	16	1·6	24	1·6	83	2·6	211	2·0
16 Legal	29	0·6							29	0·3
17 Engineering	133	2·7	10	1·0	162	10·5	2	0·1	307	2·9
18 Architecture	105	2·2			1	0·1			106	1·0
19 Estates	28	0·6	3	0·3			3	0·1	34	0·3
20 Personnel	29	0·6							29	0·3
21 Management Service	22	0·5	3	0·3					25	0·2
22 Computing	47	1·0	1	0·1					48	0·5
23 Consumer Protection	9	0·2							9	0·1
24 Other Administration	16	0·3	1	0·1					17	0·2
27 Technical Services										
28 Central Service (13-27)	666	13·8	46	4·7	187	12·1	88	2·8	987	9·4
29 Fire Service—Regular										
30 Others										
31 Other Services	14	0·3	1	0·1	35	2·3	97	3·1	147	1·4
32 Total (7-12, 28-31)	1,272	26·3	166	17·0	704	45·5	334	10·5	2,476	23·5
33 General Service (1-32)	4,841	100·0	974	100·0	1,547	100·0	3,177	100.0	10,539	100.0
34 Agency Staff										

Service	Non manual				Manual				Total	
	Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time			
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
35 Magistrates Courts	40	0·0	6	0·0			1	0·0	47	0·0
36 Probation—Officers										
37 Others										

Joint Manpower Watch—Quarter 51
Numbers of staff by function: Salford

Population—243,000 *12th September 1987*

Service	Non manual				Manual				Total	
	Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time			
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
1 Education—Teaching	2,846	47·2	746	61·2					3,592	27·5
2 Other	751	12·5	223	18·3	354	18·3	2,345	60·4	3,673	28·1
3 Construction	218	3·6			433	22·4			651	5·0
4 Transport										
5 Social Services	656	10·9	75	6·2	386	20·0	1,176	30·3	2,293	17·6
6 Total (1-5)	4,471	74·2	1,044	85·6	1,173	60·7	3,521	90·7	10,209	78·2
7 Libraries	112	1·9	74	6·1	10	0·5	29	0·7	225	1·7
8 Recreation	150	2·5	72	5·9	360	18·6	99	2·6	681	5·2
9 Environmental Health	92	1·5	3	0·2	1	0·1			96	0·7
10 Refuse	38	0·6			290	15·0			328	2·5
11 Housing	331	5·5	8	0·7	59	3·1	26	0·7	424	3·2
12 Planning	116	1·9	2	0·2					118	0·9
13 Chief Executive	12	0·2							12	0·1
14 Finance	177	2·9	1	0·1					178	1·4
15 Secretarial	90	1·5	3	0·2	3	0·2	35	0·9	131	1·0
16 Legal	36	0·6							36	0·3
17 Engineering	112	1·9	1	0·1	17	0·9	58	1·5	188	1·4
18 Architecture	56	0·9							56	0·4
19 Estates	43	0·7							45	0·3
20 Personnel	63	1·0	6	0·5					69	0·5
21 Management Service	17	0·3							17	0·1
22 Computing	74	1·2	1	0·1					75	0·6
23 Consumer Protection	14	0·2	2	0·2	1	0·1	3	0·1	20	0·2
24 Other Administration	8	0·1	2	0·2					10	0·1
27 Technical Services										
28 Central Service (13-27)	704	11·7	16	1·3	21	1·1	96	2·5	837	6·4
29 Fire Service—Regular										
30 Others										
31 Other Services	14	0·2			20	1·0	110	2·8	144	1·1
32 Total (7-12, 28-31)	1,557	25·8	175	14·4	761	39·3	360	9·3	2,853	21·8
33 General Service (1-32)	6,028	100·0	1,219	100·0	1,934	100·0	3,881	100·0	13,062	100·0
34 Agency Staff										
35 Magistrates Courts	43	0·0	14	0·0					57	0·0
36 Probation—Officers										
37 Others										

Joint Manpower Watch—Quarter 51
Numbers of staff by function: Stockport

Population—289,000 *12th September 1987*

Service	Non manual				Manual				Total	
	Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time			
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
1 Education—Teaching	2,245	48·1	874	53·0					3,119	27·8
2 Other	613	13·1	358	21·7	314	18·0	1,835	58·0	3,120	27·8
3 Construction	104	2·2			317	18·2			421	3·7
4 Transport										
5 Social Services	503	10·8	184	11·2	302	17·3	818	25·9	1,807	16·1
6 Total (1-5)	3,465	74·2	1,416	85·9	933	53·4	2,653	83·9	8,467	75·4
7 Libraries	113	2·4	81	4·9	18	1·0	61	1·9	273	2·4

Service	Non manual				Manual				Total	
	Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time			
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
8 Recreation	156	3·3	64	3·9	342	19·6	246	7·8	808	7·2
9 Environmental Health	65	1·4	3	0·2	36	2·1	4	0·1	108	1·0
10 Refuse	25	0·5	3	0·2	126	7·2			154	1·4
11 Housing	125	2·7	5	0·3	89	5·1	28	0·9	247	2·2
12 Planning	87	1·9	5	0·3					92	0·8
13 Chief Executive	27	0·6	2	0·1					29	0·3
14 Finance	133	2·8	9	0·5					142	1·3
15 Secretarial	172	3·7	48	2·9	22	1·3	34	1·1	276	2·5
16 Legal	31	0·7	2	0·1					33	0·3
17 Engineering	113	2·4			141	8·1			254	2·3
18 Architecture	60	1·3							60	0·5
19 Estates	21	0·4							21	0·2
20 Personnel	12	0·3	2	0·1					14	0·1
21 Management Service	14	0·3							14	0·1
22 Computing	27	0·6	9	0·5					36	0·3
23 Consumer Protection	11	0·2							11	0·1
24 Other Administration	9	0·2			12	0·7	6	0·2	27	0·2
27 Technical Services										
28 Central Service (13-27)	630	13·5	72	4·4	175	10·0	40	1·3	917	8·2
29 Fire Service—Regular										
30 Others										
31 Other Services	3	0·1			27	1·5	131	4·1	161	1·4
32 Total (7-12, 28-31)	1,204	25·8	233	14·1	813	46·6	510	16·1	2,760	24·6
33 General Service (1-32)	4,669	100·0	1,649	100·0	1,746	100·0	3,163	100·0	11,227	100·0
34 Agency Staff										
35 Magistrates Courts	50	0·0	7	0·0	2	0·0	1	0·0	60	0·0
36 Probation—Officers										
37 Others										

Joint Manpower Watch—Quarter 51
Numbers of staff by function: Tameside

Population—215,000 *12th September 1987*

Service	Non manual				Manual				Total	
	Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time			
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
1 Education—Teaching	2,352	40·1	547	54·4					2,899	26·6
2 Other	495	10·3	193	19·2	344	17·2	1,815	58·7	2,847	26·2
3 Construction	128	2·7			673	33·7	3	0·1	804	7·4
4 Transport										
5 Social Services	437	9·1	119	11·8	162	8·1	882	28·5	1,600	14·7
6 Total (1-5)	3,412	71·2	859	85·5	1,179	59·0	2,700	87·4	8,150	74·9
7 Libraries	92	1·9	48	4·8	3	0·2	25	0·8	168	1·5
8 Recreation	142	3·0	29	2·9	248	12·4	138	4·5	557	5·1
9 Environmental Health	61	1·3	1	0·1	73	3·7	4	0·1	139	1·3
10 Refuse					163	8·2			163	1·5
11 Housing	160	3·3	8	0·8	50	2·5	60	1·9	278	2·6
12 Planning	78	1·6							78	0·7
13 Chief Executive	2	0·0							2	0·0
14 Finance	168	3·5	39	3·9					207	1·9
15 Secretarial	79	1·6	9	0·9	17	0·9	61	2·0	166	1·5
16 Legal	34	0·7	2	0·2					36	0·3
17 Engineering	155	3·2	3	0·3	212	10·6	1	0·0	371	3·4
18 Architecture	55	1·1							55	0·5
19 Estates	42	0·9	2	0·2					44	0·4
20 Personnel	215	4·5			38	1·9	2	0·1	255	2·3
21 Management Service	25	0·5							25	0·2
22 Computing	50	1·0	4	0·4					54	0·5
23 Consumer Protection	10	0·2							10	0·1
24 Other Administration	8	0·2							8	0·1
27 Technical Services										
28 Central Service (13-27)	843	17·6	59	5·9	267	13·4	64	2·1	1,233	11·3
29 Fire Service—Regular										

Service	Non manual				Manual				Total	
	Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time			
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
30 Others										
31 Other Services	2	0·0	1	0·1	14	0·7	99	3·2	116	1·1
32 Total (7-12+28-31)	1,378	28·8	146	14·5	818	41·0	390	12·6	2,732	25·1
33 General Service (1-32)	4,790	100·0	1,005	100·0	1,997	100·0	3,090	100·0	10,882	100·0
34 Agency Staff										
35 Magistrates Courts	41	0·0	10	0·0					51	0·0
36 Probation—Officers										
37 Others										

Joint Manpower Watch—Quarter 51
Numbers of staff by function: Trafford

Population—218,000 *12th September 1987*

Service	Non manual				Manual				Total	
	Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time			
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
1 Education—Teaching	1,857	50·0	146	22·7					2,003	23·9
2 Other	369	9·9	304	47·3	172	16·0	1,466	49·7	2,311	27·6
3 Construction					177	16·5			177	2·1
4 Transport										
5 Social Services	377	10·2	86	13·4	67	6·2	1,106	37·5	1,636	19·5
6 Total (1-5)	2,603	70·1	536	83·4	416	38·7	2,572	87·3	6,127	73·2
7 Libraries	75	2·0	43	6·7	3	0·3	26	0·9	147	1·8
8 Recreation	111	3·0	29	4·5	265	24·7	139	4·7	544	6·5
9 Environmental Health	83	2·2	4	0·6	13	1·2	4	0·1	104	1·2
10 Refuse	9	0·2			154	14·3			161	1·9
11 Housing	113	3·0			43	4·0	44	1·5	200	2·4
12 Planning	83	2·2	2	0·3					85	1·0
13 Chief Executive	24	0·6	1	0·2					25	0·3
14 Finance	162	4·4	3	0·5					165	2·0
15 Secretarial	56	1·5	18	2·8	9	0·8	68	2·3	151	1·8
16 Legal	29	0·8							29	0·3
17 Engineering	118	3·2			134	12·5			252	3·0
18 Architecture	98	2·6							98	1·2
19 Estates	15	0·4							15	0·2
20 Personnel	21	0·6	4	0·6					25	0·3
21 Management Service	29	0·8							29	0·3
22 Computing	23	0·6	1	0·2					24	0·3
23 Consumer Protection	10	0·3							10	0·1
24 Other Administration	5	0·1	1	0·2					6	0·1
27 Technical Services	43	1·2			6	0·6	2	0·1	51	0·6
28 Central Service (13-27)	633	17·1	28	4·4	149	13·9	70	2·4	880	10·5
29 Fire Service—Regular										
30 Others										
31 Other Services	3	0·1	1	0·2	31	2·9	92	3·1	127	1·5
32 Total (7-12+28-31)	1,108	29·9	107	16·6	658	61·3	375	12·7	2,248	26·8
33 General Service (1-32)	3,711	100·0	643	100·0	1,074	100·0	2,947	100·0	8,375	100·0
34 Agency Staff										
35 Magistrates Courts	29	0·0	2	0·0	1	0·0	9	0·0	41	0·0
36 Probation—Officers										
37 Others										

Joint Manpower Watch—Quarter 51
Numbers of staff by function: Wigan

Population—307,000 *12th September 1987*

Service	Non manual				Manual				Total	
	Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time			
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
1 Education—Teaching	3,701	56·8	190	17·9					3,891	27·1
2 Other	628	9·6	700	65·8	442	18·6	2,480	56·5	4,250	29·6

Service	Non manual				Manual				Total	
	Full time		Part time		Full time		Part time			
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
3 Construction	130	2·0			729	30·6	6	0·1	865	6·0
4 Transport										
5 Social Services	556	8·5	40	3·8	299	12·6	1,469	33·5	2,364	16·5
6 Total (1-5)	5,015	76·9	930	87·4	1,470	61·8	3,955	90·1	11,370	79·2
7 Libraries	133	2·0	52	4·9	7	0·3	27	0·6	219	1·5
8 Recreation	135	2·1	23	2·2	366	15·4	36	0·8	560	3·9
9 Environmental Health	70	1·1	1	0·1					71	0·5
10 Refuse	24	0·4			372	15·6	6	0·1	402	2·8
11 Housing	231	3·5	2	0·2	49	2·1	83	1·9	365	2·5
12 Planning	87	1·3							87	0·6
13 Chief Executive	3	0·0							3	0·0
14 Finance	208	3·2	27	2·5					235	1·6
15 Secretarial	134	2·1	11	1·0			76	1·7	221	1·5
16 Legal	31	0·5							31	0·2
17 Engineering	162	2·5	2	0·2	64	2·7			228	1·6
18 Architecture	52	0·8	1	0·1					53	0·4
19 Estates	61	0·9	4	0·4					65	0·5
20 Personnel	44	0·7	1	0·1					45	0·3
21 Management Service	4	0·1							4	0·0
22 Computing	33	0·5	1	0·1					34	0·2
23 Consumer Protection	12	0·2							12	0·1
24 Other Administration	18	0·3	6	0·6					24	0·2
27 Technical Services	26	0·4	1	0·1					27	0·2
28 Central Service (13-27)	788	12·1	54	5·1	64	2·7	76	1·7	982	6·8
29 Fire Service—Regular										
30 Others										
31 Other Services	38	0·6	2	0·2	51	2·1	208	4·7	299	2·1
32 Total (7-12, 28-31)	1,506	23·1	134	12·6	909	38·2	436	9·9	2,985	20·8
33 General Service (1-32)	6,521	100·0	1,064	100·0	2,379	100·0	4,391	100·0	14,355	100·0
34 Agency Staff										
35 Magistrates Courts	46	0·0	2	0·0			12	0·0	60	0·0
36 Probation—Officers										
37 Others										

Rights of Way

Mr. Nicholas Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to make it compulsory upon owners of passages or places over which there are public rights of way to erect a notice stating the name and address of the owner.

Mr. Moynihan: No. It would appear both unnecessary and inappropriate to impose such a burden on landowners. In cases where applicants to modify the definitive map and statement of public rights of way have been unable to identify owners and occupiers, they may apply to the certifying authority for a dispensation.

Planning Appeals (Worthing)

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals against refusal of planning permission by the Worthing borough council have been made to him in each of the last five years; and on how many occasions he has reversed the council's decision.

Mr. Waldegrave: The table shows the number of planning appeals received against decisions of the Worthing borough council between 1 January 1984, the earliest date from which this information is available, and 30 September 1987, the number decided in each period and the number allowed.

Year	Appeals Received	Appeals Decided	Appeals Allowed
1984	26	23	6
1985	40	26	10
1986	38	39	15
January to September 1987	32	25	10

Pin-ups

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will issue instructions for the removal of all offensive pin-ups in all his departmental premises.

Mr. Ridley: Guidance was issued to all managers last July asking them to ensure that potentially offensive material is not displayed in the work place.

Swimming Instructors

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities provide training for swimming instructors.

Mr. Moynihan: This information is not held centrally. I am advised, however, that during the year ending 30 September 1987, the Amateur Swimming Association issued approximately 11,300 certificates of competence for the teaching and coaching of swimming.

Green Belt (Hertfordshire)

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the area of designated green belt land in the Hertfordshire, West constituency *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* at the present time.

Mr. Waldegrave: Approximately 4,770 hectares of land in the Hertfordshire, West constituency were designated green belt when the Hertfordshire county structure plan was approved in 1979. This position has not changed since.

Crown Suppliers

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will put in the Library a full copy of the Coopers and Lybrand report and the Dewi Jones report on the Crown Suppliers.

Mr. Chope: Summaries fo the Dewi Jones and Coopers and Lybrand reports have been prepared and copies have been placed in the Library. We do not propose to publish them in full because they contain commercially confidential information.

Illuminated Signs

Mr. Nicholas Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about his proposals to withdraw the need to seek planning approval to put up illuminated signs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: A total of 28 of the 46 organisations consulted last October have so far responded to the proposals, which were confined to certain specified types of illuminated signs. Some representations have also been received from individuals, amenity groups, and local authorities. My right hon. Friend will now be considering, in consultation with the Secretary of State for Wales, whether, and to what extent, to implement the proposals. If my hon. Friend wishes to submit any representations, he is welcome to do so.

Thamesmead

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he exercised nomination rights to Thamesmead following the abolition of the Greater London council and prior to the transfer of Thamesmead from the London residuary body to Thamesmead Town Ltd.

Mrs. Roe: The joint committee of the London area mobility scheme acted as agents for my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many properties are being registered by Thamesmead Town Ltd. in the London borough of Greenwich.

Mrs. Roe: Thamesmead Town has applied to the Greenwich rent officers for rent registrations of 2,401 tenancies.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what additional resources are being made available to the rent officer service in Greenwich and Bexley, now that Thamesmead Town Ltd. has applied to the rent officer for registration of all the tenancies for which they are responsible.

Mrs. Roe: No increase in the number of rent officers or support staff were required for the Greenwich rent officer service due to agreed spare capacity, but additional machines and other equipment have been provided at a cost of approximately £4,000. For the Bexley rent officer service, approval has been given to two additional rent officer posts and to two additional support staff posts, one on a temporary basis. Additional machines have been provided for the Bexley service at a cost of approximately £1,700.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many tenants of Thamesmead Town Ltd. have received his Department's leaflet giving advice to tenants about their rights in the rent registration procedure.

Mrs. Roe: The Bexley rent officer service have issued copies of the Department's booklet "Regulated Tenancies" to all tenants concerned in the 2,983 applications submitted to them by Thamesmead Town. The Greenwich rent officer service have issued 1,800 tenants with copies of the booklet in respect of the total of 2,401 applications which Thamesmead Town submitted to them. Now that further stocks of the booklet are available the Greenwich rent officer service are issuing copies to the remaining 601 tenants.

Homelessness

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress his Department has made in finalising the text of a leaflet on homelessness, the initial draft of which was circulated for consultation to interested voluntary agencies on 8 April 1987; and when his Department plans to publish and distribute this leaflet.

Mrs. Roe: We expect to publish a leaflet later this year. It will need to take account of further evidence now becoming available on local authorities' operation of the homelessness legislation.

Housing Waiting Lists

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households were housed by each London borough from its waiting lists through allocation procedures (a) during 1983-84; (b) during 1984-85; (c) during 1985-86, and (d) during 1986-87.

Mrs. Roe: Local authorities' annual housing investment programme returns include the numbers of dwellings let on secure tenancies, in the years ending 31 March, to households under normal waiting list allocation procedures. Figures for individual authorities appear in column D9C of the "HIP1 all items print" for 1984 and 1985 and in column E9C for 1986 and 1987; copies of all these documents are in the Library.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing those housing authorities where the council housing waiting list is of six months duration or less; if he will publish

separately a list of those housing authorities who have had 100 or more council dwellings vacant for periods of three months or more; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Roe: The information requested is not available centrally. However, English local authorities' housing investment programme returns include the number of their dwellings that have been vacant for more than six months and those authorities reporting 100 or more such dwellings vacant at April 1987 are listed in the table. Most of these dwellings were not available for letting, as they were undergoing or awaiting works, or awaiting sale or demolition.

Authorities with 100 or more dwellings vacant for more than 6 months at April 1987

	Number vacant over 6 months	Percentage of stock
Newham	2,626	8·1
Hackney	2,214	4·8
Manchester	2,034	2·1
Tower Hamlets	1,965	4·6
Sheffield	1,857	2·1
Sandwell	1,297	2·4
Salford	1,177	2·9
Southwark	1,154	1·9
North Tyneside	990	3·5
Sunderland	962	1·9
Islington	954	2·3
Lambeth	910	1·9
Bradford	777	2·1
Leeds	647	0·7
Wolverhampton	639	1·6
Nottingham	620	1·4
Camden	594	1·7
Newcastle upon Tyne	580	1·3
Lewisham	568	1·4
Wandsworth	544	1·4
Calderdale	471	3·1
Coventry	411	1·7
Brent	404	2·0
Kingston upon Hull	398	0·9
Hammersmith and Fulham	389	2·1
Oldham	388	1·6
Portsmouth	382	1·7
Haringey	367	1·5
Leicester	355	1·1
Greenwich	346	1·0
Birmingham	334	0·3
Westminster	327	1·5
Walsall	310	0·8
Derby	306	1·5
Burnley	305	4·3
Gateshead	304	0·9
Langbaurgh	298	1·8
Knowsley	283	1·1
Doncaster	273	0·8
Southampton	260	1·2
Preston	224	2·1
Test Valley	216	3·0
Wirral	209	0·9
Kirklees	202	0·6
Barnsley	192	0·6
Rochdale	186	0·9
Waltham Forest	175	0·8
Middlesbrough	155	0·9
North Bedfordshire	137	1·7
Kensington and Chelsea	135	1·5
Easington	133	0·7
Dudley	133	0·4
Merton	133	1·1
Ealing	132	0·7
Redbridge	129	1·2
Bristol	122	0·3
Carlisle	119	1·0
Rochester upon Medway	111	1·1
Hartlepool	110	1·0
Trafford	104	0·8
Redditch	103	1·0
Sedgefield	102	0·7
Norwich	102	0·4
Stockton-on-Tees	101	0·5

Note:

Liverpool did not provide this information, but reported 4,164 dwellings (6·5 per cent. of stock) vacant for more than a year.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the firms licensed to import toxic chemical waste materials into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Moynihan: Imports of special waste are subject to the same controls as indigenous waste and must be disposed of at a licensed facility. No import licence is necessary.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the quantities of toxic chemical waste imported to Britain in each of the past 10 years; and what were their countries of origin?

Mr. Moynihan: No records are held centrally of imports of waste imported into the United Kingdom. The amounts of special waste imported each year between 1983 and 1986 are as follows:

Year	Amount
1983	14,824
1984	5,000
1985	24,548
1986	53,000

Full details of countries or origin are not available, but major sources are Netherlands, Irish Republic and Belgium.

Nature Reserves

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of each national nature reserve in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* England and *(c)* Scotland, indicating for each reserve its total area and the proportion (i) owned by private landowners, (ii) owned by the Nature Conservancy Council and (iii) owned by other public bodies.

Mr. Moynihan *[pursuant to his reply, 19 January 1988, c. 602]:* The information is as follows:

Ownership of National Nature Reserves (NNRs), January 1988

Name of NNR	Declared Areas (HA)	Per cent owned by: Private Landowners	Nature Conservancy Council	Other Public Bodies
ENGLAND				
Ainsdale Sand Dunes	492	—	100	—
Arne	9	—	100	—
Asby Scar	166	—	100	—
Ashford Hill	20	—	100	—
Aston Rowant	111	64	36	—
Avon Gorge	63	100	—	—
Axmouth-Lyme Regis	—	—	—	—
Undercliffs	321	83	17	—
Barnack Hills and Holes	23	100	—	—
Barton Hills	44	100	—	—
Beacon Hill	40	—	100	—
Blackwater Estuary	1,031	100	—	—
Blean Woods	90	—	100	—
Bielham Bog	2	100	—	—
Bovey Valley Woodlands	73	—	96	4
Braunton Burrows	604	100	—	—
Bredon Hill	36	—	100	—
Brettenham Heath	234	100	—	—
Bridgwater Bay	2,564	4	2	94
Bure Marshes	451	100	—	—
Castle Eden Dene	221	—	100	—
Castle Hill, Lewes	47	—	—	100
Castor Hanglands	90	50	—	50
Cavenham Heath	204	15	85	—
Chaddesley Woods	102	—	100	—
Chartley Moss	42	100	—	—
Chippenham Fen	104	100	—	—
Clawthorpe Fell	14	100	—	—
Colne Estuary	576	46	—	54
Colt Park Wood	8	—	100	—
Coom Rigg Moss	36	—	—	100
Cothill	2	100	—	—
Cotswold Commons and Beechwoods	295	100	—	—
Dendles Wood	30	—	100	—
Dengie	2,011	—	—	100
Derbyshire Dales	320	35	50	15
Downton Gorge	48	100	—	—
Ebbor Gorge	41	100	—	—
Forge Valley Woods	63	—	—	100
Fyfield Down	230	100	—	—
Gait Barrows	69	—	100	—
Gibraltar Point	414	—	—	100
Glasson Moss	58	—	100	—
Grain Heads Moss	18	—	—	100
Hales Wood	8	—	—	100
Hamford Water	688	100	—	—
Ham Street Woods	97	—	100	—
Hartland Moor	243	100	—	—
Hickling Broad	487	100	—	—
Highbury Wood	47	—	100	—
High Halstow	52	100	—	—
Holkham	3,925	100	—	—
Holme Fen	259	—	100	—
Holt Heath	488	100	—	—
Holton Heath	117	100	—	—
Kingley Vale	146	32	68	—
Knocking Hoe	9	100	—	—
Lady Park Wood	45	—	—	100
Leigh	257	—	—	100
Lewes Down	49	100	—	—
Lindisfarne	3,278	100	—	—
Ling Gill	5	—	100	—
The Lizard	712	21	79	—
Lullington Heath	63	—	—	100
Martin Down	301	11	46	43
Moccas Park	139	100	—	—
Monks Wood	157	—	100	—
Moor House	3,894	—	100	—
Morden Bog	149	42	—	58
Mottey Meadows	32	9	91	—
Muston Meadows	9	100	—	—

Name of NNR	Declared Areas (HA)	Per cent owned by: Private Landowners	Nature Conservancy Council	Other Public Bodies
Newham Bog	13	100	—	—
North Fen	2	100	—	—
North Meadow, Cricklade	40	—	100	—
North Solent	763	100	—	—
Old Winchester Hill	61	—	100	—
Orfordness-Havergate	225	48	52	—
Park Wood	15	—	100	—
Parsonage Down	276	—	100	—
Pevensey Levels	52	—	100	—
Pewsey Downs	166	46	54	—
Prescombe Down	47	100	—	—
Ribble Marshes	2,302	—	100	—
Rodney Stoke	35	—	100	—
Rostherne Mere	152	48	52	—
Roudsea Woods and Mosses	276	100	—	—
Rusland Moss	24	80	20	—
Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe Dunes	440	73	27	—
Scar Close	93	100	—	—
Scolt Head Island	737	100	—	—
Shapwick Heath	304	100	—	—
Stiperstones	436	—	100	—
Stoborough Heath	110	—	100	—
Stodmarsh	163	—	52	48
Studland Heath	631	100	—	—
Swanscombe Skull Site	2	—	100	—
Swanton Novers Woods	60	100	—	—
The Flits	21	100	—	—
The Swale	216	24	76	—
The Wash	97	100	—	—
Thetford Heath	100	100	—	—
Thursley	325	—	100	—
Tring Reservoirs	20	100	—	—
Upper Teesdale	3,497	99	—	1
Upwood Meadows	6	100	—	—
Walberswick	514	92	8	—
Weeting Heath	137	100	—	—
Westleton Heath	47	—	100	—
Winterton Dunes	105	100	—	—
Woodwalton Fen	208	100	—	—
Wren's Nest	30	—	—	100
Wynbunbury Moss	15	—	100	—
Wychwood	262	100	—	—
Wye	132	—	100	—
Wylye Down	34	—	100	—
Wyre Forest	357	52	16	32
Yarner Wood	150	—	100	—
NNRs Declared since April 1987.				
Barrington Hill	18	—	100	—
Banacre	231	100	—	—
Chippenham Fen	7	100	—	—
Gordano Valley	66	100	—	—
Hog Cliff	88	—	100	—
Ludham Marshes	73	—	100	—
Swanton Novers	18	100	—	—
Winterton Dunes	4	100	—	—
SCOTLAND				
Abernethy Forest	1,921	100	—	—
Achanarras Quarry	44	—	100	—
Allt Nan Carnan	7	100	—	—
Beinn Eighe	4,758	11	89	—
Ben Lawers	3,974	100	—	—
Ben Lui	798	47	53	—
Ben Wyvis	5,673	59	41	—
Blar Nam Faoileag	2,126	100	—	—
Blawhorn Moss	69	—	100	—
Braehead Moss	87	—	100	—
Caenlocham	3,639	92	—	8
Caerlaverock	5,501	100	—	—
Cairngorms	25,949	92	8	—
Cairnamore of Fleet	1,922	32	68	—
Claish Moss	563	—	100	—
Clyde Valley Woodlands	51	47	53	—

Name of NNR	Declared Areas (HA)	Per cent owned by: Private Landowners	Nature Conservancy Council	Other Public Bodies
Coille Thocabhaig	81	100	—	—
Corrieschalloch	5	40	20	40
Cragbank Wood	9	—	100	—
Craigellachie	260	100	—	—
Greag Meagaidh	3,948	—	100	—
Dinnet Oakwood	13	100	—	—
Dunnet Links	433	76	24	—
Flanders Moss	210	100	—	—
Forvie	973	100	—	—
Glasdrum	169	—	100	—
Glen Diomham	10	100	—	—
Glen Nant	59	100	—	—
Glen Roy	1,168	—	100	—
Glen Tanar	4,185	96	4	—
Gualinn	2,522	100	—	—
Harmaness	964	100	—	—
Inchnadamph	1,295	100	—	—
Invernaver	552	100	—	—
Inverpolly	10,857	99·9	0·1	—
Isle of May	57	100	—	—
Keen of Hamar	30	100	—	—
Kirkconnell flow	142	100	—	—
Loch a'Mhuilinn	67	100	—	—
Loch Druidibeg	1,677	38	62	—
Loch Leven	1,597	100	—	—
Loch Lomond	428	83	17	—
Loch Maree Islands	200	80	—	20
Loch Sunart Woodlands	163	—	43	57
Mealdarrock	205	—	100	—
Milton Wood	24	100	—	—
Moine Mhor	493	—	100	—
Monach Isles	577	100	—	—
Morrane Birkwood	225	100	—	—
Morton Lochs	24	—	100	—
Mound Alderwoods	267	100	—	—
Muir of Dinnet	1,415	100	—	—
Nigg and Udale Bays	640	100	—	—
North Rona and Sula Sgeir	130	100	—	—
Noss	313	100	—	—
Rannoch Moor	1,499	—	100	—
Rassal Ashwood	85	100	—	—
Rhum	10,684	—	100	—
St. Abbs Head	77	100	—	—
St. Cyrus	92	100	—	—
St. Kilda	853	100	—	—
Silver Flowe	191	—	—	100
Strathfarrar	2,189	100	—	—
Strathy Bog	281	100	—	—
Taynish	370	2	98	—
Tentsmuir	505	76	24	—
Tynron Juniper Wood	5	100	—	—
Whitlaw Mosses	19	100	—	—
WALES				
Allt Rhyd y Groes	70	38	62	—
Cadair Idris	403	9	91	—
Caunant Llennyran	9	—	100	—
Coed Camlyn	64	—	100	—
Coed Cymerau	26	—	—	100
Coed Dolgarrog	69	—	—	100
Coed Ganllwyd	27	100	—	—
Coed Corawen	13	38	62	—
Coed Rheidol	—	—	100	—
Coed y Rhygen	28	—	76	24
Coed Tremadoc	20	84	16	—
Coedydd Aber	169	17	81	52
Coedydd Maentwrog	68	100	—	—
Cors Bodeilio	6	—	100	—
Cors Caron	792	5	95	—
Cors Erddreiniog	67	47	53	—
Cors Geirch	16	—	100	—
Cors y Llyn	25	67	33	—
Craig Cerrig Gleisiad	282	18	82	—
Craig y Cilau	64	100	—	—

Name of NNR	Declared Areas (HA)	Per cent owned by: Private Landowners	Nature Conservancy Council	Other Public Bodies
Crymlyn Bog	63	11	—	89
Cwm Clydach	24	—	100	—
Cwm glas Crafnant	15	100	—	—
Cwm Idwal	398	100	—	—
Dyfi	2,098	74	26	—
Gower Coast	47	100	—	—
Haffod Garregog	87	100	—	—
Morfa Dyffryn	202	100	—	—
Morfa Harlech	884	100	—	—
Nant Irfon	142	—	100	—
Newborough Warren/Ynys	—	—	—	—
Llanddwyn	1,297	23	8	69
Ogof Ffynnon Ddu	413	—	100	—
Oxwich	288	12	88	—
Penhow Woodlands	24	—	—	100
Rhinog	598	—	100	—
Rhos Goch	45	—	100	—
Rhos Llawr Cwrt	35	—	100	—
Skomer	308	5	95	—
Stackpole	199	100	—	—
Stanner Rocks	5	—	—	100
Ty Canol	69	—	—	100
Whiteford	782	100	—	—
Ynys Enlli—Bardsey	180	100	—	—
Y Wyddfa—Snowdon	1,678	100	—	—
Total	163,765	—	—	—

Local Authority Services

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *828*, on enabling powers on charging for local authority services, he proposes to introduce the necessary enabling power in the form of a separate Bill.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 28 January 1988]:* We shall use the most suitable legislative available vehicle. I shall write to the hon. Member on the subject.

Monument (Millbank Gardens)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans for the restoration and maintenance of the monument in Millbank gardens in commemoration of the emancipation of slaves.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* Repairs to the stonework inside the Buxton memorial and to the gargoyles will shortly be carried out. Of the eight statues around the top of the memorial only three remain at present. One has been removed for repair and four were stolen. Remodelled and recast replacements will be positioned on the memorial.

Leeds-Bradford Airport

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the findings of the Leeds-Bradford airport public inqurity into extended flying hours; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The inspector has completed his report of the inquiry and his findings are now being carefully considered. When this has been concluded, a decision will be issued jointly by the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport.

Whilst every effort will be made to reach the decision with the minimum of delay, I cannot predict at this stage when that will be.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Overseas Aid (Warship Purchases)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report*, details of any projects which have been agreed or are presently being considered which would use any part of the United Kingdom or European Community aid budgets or ATP provisions for the purchase of frigates or any other warships by an overseas Government.

Mr. Chris Patten: There is none. Neither the overseas aid budget nor the European Community aid programmes are used for military or para-military purposes.

Research

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the research agreements and contracts which his Department has with the university of York; and into what subjects the research is being carried out.

Mr. Chris Patten: We have no such research agreements or contracts.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the research agreements and contracts which his Department has with the university of Loughborough; and into what subjects the research is being carried out.

Mr. Chris Patten: The Overseas Development Administration has the following current research projects contracted to Loughborough university:

Development of Simple Pump Technology for Irrigation—Phase II (Costing £116,708)
Reduced Cost Sewerage System—Phase I (£12,410)
Use of Floating Macrophytes to Remove Plant Nutrients from Treated Refluents (£36,776)
Simple Pump Technology for Irrigation—Phase I (£12,678)
Design and Operation of Septic Tank Systems (£27,067)

Boithuthong Community Centre, Bophuthatswana

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the total cost to the small projects scheme of contributions made to the Boithuthong community centre, Garankuwa, Bophuthatswana.

Mr. Chris Patten: An allocation of £2,000 has been approved towards the cost of a building and equipment for this centre, which is a non-governmental institution. No funds have so far been spent.

CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Empty Houses

29. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many empty houses there are on the Duchy of Lancaster estates.

Mr. Butcher: There are currently six houses or cottages vacant on the Duchy of Lancaster's estates.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Pin-ups

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he will issue instructions for the removal of all offensive pin-ups in all his departmental premises.

Mr. Butcher: This Department is to issue shortly a further notice to its staff on the subject of sexual harassment at work, which will include a reminder to managers that they must take prompt action against unacceptable behaviour such as the display of sexually offensive photographs or posters.

Balance of Trade

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will give for standard industrial classification orders 3302 and 3341 *(a)* annual output, *(b)* United Kingdom market size and *(c)* balance of trade for each year since 1983 and for as much of 1987 as is possible; and if he will give the figures on a similar basis for standard industrial classifications 3302 and 3341, together with standard industrial classifications 3301, 3443, 3453 and 3454.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information that is available is shown in the tables:

Activity Headings 3302+3441[5]

£ million

	Annual Output[1]	*UK Market Size*[2]	*Trade Balance*[3]
1983	2,953	3,868	−915
1984	3,994	5,007	−1,013
1985	5,127	5,808	−681
1986	4,728	5,698	−970
1987[4]	2,752	3,333	−581

Activity Headings 3301+3302+3441+3443+3453+3454[5]

£ million

	Annual Output[1]	*UK Market Size*[2]	*Trade Balance*[3]
1983	6,987	9,002	−2,015
1984	8,731	10,767	−2,036
1985	10,171	11,785	−1,614
1986	10,051	11,921	−1,870
1987[4]	5,565	6,538	−973

[1] Annual Output = Total Sales of Principal Products by UK manufacturers.
[2] UK Market Size = Annual Output — Exports (fob) + Imports (cif).
[3] Trade Balance = Exports (fob)—Imports (cif).
[4] First six months only, not seasonally adjusted.
[5] Activity Heading:
3301—Office machinery.
3302 Electronic data-processing equipment.
3441—Telegraph and telephone equipment.
3443—Radio and electronic capital goods.
3453—Electronic sub-assemblies and active components.
3454—Electronic consumer goods and miscellaneous equipment.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the United Kingdom's deficit in manufactured trade with Japan, Korea, Taiwan, West Germany and the whole of the EEC including Germany, respectively, in the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is in the table.

United Kingdom crude balance of trade in manufactures[1] *1987*

	£ billion
Trade with:	
Japan	−4·2
South Korea	−0·6
Taiwan	−0·7
F R Germany	−7·5
European Community	−11·1

[1] Standard international trade classification Sections 5 to 8.

Figures are on the overseas trade statistics basis: imports, but not exports, are valued inclusive of insurance and freight charges.

Britoil

Mr. Millan: To ask the Chancellor to the Duchy of Lancaster what advice he has received from the Director General of Fair Trading on the proposed takeover of Britoil by BP; and if he will refer the bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State announced on 4 February his decision not to refer the proposed acquisition by the British Petroleum plc. of Britoil plc. to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. This decision was in accordance with the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading.

Decentralisation of Trade

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his Department's plans for the decentralisation of trade policy.

Mr. Alan Clark: My Department has no plans to decentralise trade policy.

Confidential Letters (Leaks)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will direct his Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Brian Hayes, to prepare a report on leaks of confidential letters from his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: Any such direction would be superfluous. It is already Sir Brian Hayes's practice to institute an inquiry when there appears to have been an unauthorised disclosure of confidential information and it seems possible that investigation might identify its source. The reports of such investigations are submitted to Ministers.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police National Computer

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much he plans to spend over each of the next three years on interim arrangements in connection with the police computer; when the new permanent system *(a)* was and *(b)* is now scheduled to be operative; what has caused the delay in its introduction; why the current system is no longer suitable; if a new tender has been put out for the mainframe and terminals for the interim system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The capital cost of the interim equipment is about £3·75 million, but this is offset by savings of about £950,000 a year in terms of maintenance, power and other costs. Taking account of the residual value of new hardware, the interim arrangements are likely to cost about £65,000 a year.

The interim equipment was necessary to replace processors which could no longer be economically maintained. It was procured by single tender action from the supplier of the present PNC equipment as no other firm could supply processors which would run the existing PNC software. No new terminals have been procured.

The next generation PNC is expected to be operational in 1990, as originally planned.

Metropolitan Police (Sickness and Injury)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Belfast, South on 22 January, *Official Report*, column *869*, how many of the total days off sick or injured by members of the Metropolitan police were attributable to *(a)* injury and *(b)* sickness; and if he will give this information for the last five years, stating average days off per capita.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that information in the form requested is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the numbers of officers injured on duty, who were placed on the sick list, are as follows:

	Numbers
1983	1,911
1984	1,926
1985	2,593
1986	2,234
1987	2,164

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men *(b)* women were held on remand in magistrates' court cells in England and Wales on the 25 January 1988; and if he will list the magistrates' courts.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I am informed by the Metropolitan police that the police cells at Highbury Corner, Camberwell Green and Marylebone magistrates' courts held 32, 29 and nine prisoners respectively on 25 January 1988. Records do not distinguish between numbers of men and women held.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the longest period of time a person had been held on remand in a magistrates' court cell as of 25 January.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information required is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who has the responsibility for visiting and checking the conditions in which people being held in magistrates' court cells are kept; and to whom are reports sent as to such conditions.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It has been decided that lay visitor panels should have this responsibility. Arrangements for such visits in London will be introduced as soon as consultations with the Metropolitan police and the clerks to the courts concerned are satisfactorily completed. It is intended that reports on visits should go to a responsible senior police officer and to the Secretary of the Lay Visitors' Panel. It will be open to the latter to send a copy of a report also to my right hon. Friend as the police authority.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the weekly cost of keeping a person in a magistrates' court cell; and who pays this cost.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The average weekly cost of keeping a prisoner in police or magistrates' court cells, based on the latest accounts submitted by police forces, is £1,008. The cost is borne on the prison department Vote.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with panels of lay visitors as to the position of people being held in remand in magistrates' court cells.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Department is discussing with the Metropolitan police guidelines for lay visitors who visit remand prisoners held in police cells and magistrates' courts cells. We have also approached the clerks of the five magistrates' courts in London in which remand prisoners are held about access by lay visitors. When consultations are complete, the guidelines will be circulated to lay visitor panels.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the conditions under which people being held in magistrates' court cells are allowed visits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are no general rules applying to visitors to persons held in magistrates' courts cells. I understand from the commissioner that in the Metropolitan police district prisoners detained in cells at magistrates' courts are allowed to receive visits from their legal representatives, probation officers and social workers preparing social inquiry reports. Such visits would be refused only if there was good reason. The police also do what they can to facilitate visits by friends and relatives, but arrangements vary and depend on such factors as the facilities available and other calls on police resources.

Metropolitan Police (Heathrow)

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officers of the Metropolitan police were stationed at Heathrow airport in each of the last five years; and what percentage this represented of the total strength of the Metropolitan police in the same period and at the latest available date.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the information requested is as follows:

Date	*Officers on policing duties at Heathrow*	*Strength of the force*	*Per cent.*
31 December 1983	394	26,729	1·47
31 December 1984	407	26,766	1·52
31 December 1985	401	26,705	1·50
31 December 1986	401	26,920	1·49
31 December 1987	411	27,355	1·50

Alcohol Sales (Under-age Persons)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to how many convictions there have been of *(a)* public house licensees or managers or *(b)* managers of off-licences or shops for offences involving the sale of alcohol to under-age persons in (i) Somerset and Avon and (ii) England and Wales, in each of the last five years.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The available information, which may be incomplete, is given in the table. The other information requested is not held centrally.

Persons convicted of offences under section 169(1) of the Licensing Act 1964

Year	*England and Wales*	*Avon and Somerset*
1982	187	19
1983	188	22
1984	164	9
1985	170	12
1986	165	7

Police Sub-stations

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has issued any guidelines to chief constables concerning *(a)* the opening hours of police sub-stations and *(b)* levels of staffing at police sub-stations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. These are operational matters which chief officers of police must decide.

Members' Representations

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations were made by hon. Members to his Department in each year from 1983 to 1987.

Mr. Hurd: The available information relates to the number of cases of ministerial correspondence recorded in my Department as the result of representations made to Home Office Ministers, and is as follows:

	Number
1983	25,642
[1]1984	26,200
1985	31,853
1986	33,015
1987	27,561

[1] The figures for 1984 is an estimate since precise figures are not available for November and December of that year.

Although the great majority of the cases relate to representations made by right hon. and hon. Members, these figures include ministerial correspondence with noble Lords and others.

Television Licences (Students)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward legislation to relieve students living in university accommodation from the requirement to have a full television licence if they operate a television in their own room.

Mr. Renton: There are no plans to do so. The full television licence already permits members of the licence holder's family who are living away from home as full-time students at an educational establishment to use portable television sets powered only by internal batteries.

Knives

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been convicted of carrying knives in the Metropolitan police area for the most recent 12 month period for which figures are available.

Mr. John Patten: The readily available information relates to possession of offensive weapons without lawful authority or reasonable excuse. A total of 1,840 persons were found guilty of such offences in the Metropolitan police district in 1986.

Shotgun Cartridges

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement on his intentions as to whether to classify further shotgun cartridges under section 1 control.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our intentions are set out in the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, which lowers the diameter of shot above which a cartridge is subject to control under section 1 of the Firearms Act 1968 from 0·36 inch to 0·23 inch.

Immigration

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are being held awaiting removal or deportation for overstaying under the immigration rules; and what is the breakdown of ethnic origin of these prisoners.

Mr. Renton: The information requested is not maintained centraly and could be provided only at disproportionat cost. Statistics relating to immigration control do not include the ethnic origin of the persons concerned.

Entry Clearance

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of refusals for entry clearance from all countries for each year from 1977 to 1987, broken down by country; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The information requested is available centrally only for certain countries, and is given in the table.

Persons refused initially[1] an entry clearance[2] to the United Kingdom

Number of persons

Year	*Bangladesh*	*India*	*Pakistan*	*Sri Lanka*	*Ghana*	*Nigeria*	*Hong Kong*
1977	5,660	2,400	3,970	..	..	..	..
1978	3,230	2,300	4,540	..	..	..	..
1979	2,660	2,120	4,760	..	..	..	..
1980	3,240	1,980	3,290	..	..	..	..
1981	3,200	1,280	3,010	..	..	..	..
1982	4,670	1,410	2,900	..	..	..	..
1983	5,820	1,670	2,320	..	..	..	..
1984	4,270	1,250	1,860	..	..	..	[3]80
1985	4,900	1,160	1,680	[4]570	..	..	160
1986	3,680	1,760	2,150	660	[5]480	..	110
1987[6]	2,300	4,810	6,600	680	2,050	[5]2,640	110

.. Not available.
[1] Including those subsequently successful on appeal.
[2] Excluding persons refused a certificate of entitlement to, or a confirmation of, the right of abode.
[3] October to December only.
[4] 30 May to December only.
[5] January to September, unless otherwise stated. The increase in refusals in 1987 in India and Pakistan reflected the introduction of the Visa requirement on 15 October 1986.
[6] February to September only.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue a directive to the Director General of the security services clarifying the extent to which security operations which would otherwise be criminal offences can be made lawful under the terms of the royal prerogative.

Mr. Hurd: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) on 29 January at column *397*.

Radio

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what powers the Radio Authority will have to arrange cross-subsidies to assist with the cost of transmission in remote rural areas;

(2) what are his intentions on facilitating transitional arrangements for the transfer of responsibilities for radio broadcasting from the Independent Broadcasting Authority to the new Radio Authority.

Mr. Renton: We shall be discussing the transitional arrangements with the Independent Broadcasting Authority and other organisations with an interest. The position of stations in remote rural areas will be one of the matters for discussion.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether radio stations will be able to make their own transmission arrangements on both VHF and MF under the new arrangements proposed.

Mr. Renton: Stations will become responsible for their own transmission arrangements irrespective of whether they broadcast on VHF, MF or both.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Radio Authority will be required to ensure that national and local radio stations provide an adequate service of national and international news.

Mr. Renton: We do not envisage a general requirement on stations licensed by the Radio Authority to provide any given amount of news although any news given will have to satisfy the criteria set out in paragraph 7.7 of our Green Paper "Radio: Choices and Opportunities" (Cm. 92).

Prison Education

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if Her Majesty's Government have any plans to alter the way in which prison education is currently delivered through local education authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Under current arrangements the great majority of education for people in custody is provided by teachers who are employed by and professionally responsible to the local education authority. The Government have no plans to change this means of

providing education. As part of the ongoing work of the prison education branch, agreement has been reached with the local authority associations to set up a working party on the role of local education authorities in providing education in prison. The aims of the working party are set out in the Government reply to the second report from the Education, Science and Arts Committee (Cm 298), copies of which are in the Library.

London City Airport

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *307*, why it is not possible to identify police costs associated with London City airport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The costs of the attendance of police officers in response to particular incidents as required and in order to direct traffic in the vicinity cannot be separately identified from the costs of policing the surrounding area.

Prevention of Terrorism

Mr. Thorne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will seek the renewal of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: A draft order was laid on 25 January under section 14(10) of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984. If the draft order is approved by Parliament, the Act will continue in force for a further 12 months. I have received the report from Viscount Colville of Culross on the operation of the Act in 1987 and copies have been placed in the Library. The report is supplementary to his review of the Act as a whole, publication of which was announced to the House on 9 December at column *167*.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

File (Disappearance)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Attorney-General if a report was made to the Director of Public Prosecutions following the disappearance of a file belonging to Mr. Colin Wallace from the office of the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) in March 1986.

The Attorney-General: I understand that no report has been received by the Director of Public Prosecutions relating to any such event.

Mr. Holroyd and Mr. Wallace

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Attorney-General what was the outcome of the active consideration given to certain reports that appeared about Mr. Holroyd and Mr. Wallace, referred to in the *Official Report*, 23 February 1987, column 16.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to the Answer given on 3 March 1987 to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Services in which he said that the various allegations made by Captain (Retd.) Holroyd and Mr. Colin Wallace over many years about the conduct of the security forces in Northern Ireland had been fully and carefully investigated since they left the Province in 1975; no evidence had been discovered as a result of these investigations to substantiate any of their allegations.

Unification Church

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Attorney-General which religious organisations were approached for assistance when preparing the now abandoned appeal against the decision not to remove charity status from the Unification Church.

The Attorney-General: Such an approach was made to the Church of England. I also received representations from the following organisations:

The Churches Main Committee
The Council of Christians and Jews
The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches
The Ayra Samaj in London
the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Attorney-General which of the Christian religious organisations, approached for assistance when preparing the appeal against the decision not to remove charity from the Unification Church, were prepared to state that the Unification Church was not a bona fide Christian organisation.

The Attorney-General: The Church of England expressed no view on whether or not the Unification Church is a bona fide Christian organisation. It did, however, declare doubts about the wisdom of attempting to prove in secular court proceedings that the Unification Church is not an organisation of Christian character. It expressed the view that the issues were very far from simple, requiring as they did the making of theological distinctions between orthodoxy, heresy and Christian deviations. Similar views have also been expressed by other Christian Churches and Church organisations.

Herald of Free Enterprise

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Attorney-General if any proceedings are to be initiated against Townsend Thoreson Ltd. in respect of alleged illegal carriage of toxic chemical wastes aboard the Herald of Free Enterprise.

The Attorney-General: The capsize of the Herald of Free Enterprise and matters relating to it are under investigation by the police. When that investigation is complete, the Director of Public Prosecutions will consider the question of any criminal proceedings.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Attorney-General how many persons are employed in the Crown court sections of the Crown prosecution service, area by area; and how many in each area are legally qualified as either solicitor or barrister-at-law.

The Attorney-General: Crown court sections within the Crown prosecution service are staffed by law clerks supported by administrative staff. The function of law clerks is to prepare papers for counsel, liaise with the police, and to represent the Crown prosecution service in court. It is not a requirement that they should hold legal

qualifications. The numbers of law clerks employed in the Crown court sections are detailed on the attached schedule.

CPS Area	Numbers of Staff Employed in the Crown Court Section	
	Law Clerks	Administration Staff
Avon/Somerset	15	3
Beds/Herts	13	5
Cambs/Lincs	12	3
Cheshire	9	2
Cleveland/North Yorks	17	0
Cumbria/Lancs	16	11
Derbyshire	9	4
Devon/Cornwall	14	0
Dorset/Hants	18	4
Durham/Northumbria	26	9
Essex	12	2·5
Glos/Wilts	7	6
Greater Manchester	36	3
Humberside	8	6
Kent	16	6
Leics/Northants	14	0
London—Inner	113·5	32
London—North	52·5	15
London—South	41·5	10·5
Merseyside	30	9
Norfolk/Suffolk	9	1
North Wales/Dyfed	9	3·5
Nottinghamshire	12	7
South Wales/Gwent	22	3
South Yorkshire	15	5
Staffs/Warwicks	15	0
Sussex	11	4
Thames Valley	19	10
West Mercia	8	4
West Midlands	35	9
West Yorkshire	32	8

Figures taken from Staff in Post details at 31 December 1987.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Costs

32. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission what was the cost of the Public Accounts Commission's work during 1987.

Sir Peter Hordern: These costs, which relate primarily to the time of the nine Members of the House who serve as Members of the Commission, are not quantifiable.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Prime Minister if, further to her reply to the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington of 26 January, *Official Report* column *133*, she will give the time, nature and duration of her meetings on Monday 18 January between 12 pm and 6 pm.

The Prime Minister: No.

Minister for Social Security and the Disabled

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list the interdepartmental responsibilities of the Minister for Social Security and the Disabled.

The Prime Minister: The Minister for Social Security and the Disabled has particular responsibility for co-ordinating policy on disablement and for benefits, aids and services for disabled people. These functions are discharged in conjunction with other departmental Ministers as necessary.

Security and Intelligence Services

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister (1) whether she will amend the terms of reference of the staff counsellor for the security and intelligence services, so as to allow him to counsel military intelligence officers as well;

(2) whether she will amend the terms of reference of the staff counsellor for the security and intelligence services to counsel any individuals who have anxieties about the service;

(3) whether she will amend the terms of reference of the staff counsellor for the security and intelligence services, so as to allow him to counsel military information officers as well.

The Prime Minister: No.

Departmental Correspondence

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to her written answer of 11 December 1987, *Official Report*, column *278*, in what circumstances she is prepared to give information on correspondence received from third parties.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the reply already given to the hon. Gentleman on 11 December, at column 278.

National Health Service

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister if she will give the date and place of any official statement by any Minister of the Crown prior to 11 June 1987 concerning the proposed review of the finances of the National Health Service.

The Prime Minister: There was no such statement.

South Africa and Namibia

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list the names of all the South African citizens and Namibian citizens she has met in an official capacity over the past two years.

The Prime Minister: My normal practice will continue to be not to provide detailed information about my meetings with private individuals. Meetings in recent years with Chief Buthelezi, Bishop Tutu, Chief Mabuza, and Mrs. Helen Suzman were made public at the time.

Trade Unions

Mr. Eadie: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list in the *Official Report* the trade unions she personally, or officials acting on her behalf, met during the past five weeks; and where these meetings were held.

The Prime Minister: As I have told the House before, my normal practice is neither to confirm nor to deny whether meetings with private individuals have taken place, even in those cases where no such meeting has occurred.

Stalker Report

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received from the Irish Government concerning the Stalker report and the Royal Ulster Constabulary's alleged shoot-to-kill policy; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement issued following the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference on 2 February, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Secret Services (Papers)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Prime Minister if she will arrange for the early release of papers relating to the activities of the secret services at the time of the fall of the Gough Whitlam Government in Australia; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The release of records will continue to be dealt with in the normal way in accordance with the provisions of the Public Records Acts.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Young People (Full-time Education)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will take steps to put beyond doubt the right of every young person, including those with special educational needs, aged between 16 and 19 years who seeks it to receive appropriate full-time education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Clause 81 of the Education Reform Bill, which clarifies the existing law on this point, puts beyond doubt the duty of local education authorities to provide full-time education for all who seek it up to the age of 19, including those with special educational needs.

School Crossing Patrols

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many unmanned school

crossing patrols there are *(a)* in the United Kingdom as a whole and *(b)* in north Yorkshire; and what proportions these numbers represent of the total number of school crossing patrols in each case.

Mr. Dunn: My Department does not collect information about school crossings and patrols.

Higher Education (Research)

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has had in support of the recommendation from the Advisory Board for the Research Councils to differentiate between three levels of higher education institutions in the level and scope of their research activity; and what reply he has given to the board.

Mr. Jackson: A substantial majority of the 250 submissions which my right hon. Friend has received about the ABRC's discussion document "A Strategy for the Science Base", accept the need for greater differentiation of research roles in higher education; but most do not support the board's recommendation that this should be at the institutional level. My right hon. Friend will be making a statement on policy for the science base later this year.

Inner London Education Authority

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received about the future of the Inner London education authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Since the introduction of the Education Reform Bill, the Department of Education and Science has received some 1,200 letters about education in inner London. My right hon. Friend announced on 4 February at columns 1178-9 that the Government had decided to introduce amendments to the Education Reform Bill, with the aim of transferring responsibility for education to the inner London boroughs and the City of London from 1 April 1990.

Swimming Pools

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the number of swimming pools under the control of local education authorities in England and Wales; and what proportion are open-air.

Mr. Dunn: Information about the number of such swimming pools is not available.

Secondary Schools

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out in a table for each local education authority *(a)* the number of children starting secondary schools at the start of the 1987-88 academic year, *(b)* the number of complaints he has received or been notified of where parents are not satisfied with their child's allocated school for 1987-88 and *(c)* the number of children who, following complaints, were subsequently reallocated to the school of their choice in 1987-88.

Mr. Dunn: Information on the number of children admitted to secondary schools at the beginning of the academic year 1987-88 has not been collected centrally. Information on complaints in respect of individual local authorities cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Where parents do not get the school they want for their child, it is open to them to appeal to an independent local appeal committee, whose decision is binding on the local education authority or school governors concerned. From informal inquiries made in 1985, it appeared that some 9,000 such appeals were made in that year, of which around 40 per cent. were decided in the parents' favour.

The Secretary of State does not consider an admissions complaint unless the case has first been referred to the independent local appeal committee, and his powers of intervention in such local matters are extremely limited. In calendar year 1987, the Secretary of State received over 380 complaints about school admissions decisions in England but did not consider that there were grounds to intervene under sections 68 or 99 of the Education Act 1944 in any of these cases. It is not known how many of the pupils concerned were subsequently allocated a place at their preferred school or at another school acceptable to their parents.

Business and Technician Education Council

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the future of the Business Technician Education Advisory Council and its services.

Mr. Jackson: I understand that my hon. Friend is referring to the Business and Technician Education Council. This is a non-departmental public body established in 1983 as a successor to the former Business Education Council and Technician Education Council, themselves established in the mid-1970s to validate a wide range of vocational courses and examinations at technician level and equivalent. It is one of many bodies, operating in the vocational qualifications field, albeit the only one with NDPB status under my Department. It has an important part to play in the much wider rationalisation of vocational qualifications now being undertaken under the aegis of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications. The council is currently taking steps to improve the marketing of its qualifications and its links with other bodies, and is reforming its structures and services to those ends. My right hon. Friend welcomes these steps, and looks to the council to continue its efforts to improve its own efficiency and responsiveness to the changing context in education and training.

Schools (Opting Out)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many bodies representing schools in the Easington area have expressed an interest to his Department in opting out of local government control.

Mr. Dunn: All individual schools which have approached the Department about this proposal have done so on the basis that their interest will be treated in confidence.

Education Reform

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* his recent correspondence with the court of the University of Edinburgh on the Education Reform Bill, initiated on 22 January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The exchange of correspondence is as follows.

22 January 1988

The Rt. Hon. Kenneth Baker, M.P.,
Secretary of State for Education and Science,
Elizabeth House,
York Road,
LONDON SE1 7PH.

Dear Secretary of State,

EDUCATION REFORM BILL

The University Court of the University of Edinburgh, which is the University's supreme governing body established under the Universities (Scotland) Acts, has discussed those sections of the Education Reform Bill which are of direct relevance to universities. The Court instructed us to write to you to convey its dismay and anxiety over a number of proposals in the Bill as it is now before Parliament.

The Court was particularly concerned at two aspects—the powers to be vested in the Secretary of State, and the powers to be given to the Commissioners to be established under the Bill. Under section 94(1), the Secretary of State may by order confer or impose on either of the Funding Councils such additional functions as he thinks fit, and under section 94(3) "the Secretary of State may make grants to each of the Funding Councils . . . subject to such conditions as he may determine;" the Court regards these powers as unnecessarily wide and as an unnecessary accretion of authority to the executive arm of government. Similarly, section 132(1) of the Bill provides that "for the purposes of performing the duty imposed on them by section 131 . . . the Commissioners may make such modifications to the statutes of any qualifying institution as they consider necessary or expedient," subject to the approval of Her Majesty in Council, while under section 135(2), an Order in Council may amend, repeal, or revoke, any provisions of an Act of Parliament—such as, presumably, one of the Universities (Scotland) Acts; the Court has grave reservations about the constitutional propriety of thus over-riding the statutory provisions of Parliament. Finally with regard to the proposed Commissioners, the Court takes strong exception to the sweeping powers conferred under Schedule 9, Section 4, under which the Commissioners may, apparently without any constraint, "do anything which appears to them necessary or expedient for the purpose of . . . their functions," including requiring any University Officer "to furnish any information or to produe any documents relating to the institution . . .".

The Court's attention has also been drawn to the lack of any reference in the Bill to the maintenance of academic freedom; the Court hopes that this omission will be rectified.

Copies of this letter are being made available to the Press, and the text will be published in the University of Edinburgh Bulletin. A copy is also being sent to the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Yours sincerely,

Archie MacPherson — Rector
A. M. Currie — Secretary to the University

A MacPherson Esq BA
Rector
University of Edinburgh
Old College
South Bridge
EDINBURGH EH8 9YL

Dear Rector

Thank you for you letter, also signed by Mr Currie, of 22 January to the Secretary of State about the provisions in the Education Reform Bill relating to the universities. I am replying as these are matters for which I have responsibility within the Department.

We have received many letters on similar lines about the proper balance between necessary central powers and institutional autonomy. Detailed discussions of the Bill's higher education provisions will begin shortly in the Commons Standing Committee and a large number of relevant amendments have already been tabled which will allow these matters to be properly explored. I obviously cannot prejudge the outcome of this or the debate that will continue through the Bill's Parliamentary passage.

Yours sincerely
Robert Jackson

Education Expenditure

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table based on table 12.1 of the public expenditure White Paper Cmnd. 288-II, with all figures converted to 1987-88 prices and in the manner of his reply, *Official Report*, 29 January 1987 columns 509-14.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information requested is set out in the table. The figures have been revalued using the GDP (market prices) deflator, which is assumed to rise by 4·25 per cent. in 1987-88, 4·5 per cent. in 1988-89, 3·5 per cent. in 1989-90 and 3 per cent. in 1990-91. All figures in the table have been rounded to the nearest £1 million, so that the totals shown may not equal the sum of their rounded components.

£ million at 1987-88 prices

	1982-83 outturn	*1983-84 outturn*	*1984-85 outturn*	*1985-86 outturn*	*[1]1986-87 outturn*	*[2]1987-88 estimated outturn*	*1988-89 plans*	*1989-90 plans*	*1990-91 plans*
Schools	9,531	9,646	9,441	9,244	10,005	10,633	10,630	10,635	10,654
Higher and further education	4,930	4,960	4,946	4,751	4,789	4,904	4,866	4,851	4,806
Miscellaneous educational services research and administration	826	878	888	888	930	975	1,032	1,071	1,090
Research Councils and related bodies	589	604	612	618	635	657	669	675	655
Total Department of Education and Science	15,876	15,980	15,888	15,502	16,358	17,169	17,197	17,232	17,205

	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn	[1]1986-87 outturn	[2]1987-88 estimated outturn	1988-89 plans	1989-90 plans	1990-91 plans
Central government									
Voted in Estimates									
Schools									
Building grants to voluntary and special schools	48	45	52	58	50	55	68	70	74
Music and ballet schools	4	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4
Assisted places scheme	11	18	25	32	40	49	53	55	54
City technology colleges	—	—	—	—	—	4	18	30	30
Higher and further education (including teacher training)									
Universities									
Capital	151	141	137	144	154	154	147	141	142
Current	1,568	1,555	1,527	1,478	1,474	1,562	1,614	1,620	1,609
Voluntary and direct grant institutions									
Capital	5	5	6	5	5	7	6	5	5
Current	107	105	97	92	91	95	93	90	90
Adult education	14	15	15	16	16	16	17	16	16
Postgraduate awards to humanities students and other student awards	8	5	5	4	5	6	5	5	5
Miscellaneous services, research and administration									
Youth service	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Research programme and other education services	19	23	24	25	24	27	45	69	75
Administration and inspection costs	40	53	55	55	57	58	65	63	63
Compensation payments	5	5	6	6	6	7	7	7	7
Research Councils etc.									
Capital	96	90	88	97	96	93	85	99	77
Current (including postgraduate science awards)	494	513	523	521	538	564	584	576	578
Total voted expenditure	2,573	2,581	2,568	2,541	2,564	2,703	2,812	2,855	2,833
Other central government Schools	−5	−4	−4	−4	0	0	0	0	0
Total central government	2,569	2,576	2,563	2,537	2,564	2,703	2,812	2,855	2,833
Of which: Total central government capital expenditure	296	277	282	302	307	310	309	318	300
Local authorities									
Relevant current spending									
Schools									
Under fives	342	352	377	377	411	441	443	456	463
Primary schools	2,926	2,876	2,832	2,809	3,118	3,370	3,403	3,486	3,539
Secondary schools	4,416	4,447	4,397	4,248	4,645	4,957	4,895	4,819	4,797
Special schools	476	491	492	497	523	544	546	541	538
Meals and milk	512	507	488	468	471	469	431	416	404
Transport	230	233	227	224	219	213	205	204	205
Non-maintained school fees	143	140	138	126	125	125	123	118	114
Teachers' centres	29	28	31	34	37	39	42	42	41
Child guidance	35	34	35	38	41	45	45	45	45
Pupil support	32	32	37	37	38	38	38	38	38
Higher and further education									
Advanced further education	759	757	763	776	782	780	774	782	789
Non-advanced further education	1,094	1,108	1,137	1,053	1,100	1,098	1,104	1,084	1,045
Adult education	95	102	106	109	116	123	125	127	127
Discretionary students awards and support	151	157	162	163	176	189	200	200	200
Miscellaneous services, research and administration									
Youth service	121	130	133	135	143	150	160	163	162
Recreational services and research	57	65	66	62	67	68	75	76	75
Administration and inspection costs	543	568	573	578	610	642	664	677	691
Total relevant current spending	11,960	12,026	11,994	11,735	12,622	13,291	13,273	13,273	13,273
Non-relevant current spending									
Mandatory student awards[3]	833	874	848	764	733	742	733	732	728

	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn	[1]1986-87 outturn	[2]1987-88 estimated outturn	1988-89 plans	1989-90 plans	1990-91 plans
Local authority capital[4]									
Schools	332	338	311	297	284	281	316	311	309
Higher and further education	145	137	142	146	137	134	50	50	49
Miscellaneous education services									
Youth service	15	12	13	12	12	12	8	7	7
Other education services	22	17	15	10	7	7	6	6	5
Total local authority capital	514	505	482	466	441	434	379	374	371
Total local authorities	13,308	13,404	13,324	12,965	13,795	14,467	14,385	14,378	14,372
Total Department of Education and Science	15,876	15,980	15,888	15,502	16,358	17,169	17,197	17,232	17,205

[1] The 1986-87 figures incorporate a distribution by sector of total current spending by local authorities based on ther provisional outturn expenditure on education.
[2] The 1987-88 figures incorporate a provisional distribution by sector of total current spending by local authorities based on their budgets.
[3] Includes payments to public sector higher education institutions as reimbursements of fees for EC students.
[4] Local authority capital expenditure figures are net of receipts attributable to education. They include provision for the Urban Programme.

Teachers (Pay)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many responses he has received to the Green Paper on teachers' pay and conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Thirty-seven responses to the Green Paper, "Teachers' Pay and Conditions: a Consultative Document" (Cm 238), have so far been received in the Department from organisations and two from individuals.

Pupil Statistics

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will now publish in the *Official Report* for each of Waltham Forest, Merton, Enfield, Haringey, Barnet, Brent, Ealing, Hillingdon, Kingston, Sutton, Harrow, Newham and Richmond, and for the area covered by the Inner London education authority *(a)* the number of secondary pupils *(b)* the number of pupils studying in another local education authority area *(c)* the number of pupils educated who come from the Inner London education authority area, *(d)* the number of pupils educated from other local education authority areas and *(e)* the net inflow-outflow of pupils for the last date for which figures are available and in each of the past four years.

Mr. Dunn *(holding answer 4 February 1988):* The following information relates to pupils aged 11 to 15 in all maintained schools and is taken from authorities' regular returns to the Department for rate support grant purposes. The figures for January 1987 and the previous three years are as follows:

Pupils aged 11 to 15 in all maintained schools

	Number of pupils studying in the authority (a)	Pupils from authority studying in other LEAs (b)	ILEA pupils studying in the authority (c)	Pupils fron other [1]LEAs studying in the authority (d)	Net inflow(−) or outflow(+) (e)
At January 1987					
Barnet	15,448	948	342	2,530	−1,582
Brent	10,798	2,801	133	654	2,147
Ealing	13,091	1,839	94	699	1,140
Enfield	15,645	938	61	1,045	−107
Haringey	8,740	1,786	455	827	959
Harrow	9,625	1,367	*7	540	827
Hillingdon	12,876	618	2	668	−50
Kingston	7,025	662	58	885	−223
Merton	8,466	728	384	1,116	−388
Newham	13,334	468	46	399	69
Richmond	6,925	857	741	1,758	−901
Sutton	10,017	1,033	43	1,432	−399
Waltham Forest	12,203	839	32	300	539
ILEA	104,574	4,647		5,817	−1,170
At January 1986					
Barnet	15,860	931	323	2,405	−1,474
Brent	11,660	2,735	129	718	2,017
Ealing	13,909	1,874	87	637	1,237
Enfield	16,332	876	59	1,087	−211
Haringey	9,369	1,966	369	694	1,272
Harrow	9,964	1,397	7	464	933
Hillingdon	13,632	553	1	752	−199

	Number of pupils studying in the authority (a)	Pupils from authority studying in other LEAs (b)	ILEA pupils studying in the authority (c)	Pupils from other [1]LEAs studying in the authority (d)	Net inflow(−) or outflow(+) (e)
Kingston	7,251	588	51	818	−230
Merton	8,958	683	394	1,153	−470
Newham	13,898	524	39	371	153
Richmond	6,971	922	657	1,535	−613
Sutton	10,260	1,002	38	1,301	−299
Waltham Forest	13,034	843	34	318	525
ILEA	109,739	4,572		6,202	−1,630
At January 1985					
Barnet	16,182	912	285	2,248	−1,336
Brent	12,533	2,576	124	723	1,853
Ealing	14,678	2,018	76	561	1,457
Enfield	17,092	846	78	1,160	−314
Haringey	10,069	2,014	309	625	1,389
Harrow	10,349	1,354	10	478	876
Hillingdon	14,047	517	6	508	9
Kingston	7,386	527	61	685	−158
Merton	9,415	585	365	1,079	−494
Newham	14,499	463	48	363	100
Richmond	6,981	1,015	567	1,330	−315
Sutton	10,521	932	35	1,225	−293
Waltham Forest	13,668	742	27	286	456
ILEA	116,146	4,475		6,166	−1,691
At January 1984					
Barnet	16,388	882	260	2,087	−1,205
Brent	13,419	2,460	98	692	1,768
Ealing	15,449	1,991	98	581	1,410
Enfield	17,850	766	76	1,189	−423
Haringey	10,982	1,907	285	600	1,307
Harrow	10,716	1,304	14	414	890
Hillingdon	14,731	439	5	529	−90
Kingston	7,713	444	77	635	−191
Merton	9,835	538	318	1,157	−619
Newham	15,164	397	47	333	64
Richmond	6,879	1,076	480	1,028	48
Sutton	10,906	948	50	1,141	−193
Waltham Forest	14,370	690	19	270	420
ILEA	123,436	4,366		5,898	−1,532

[1] Including pupils from ILEA *(c)*.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Pin-ups

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will issue instructions for the removal of all offensive pin-ups in all his departmental premises.

Mr. Mellor: In accordance with item 69 of the programme of action for equal opportunities for women in the civil service, published by the Cabinet Office (Management and Personnel Office) in 1984, all staff in the diplomatic and aid wings have been notified that the display of sexually offensive material in the workplace will be regarded as a serious matter and may be dealt with as a disciplinary offence.

Diplomatic Personnel

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the number of diplomatic personnel who are resident in the constituency of Kensington; and what is the number of members of their families resident in Kensington.

Mr. Mellor: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Bophuthatswana

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what interpretation of the relationship between the territory of modern Bophuthatswana and the native reserves established for the Southern Botswana by British Governments is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards Bophuthatswana based.

Mrs. Chalker: Our policy is based on the fact that Bophuthatswana was created out of the Republic of South Africa, as a key element in the policy of separate development, to which we are wholly opposed.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries have applied for licences for fishing in the Falkland Islands control zone next season; what fees are being levied; and what limits are to be placed on times of fishing, location, species and catch size.

Mr. Mellor: For the 1988 fishing season, the Falkland Islands Government received licence applications to fish in the Falkland Islands interim conservation and management zone for fishing vessels from the United

Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, France, Netherlands, Greece, Italy, Poland, Chile, Taiwan, Republic of Korea and Japan. The season for finfish began on 1 January and for Loligo squid, on 1 February. The Illex squid season begins on 1 March. The seasons end on 30 June. Copies of the fees schedule, and information on the mesh regulations and fishing areas have been placed in the Library of the House, as have details of licence allocations for 1988.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many licenses issued for fishing in 1987 in the Falkland Islands protection zone were not taken up and reallocated and how many were awarded to undertakings, individuals or companies whose primary business was not fishing.

Mr. Mellor: I will reply as soon as possible.

EC Legislation (Plain Language)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he supports the campaign launched by the consumers in the European Community Group and European Research into Consumer Affairs for plain language in European Community proposals and legislation; and if he will encourage Ministers to promote this issue within the Community at every opportunity.

Mrs. Chalker: Yes.

Herald of Free Enterprise

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Belgian authorities about the carriage of toxic chemicals on board the Herald of Free Enterprise and on the discovery, subsequent to the vessel foundering of toxic items which are now being held in Belgium; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend has had no contact with the Belgian authorities on this matter. I understand, however, that there have been contacts between other Departments and the Belgian authorities on this subject.

Nuclear Exports (Japan)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's Government expect to communicate to the European Commision full details of any draft nuclear export agreements with Japan for technology and nuclear materials transfer, in compliance with article 103 of the Euratom Treaty.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 25 January]:* We have no agreement with Japan for technology and nuclear materials transfer. The hon. Member may have in mind the contract between British Nuclear Fuels Plc and Japanese Nuclear Fuel Services. I am advised that this contract does not fall within the scope of article 103 of the Euratom treaty.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Energy Conservation

34. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether there have been any consultations on the introduction of new energy conservation measures in the House.

Mr. Wakeham: Energy conservation measures are included in the Parliamentary Works Office programme of work. I understand that the proposals for 1988 will be coming forward for consideration by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee shortly.

Official Report

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Lord President of the Council what action he will take to prevent the number of mistakes now appearing in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Wakeham: I assume the hon. Gentleman is referring to some minor typographical errors. The attention of *Hansard* is automatically drawn to any lapses. The quality of the printing of *Hansard* is under regular review by a liaison committee consisting of senior *Official Report* and HMSO personnel, and remains higher than that of any comparable daily publication.

Privy Council Office (Periodicals)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list all the periodicals subscribed to by the Privy Council since 1970.

Mr. Wakeham: The information requested is not available for the period before 1980. The periodicals subscribed to by the Privy Council Office since 1980 are as follows:

Campaign*
Economist
Farmers Weekly*
Financial Weekly*
Listener
New Scientist
New Society
New Statesman
Now*
Private Eye
Spectator
Times Literary Supplement
Tribune
UK Press Gazette*

* No longer obtained.

Other periodicals are borrowed from other sources, as and when required.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Breeding Sows

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list in the *Official Report* the numbers of breeding sows in each English and Welsh region and county pig herd for each year from 1979 to date of the most recently available figures.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The information is contained in the table.

County by Standard Statistical Region	Total breeding pig herd 1979-86							
	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
England and Wales	717,672	701,116	713,883	736,195	727,395	690,098	715,167	714,539
Cleveland	4,229	4,015	3,877	4,323	4,246	4,004	3,869	4,351
Cumbria	6,064	6,514	6,386	6,164	6,345	6,415	6,373	6,223
Durham	4,820	4,911	5,245	4,841	4,976	5,000	5,158	5,184
Northumberland	2,913	2,863	2,668	2,672	2,476	2,449	2,302	2,289
Tyne and Wear	802	607	567	612	561	376	474	385
North Region	18,828	18,910	18,743	18,612	18,604	18,244	18,176	18,432
Humberside	73,568	73,919	76,144	78,954	78,696	78,774	81,363	83,142
North Yorks (North Allerton)	35,051	35,243	48,952	54,890	54,357	56,429	59,935	61,363
North Yorks (Beverley)	—	—	8,814	9,458	9,808	9,151	9,653	11,078
North Yorks (Harrogate)	20,120	21,276	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Yorkshire	6,124	6,074	6,069	5,857	6,381	5,959	5,895	6,609
West Yorkshire	12,247	11,946	11,873	13,149	12,490	12,201	15,181	15,319
Yorks and Humberside	147,110	148,458	151,852	162,308	161,732	162,514	172,009	177,511
Derbyshire	5,342	4,813	4,982	6,096	5,680	5,505	5,381	5,537
Leicestershire	8,050	7,327	7,408	7,552	6,476	6,476	6,558	6,769
Lincolnshire	31,799	33,359	32,592	32,839	31,150	31,150	31,069	31,661
Northamptonshire	8,184	8,270	8,356	8,576	7,945	7,945	7,778	7,683
Nottinghamshire	14,517	14,373	14,928	14,474	15,114	15,114	14,790	14,707
East Midlands Region	67,892	68,142	68,266	69,537	70,244	66,190	65,576	66,357
Cambridgeshire	25,072	22,258	22,387	22,825	21,902	19,271	18,133	17,453
Norfolk	57,901	56,451	58,056	59,547	58,360	54,493	56,992	57,231
Suffolk	61,187	60,811	60,832	63,491	60,155	56,050	57,223	55,914
East Anglia Region	144,160	139,520	141,275	145,863	140,417	129,814	132,348	130,598
Bedfordshire	8,468	7,973	7,811	8,005	8,123	7,616	8,864	8,564
Berkshire	9,196	8,718	9,063	9,562	9,462	8,585	8,985	8,631
Buckinghamshire	7,963	7,260	7,526	7,136	6,901	6,522	6,190	6,038
East Sussex	5,774	5,226	5,298	5,351	4,996	4,030	4,381	4,321
Essex	25,561	23,504	23,069	21,668	20,267	19,161	19,351	18,692
Greater London (East)	306	258	285	311	249	236	373	487
Greater London (South East)	1,697	1,661	1,518	1,609	1,308	1,155	1,257	1,113
Hampshire	15,993	15,224	16,180	16,745	17,566	14,994	16,838	17,557
Hertfordshire	6,163	6,134	5,918	5,946	5,393	4,372	4,161	3,794
Isle of Wight	1,396	1,344	1,164	1,120	1,205	1,195	1,235	1,058
Kent	13,519	12,923	12,218	12,269	11,495	10,350	9,704	9,715
Oxfordshire	22,060	22,524	22,051	23,683	24,824	24,523	27,490	26,194
Surrey	6,426	6,210	6,204	6,025	5,870	4,934	4,775	4,216
West Sussex	7,081	8,104	8,891	9,075	8,969	7,974	7,748	8,057
South East Region	131,608	127,063	127,196	128,505	126,628	115,647	121,352	118,437
Avon	5,160	5,010	5,138	4,933	4,943	4,576	4,592	4,647
Cornwall	13,084	11,373	11,770	12,133	11,461	10,172	10,393	9,965
Devon	23,208	22,663	22,332	22,717	22,379	21,412	23,104	23,820
Dorset	11,432	13,401	13,774	14,306	13,753	14,327	15,066	13,110
Gloucestershire	8,280	7,615	8,062	8,585	8,476	7,953	8,004	7,952
Isles of Scilly	2	2	1	3	2	2	2	2
Somerset	18,670	17,084	18,565	19,135	19,058	17,149	19,015	19,953
Wiltshire	15,716	15,477	16,839	17,155	16,844	17,130	17,145	18,118
South West Region	95,552	92,625	96,481	98,967	96,916	92,721	97,321	97,567
Hereford and Worcester	15,209	15,252	15,188	15,359	15,364	14,266	14,451	14,492
Shropshire	16,657	16,406	17,428	17,800	17,673	16,474	16,155	15,616
Staffordshire	12,013	11,450	11,650	11,779	12,842	12,619	13,357	13,569
Warwickshire	6,721	6,114	6,095	6,128	6,178	5,871	5,807	5,295
West Midlands	2,462	2,167	2,421	2,658	2,552	2,297	2,573	2,672
West Midlands Region	53,062	51,389	52,782	53,724	54,609	51,527	52,343	51,644
Cheshire	11,678	11,419	11,586	11,728	12,508	11,450	12,148	11,457
Greater Manchester	4,649	4,083	4,172	4,354	4,453	3,641	4,063	3,846
Lancashire	24,906	22,743	24,557	24,394	23,681	22,881	23,346	22,010
Merseyside	1,379	1,369	1,488	1,479	1,228	1,141	978	1,130
North West Region	42,612	39,614	41,803	41,955	41,870	39,113	40,535	38,443

County by Standard Statistical Region	Total breeding pig herd 1979-86							
	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
England	700,824	685,721	698,398	719,471	711,020	675,770	699,660	698,989
Clwyd	3,402	3,366	3,387	3,327	3,371	2,788	3,221	3,252
Dyfed	4,797	4,321	4,498	4,646	4,680	3,974	4,098	3,878
Gwent	1,993	2,048	1,844	2,722	2,766	2,830	2,902	3,315
Gwynedd	1,977	1,677	1,525	1,689	1,359	1,040	1,123	1,116
Mid Glamorgan	544	481	563	542	546	395	448	409
Powys	3,119	2,562	2,578	2,480	2,345	1,935	2,260	2,137
South Glamorgan	837	797	944	1,141	1,109	1,137	1,208	1,189
West Glamorgan	182	143	143	177	199	229	247	254
Wales	16,848	15,395	15,485	16,724	16,375	14,328	15,507	15,550

Pins-ups

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will issue instructions for the removal of all offensive pin-ups in all his departmental premises.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Guidance has already been issued in my Department which makes clear that sexual harassment at work is not tolerated and in particular requires managers to ensure that potentially offensive material is not displayed in the workplace.

Affatoxin

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement about the recent import of peanuts containing five times the safe amount of affatoxin and their subsequent sale as wild bird seed;

(2) if he will introduce a statutory limit on the proportion of affatoxin contained in imported foods destined for wild animals.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Controls which exist for levels of contaminants in feeding stuffs for domesticated animals and birds do not cover materials fed to wild birds; these controls are harmonised throughout the European Community and I am not aware of any plans to extend them to wild species.

Milk

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total volume of milk production in the United Kingdom for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The information is as follows:

Year	'000 tonnes
1978	17,905
1979	17,830
1980	17,819
1981	17,610
1982	18,457
1983	18,923
1984	17,873
1985	17,680
1986	17,856
1987	[1] 16,976

[1] Provisional.
Sources: EEC Dairy Facts and Figures/Milk Marketing Board.

Radioactivity (Cumbria)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what experimental work he is undertaking or sponsoring, within the restricted area of Cumbria, into the effects of radioactivity following the Chernobyl nuclear accident.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I am arranging for a copy of my Department's post-Chernobyl agricultural research programme to be placed in the Library of the House.

ENERGY

Anglo-French Electricity Supply Link

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what is the ratio of United Kingdom imports to exports of electricity supply via the electricity supply link between the United Kingdom and France for the years 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1987;

(2) if he will make a statement on the performances of the United Kingdom and France electricity supply link; and what are the export figures via the link from the United Kingdom to France for the years 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1987, expressed in gigajoules.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The existing cross-channel electricity supply link between England and France was not fully commissioned until October 1986.

In 1985-86 France supplied the CEGB's system with 103 GWh (370,799 GJ) of electricity. There were no exports from England and France.

In 1986-87 electricity exports from England to France were 188 GWh (676,798 GJ), while imports from France amounted to 6590 GWh (23,723,934 GJ). This represents a ratio of exports to imports of 1:35.

Electricity System (Emergencies)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on his recent visit to the headquarters of the Central Electricity Board's national grid control system of Southwark; what arguments were put to him about the technical value of the coherence of the electricity system in times of emergency; and what his response was.

Mr. Parkinson: I visited the Central Electricity Generating Board's national control centre twice last autumn, and had wide-ranging discussions.

L. A. W. Mining Company Ltd.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has as to licences granted by British Coal to L. A. W. Mining Company Ltd. and the dates when such licences were granted.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This is a matter for the British Coal corporation, and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Nuclear Safety

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received concerning the future of the mobile maintenance unit based at Llandegai Owynedd and Fiddler's Ferry and the scientific services department based at Llandegai and Manchester; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have received no representations.

Coal Imports

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will issue a direction to the Central Electricity Generating Board not to purchase foreign coal, and in particular coal exported from South Africa, for use in its power stations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This is a matter for the Central Electricity Generating Board. However, I understand that the CEGB does not import any coal from South Africa.

SCOTLAND

Rating Reform

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what additional regulations or advice his Department will produce to ensure that the collection of personal data for use in the community charge register complies with the terms of the first data protection principle; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what additional regulations or advice his Department will produce to ensure that the disclosure of personal data from the community charge register complies with the terms of the third data protection principle; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend is considering this matter. Compliance with the Data Protection Act 1984 and the data protection principles is a matter for individual community charge registration officers and local authorities.

Community Charge Register (Access)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he intends to allow police, district health and social security specialist units or immigration officers routine access to the community charge register.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 28 January 1988 at column *324*.

Schools (Clydesdale)

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many pupils are at each primary and secondary school in Clydesdale constituency; and what is the teacher-pupil ratio at each school;

(2) if he will give, in respect of present primary and secondary schools in Clydesdale *(a)* the number of pupils in each school, *(b)* the number of teachers in each school and *(c)* the expected numbers resulting from falling rolls anticipated in 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on individual schools in Clydesdale can be obtained from Strathclyde regional council.

Strathclyde Structure Plan

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the effect that his draft decision letter on the Strathclyde structure plan 1986 update will have on development of the green belt in Strathclyde.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Strathclyde structure plan update (1986) proposes no substantial changes to the structure plan policies concerning the Clyde Valley green belt. In his draft modifications to the update my right hon. and learned Friend equally proposes no important changes to these policies. The draft modifications to the proposals in the update concerning residential development require additional land to be made available for housing in certain areas. The identification of sites would be a matter for district councils, in consultation with local housebuilders. The effect on the existing green belt is unlikely to be significant.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to take account of evidence that 700 houses are now being built and 1,700 others are planned to be built on land previously rejected by house builders before issuing his final decision letter on the Strathclyde structure plan 1986 update.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes.

Pre-Court Diversion Schemes

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to publish the findings of his Office's research into pre-court diversion schemes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A decision on the publication of two relevant reports on the subject will be taken when the second has been received.

AIDS

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has about the decision of the United States national institutes of health to instruct all biological laboratories to review their safety guidelines following the reported infection of two laboratory workers with the AIDS virus after working with concentrated samples; and whether he will carry out such a review of procedures in medical and biological laboratories in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We are aware of the decision of the United States national institutes of health. Following a review of procedures relevant to potential occupational HIV infection which was carried out by the advisory committee on dangerous pathogens, in July 1986 the Scottish Home and Health Department drew the attention of all health boards to revised guidelines drawn up by the

committee. These guidelines have been endorsed by the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive.

Domestic Violence

Mrs. Mararet Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what stage his Department has reached in its consideration of guidelines on police response to domestic violence.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Draft guidelines on the investigation of complaints of domestic violence are in course of preparation and will be the subject of consultation with relevant interests shortly.

Road Contracts

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the motorway and trunk road contracts in Scotland with a works cost of £1 million or more which his Department intends to award in 1988-89 showing, in each case, the total value of the contract and the expenditure likely to be incurred in that year.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Consideration of the major trunk road contracts to be awarded in 1988-89 is not yet complete. My right hon. and learned Friend's normal practice is to announce in March of each year those major schemes which he expects to start in the following year.

Residential Care and Nursing Homes

Mr. Millan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what response he has sent to age Concern Scotland regarding its document "The Case for Change" relating to residential care and nursing homes in Scotland; and what discussions he proposes having on the document.

Mr. Rifkind: I received the letter from Age Concern Scotland on 21 January. I am studying the proposals it contains and expect to reply shortly.

School Meals and Milk

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children in *(a)* Tayside region and *(b)* Dundee district authority aea will lose entitlement to free school meals and free welfare milk after the Social Security Act 1986 is fully implemented in April; and how many of these children attend schools for those with special educational needs.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally.

Labour Statistics

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, for each local authority ward, in the Dundee district council area, the percentage of the working population who are unemployed at the latest available date; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1983.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is not available, as unemployment percentage rates are calculated only on a travel-to-work area, regional authority and Scotland basis.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish figures for unemployment in the Dundee, East constituency for each year since 1979; and what percentage of the total working population this represents in each year.

Mr. Lang: Unemployment statistics on a parliamentary constituency basis are available only from June 1983. The table shows the number of unemployed claimants in the Dundee, East parliamentary constituency for December 1987 (the latest date for which information is available) and the corresponding figures for previous years. Unemployment percentage rates for parliamentary constituencies are not available.

Dundee, East Parliamentary Constituency December	*Number of Unemployed Claimants*
1983	8,015
1984	8,192
1985	8,245
1986	7,748
1987	7,004

These figures are not directly comparable due to a change in the compilation of the statistics in March 1986. This information is available in the Library.

Schools (Assaults)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what statistics are kept on the number of assaults taking place in schools in *(a)* Scotland as a whole, *(b)* Tayside region and *(c)* Dundee district authority area; and if he will give the number of assaults on (i) teachers and (ii) pupils per year since 1979 in each of these geographical areas.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on the number of assaults taking place in schools is not collected centrally.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the numbers of prosecutions taking place in each year since 1979 for assaults on teachers and pupils in Scottish schools.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Homelessness

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what sums have been allocated to each Scottish local authority for the relief of homelessness in each year since 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In determining housing revenue account capital allocations, my right hon. and learned Friend takes account of housing authorities' planned programmes for tackling the needs of their areas, including the needs of the homeless. The allocations issued are not, however, hypothecated for specific purposes and it is for each authority to determine its own policies and priorities and to programme expenditure accordingly, within the resources available to it.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of homeless households in Scotland became homeless through mortgage arrears in each year since 1979; and if he will give this information for *(a)* Scotland as a whole and *(b)* each district council.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: For Scotland as a whole, the proportions of households categorised as

homeless who quoted a court order for mortgage default as a reason for the loss of their last or present accommodation are as follows:

	per cent.
1984-85	2·7
1985-86	3·3
1986-87	3·0

This category was not separately identified prior to March 1984.

Information at district council level is being prepared and I shall write to the hon. Member about this as soon as possible.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of homeless households in priority need in Scotland in each year since 1979; and if he will give this information for Scotland as a whole and for each district council area.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The table sets out the information requested, on a financial year basis:

Number of applications from homeless households in priority need

Areas	*Financial Years*							
	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
SCOTLAND	6,419	6,029	7,326	7,492	6,984	8,338	8,815	9,318
Borders								
Berwickshire	6	0	6	3	6	6	2	4
Ettrick and Lauderdale	22	13	21	21	14	9	10	6
Roxburgh	25	12	14	25	13	26	17	24
Tweeddale	11	11	19	0	0	—	—	—
Central								
Clackmannan	259	200	230	230	193	196	183	184
Falkirk	101	64	116	147	174	1,473	1,156	351
Stirling	119	115	105	153	223	152	0	1
Dumfries and Galloway								
Annandale and Eskdale	29	22	26	27	28	14	14	6
Nithsdale	115	83	116	130	138	135	127	149
Stewartry	21	15	11	16	20	20	24	20
Wigtown	63	61	36	18	30	28	39	63
Fife								
Dunfermline	181	212	245	245	214	263	367	337
Kirkcaldy	157	97	116	129	143	99	126	132
North East Fife	23	41	25	31	29	36	42	34
Grampian								
Aberdeen	210	143	191	149	163	200	565	373
Banff and Buchan	23	19	27	13	5	18	28	46
Gordon	16	24	19	16	25	31	49	52
Kincardine and Deeside	12	3	9	8	9	1	0	2
Moray	73	94	80	101	86	60	68	56
Highland								
Badenoch and Strathspey	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Caithness	6	3	12	5	2	1	0	0
Inverness	78	59	83	74	115	67	48	46
Lochaber	19	20	58	41	32	32	20	34
Nairn	11	11	10	29	32	13	16	23
Ross and Cromarty	21	33	11	0	0	20	14	19
Skye and Lochalsh	20	20	10	15	16	21	24	26
Sutherland	0	1	0	0	0			
Lothian								
East Lothian	24	31	103	115	106	164	127	58
Edinburgh	267	206	203	192	164	253	445	575
Midlothian	30	27	145	56	61	41	70	99
West Lothian	104	75	176	98	62	67	83	72
Strathclyde								
Argyll and Bute	113	80	83	70	55	52	64	86
Bearsden and Milngavie	3	0	0	0	13	25	26	23
Clydebank	21	61	119	87	130	291	252	103
Clydesdale	26	15	24	14	11	21	31	45
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	23	72	62	169	16	118	61	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	26	28	26	27	28	38	37	34
Cunninghame	224	183	222	255	227	234	272	245
Dumbarton	82	94	138	80	72	120	245	334
East Kilbride	74	76	109	102	95	109	134	147
Eastwood	7	3	9	8	9	10	7	6
Glasgow	1,822	1,879	1,714	2,339	1,949	1,543	1,267	1,198
Hamilton	150	117	221	86	137	86	96	76
Inverclyde	188	210	208	154	132	170	209	214
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	61	94	117	54	28	51	190	66
Kyle and Carrick	156	121	260	218	244	234	221	238
Monklands	99	72	139	75	86	88	134	111
Motherwell	428	364	397	522	541	292	162	109
Renfrew	366	379	464	579	495	560	927	485
Strathkelvin	140	136	133	73	63	58	182	173

Area	Financial Years 1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87
Tayside								
Angus	84	49	35	78	67	55	90	121
Dundee	198	155	165	171	185	399	602	549
Perth and Kinross	55	67	166	200	223	244	150	190
Orkney Islands	10	4	9	2	10	8	2	2
Shetland Islands	15	18	23	19	23	26	49	28
Western Isles	24	13	20	23	28	12	18	23

Notes:
1986-87—Returns are still outstanding for a few districts.
Blanks indicate no returns received to date.

Schools (Expenditure)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the capital allocation for expenditure on schools in 1987-88 made by his Department to each education authority in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Local authorities in Scotland receive an allocation of consent to incur liability to meet capital expenditure on schools, further education colleges and community education buildings. Within this overall level of consent they are free to determine which education building projects will proceed. They are also free to transfer consent between certain other capital programmes. Information on the level of the total capital allocations for education, and on the assumed schools element included in that total, for 1987-88 is given in the table.

£000 at cash prices

Region/Island Authority	Total allocation for education 1987-88	Assumed schools element
Borders	1,134	932
Central	3,065	2,854
Dumfries and Galloway	1,306	929
Fife	4,180	3,553
Grampian	3,965	2,845
Highland	3,020	2,181
Lothian	6,647	4,842
Strathclyde	20,378	18,239
Tayside	3,440	2,715
Orkney	975	923
Shetland	840	679
Western Isles	4,360	3,533

Notes:
1. Total allocation figures include where appropriate, assumed levels of capital financed from current revenue.
2. Both sets of figures include the enhancement of consent issued in August 1987 for the purchase of equipment for science, technological and computing studies courses in secondary schools.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the bid by each Scottish local education authority to his Department for a capital allocation for expenditure on schools for 1987-88.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The bids made by local authorities in Scotland for consent to incur liability to meet capital expenditure on their education programmes in 1987-88 and the amounts included in such bids for school building, are given in the table.

£000 at cash prices

Regional Islands Authority	Total bid for education building	Bid for school building
Borders	1,348	1,122
Central	3,808	3,118
Dumfries and Galloway	3,387	1,345
Fife	6,573	5,034
Grampian	3,312	2,657
Highland	4,130	3,446
Lothian	8,555	5,836
Strathclyde	24,888	22,161
Tayside	3,701	2,862
Orkney	967	910
Shetland	983	643
Western Isles	5,158	3,783

Rates Relief

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of those who are eligible to vote in local government elections in *(a)* Tayside region and *(b)* Dundee district authority are (i) domestic ratepayers, (ii) spouses of domestic ratepayers and (iii) people who receive any relief from domestic rates because of special needs.

Mr. Lang: This information is not held centrally.

Epilepsy

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he intends to issue further guidance to health boards in Scotland on the provision of health services for patients with epilepsy to that issued in 1968 in the Hutchinson report "The Medical Care of Epilepsy in Scotland;" and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have no plans to issue such guidance.

Doctors and Consultants (Telephones)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about arrangements for funding emergency repair cover for the house telephones of doctors and consultants working in the National Health Service in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: British Telecom is in the process of changing the arrangements for the operation and funding of emergency repairs to telephones at National Health Service premises and at the homes of key personnel. The Scottish Home and Health Department is consulting interested parties about ways of ensuring that key personnel (including general practitioners and hospital

consultants) can be contacted quickly in cases of urgency, even when there is a fault on their home telephone line. The Department aims to identify arrangements which represent good value for public money, do not conflict with the terms of service of the key personnel concerned and, above all, are effective.

Fine Defaulters

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the percentage of inmates in Scottish prisons sent there due to fines defaults for each year since 1974.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The available information is set out in the table:

Fine Defaulters as percentage of Total Average Daily Population in Penal Establishments in Scotland

	Percentage
1974	5·7
1975	6·6
1976	6·6
1977	5·9
1978	6·1
1979	6·4
1980	7·9
1981	5·1
1982	4·8
1983	4·5
1984	5·4
1985	5·8
1986	5·9
1987	5·2

Prison Statistics

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of inmates in Scottish prisons in each year since 1974.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The average daily penal population in 1987 is provisionally estimated as 5,446. For earlier years, corresponding figures are given in appendix 2 of the annual reports "Prisons in Scotland" for 1985 and 1986.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of inmates in Scottish prisons aged *(a)* between 16 to 18 years *(b)* between 18 to 21 years and *(c)* between 21 to 25 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Detailed information is not available on the age distribution of the penal population in Scotland. The average daily penal population in 1987 is provisionally estimated as 5,446—of these 987 were young offenders under sentence, aged under 21.

An analysis by age of remand, direct sentenced and fine default receptions in 1986 was published in tables 8, 10 and 19 of Scottish Home and Health Department statistical bulletin No. 6/1987, "Prison Statistics Scotland 1986" (copies of which are available in the Library).

Education (Under-sixes)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will publish a report on the Scottish Education Department's review of provisions for the under-sixes.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The review has been discontinued and I do not intend to publish a report.

Islay (Wild Birds)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will describe the measures taken to prevent disturbance to wild birds in the proposed special protection area known as the Rinns, by the licensed shooting of white-fronted geese on Islay.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The special interest of the Rinns of Islay, including the habitats of wild birds, is protected by the area having been notified as a site of special scientific interest by the Nature Conservancy Council. None of the licences issued for the shooting of white-fronted geese on Islay permit shooting on land contained within the Rinns SSSI.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the impact of the killing of white-fronted geese on Islay on the conservation efforts and the distribution of the Greenland race of the species; and if he will make his policy to refuse any further applications for licences.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As the primary objective is to scare the geese away from land being cropped, we would expect only a relatively small number to be shot.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will be measuring the effectiveness of the licences recently issued for the killing of white-fronted geese; and if a report will be made.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The issue of licences to shoot white-fronted geese is part of an overall package of measures to contain the geese within protected areas and other land providing their natural habitats. The effects of the measures are being monitored and a report will be compiled at the end of the over-wintering period.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consider giving financial compensation to the farmers on Islay for damage caused by white-fronted geese and withdrawing the licences issued for shooting; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Nature Conservancy Council has agreements with farmers within the sites of special scientific interest to compensate for goose damage. The protection of crops and improved grassland outwith these areas is essential to the continued viability of agricultural production on Islay and a more widely based compensation policy would not offer an appropriate solution.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of white-fronted geese killed to date; and if he anticipates issuing any further licences for killing them.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Shooting is primarily intended to scare the geese and inquiries made by officials of my Department have indicated that in the period to 31 January 1988 none had been killed. The position is being kept under review and consideration will be given to the case for issuing further licences if it can be demonstrated that serious damage to crops or improved grassland is being caused by the geese.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, pursuant to the reply of 20 January, *Official*

Report, column 720, he received any advice from the Nature Conservancy Council in respect of the licences to shoot white-fronted geese.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Nature Conservancy Council was given advance notice of the proposal to issue licences to shoot white-fronted geese. It indicated that it could not support the proposal.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, pursuant to the reply of 20 January, *Official Report*, column 720, he will detail the terms of the respective licences to shoot white-fronted geese, including the number of birds permitted to be killed under each licence.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Since the licence is a lengthy document I am sending a copy to the hon. Member.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, pursuant to the reply of 20 January, *Official Report*, column 720, he will indicate the evidence he considered in assessing the serious damage to crops for the purposes of issuing licences to kill white-fronted geese; and if he will indicate the extent to which alternative solutions were considered and tested.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: On receipt of an application for a licence to protect a farm from serious damage by white-fronted geese, experienced members of my Department's agricultural staff report on the numbers of geese feeding and the extent of the damage being caused to crops and grassland. A licence would not normally be issued unless significant numbers of geese were feeding on the land. White-fronted geese are difficult to keep away from crops for any length of time, and shooting is needed to complement other methods of scaring.

EMPLOYMENT

London Docklands

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the Manpower Services Commission has any projects targeted on London docklands apart from the general programmes.

Mr. Cope: In addition to the Manpower Services Commission's mainstream programmes which are designed to respond to local needs in London docklands, as elsewhere, the MSC has a number of other initiatives. For the London docklands these include a local collaborative project, which aims to establish a long-term partnership between employers and training providers and a local employer network to encourage the involvement of employers in local vocational education and training issues.

Pin-ups

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will issue instructions for the removal of offensive pin-ups in all his departmental premises.

Mr. Nicholls: The programme of action to achieve equality for women which the Cabinet Office (Management and Personnel Office) issued in 1984 recommended that Departments should advise their staff that sexual harassment at work was not tolerated and would be treated as a disciplinary offence. The guidance issued to my staff gives examples of what might constitute sexual harassment. These include

"displays and circulation of sexually offensive material, for example pin-ups".

I do not therefore consider that any further instructions are needed.

Wages (Underpayment)

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many cases of underpayment the wages inspectorate investigated in each of the past five years in *(a)* the Northunnel travel-to-work area, *(b)* the Chester travel-to-work area and *(c)* the Runcorn travel-to-work area; how many checks were the results of complaints by staff; how many the result of routine spot checks; and what were the outcomes.

Mr. Nicholls: Statistics are not compiled for areas smaller than the nine wages inspectorate divisions.

Accidents at Work

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the number of *(a)* accidents, *(b)* serious injuries and *(c)* deaths arising at the workplace for each year since 1975.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) *Official Report* 16 December 1987, at column *578*.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any information on the breakdown of accidents at work in small companies since 1975.

Mr. Nicholls: I regret that the information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, some details on this can be found in the publication "Health and Safety Statistics 1984-85", copies of which were placed in the Library.

Major Accident Hazards

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of those industrial installations in west Glamorgan which are covered by the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984 (S.I. 1984, No. 1902); and whether the amending European Community directive 87/216 has yet been applied to any of them.

Mr. Nicholls: The industrial installations in west Glamorgan notified to the Health and Safety Executive under the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984 are;

1. BP Chemicals Limited, Port Talbot;
2. British Gas Corporation, E M Edwards Works, Jersey Marine, Neath;
3. BP Oil (Llandarcy) Refinery Limited, Llandarcy, Neath;
4. BP Oil (Llandarcy) Refinery Limited, Queens Dock, Swansea;
5. Calor Gas Limited, Aberdulais;
6. Inco (Europe) Limited, Clydach.

Compliance with the EC directive 87/216 is required by 24 September 1988. Regulations to implement the directive in Great Britain are currently being prepared.

Labour Statistics

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many constituencies in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole have had a higher percentage rate of unemployment than Dundee East for each year since 1979.

Mr. Lee: The information requested is not available. Unemployment rates are not calculated for areas smaller that travel-to-work areas.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many people have been employed in the agricultural industry in each of the last 10 years;

(2) how many people were employed in the coal mining industry in each of the last 10 years;

(3) how many people were employed in the shipbuilding and ship-repairing industries in each of the last 10 years;

(4) how many people were employed in the steel industry in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Lee: The available information is as follows:

Employees in Employment in Great Britain

June of each year	*Agriculture and Horticulture [1](0100)*	*Coal Extraction and Solid Fuels (111)*	*Shipbuilding and Repairs (3610)*	*Iron and Steel (2210)*
1977	358,000	312,000	142,000	222,000
1978	354,000	308,000	141,000	199,000
1979	339,000	299,000	135,000	191,000
1980	332,000	298,000	122,000	168,000
1981	324,000	285,000	113,000	130,000
1982	320,000	271,000	114,000	114,000
1983	312,000	257,000	109,000	95,000
1984	302,000	234,000	89,000	85,000
1985	304,000	219,000	82,000	83,000
1986	292,000	183,000	79,000	75,000
1987	283,000	154,000	72,000	72,000

[1] Figures in brackets denote Groups and Activity Headings of the Standard Industrial Classification 1980.

The figures are unadjusted for the effects of seasonal variations.

The estimates for shipbuilding and repairs and iron and steel are subject to considerable potential estimation error due to the relatively small number of employees in these industries.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current estimate for unclaimed benefit in *(a)* Scotland as a whole, *(b)* Tayside region and *(c)* Dundee.

Mr. Portillo: I have been asked to reply.

For statistical reasons it is possible to provide take-up estimates only for Great Britain as a whole. A convenient summary of the national position is shown on pages 272 and 273 of the 1988 public expenditure White Paper (Cm. 288).

WALES

Cancer Screening

8. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any proposals to increase the level of provision of mammography units and cervical cancer screening units in Wales.

Mr. Grist: The number of mammography units in Wales is to be increased as part of the centrally funded breast screening programme. The provision of cervical screening is the responsibility of district health authorities. Some £800,000 a year of central funding has been allocated over the last two years to help authorities develop and extend the service they provide.

Regional Development Fund

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his most up-to-date estimate of the planned provision for payment of regional development grant, separately for old scheme and new scheme *(a)* gross and *(b)* net of European regional development fund receipts, for 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Peter Walker: Planned regional development grant provision in Wales is as follows:

£ million

	Old scheme	*New scheme*
1987-88	22·0	34·0
1988-89	17·0	46·5
1989-90	2·0	40·0
1990-91	0·6	27·0

These figures are gross of receipts from the European regional development fund. The provision for ERDF receipts towards RDG expenditure is £3·8 million in 1987-88 and £1·5 million in 1988-89. Information is not available at this stage on the likely level of ERDF receipts beyond 1988-89. The United Kingdom will, however, continue to claim reimbursement from the European Commission in respect of both regional development grant schemes.

14. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total value of grants which Wales has received from the European regional development fund in each of the last three years.

Mr. Peter Walker: Net commitment to Wales from the European regional development fund was £54·9 million in 1985, £59·5 million in 1986 and £53·8 million in 1987.

Regional Aid

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether regional selective assistance will be available for United Kingdom firms moving from one region of the

United Kingdom to Wales, or opening new branches in Wales following the change in policy announced on 12 January.

Mr. Peter Walker: Regional selective assistance will continue to be available for all qualifying projects which improve employment opportunities in the assisted areas. Projects which move from elsewhere in Great Britain will be eligible for assistance on the additional employment which they create. Since 1984 relocation projects involving no net increase in jobs have not normally been assisted and that policy has not changed as a consequence of the announcements made on 12 January.

Bus Deregulation

Sir Raymond Gower: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the results to date of the deregulation of buses in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Initial research by the Department of Transport's Transport and Road Research Laboratory indicates that overall bus deregulation in Wales has been successful. Monitoring of the position is continuing.

Bypasses

Sir Raymond Gower: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many road bypass schemes have been completed in Wales since January 1987.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Two; the A48 Crosshands-Llanddarog bypass and A483 Ruabon bypass and Wynnstay link.

Measles, Whooping Cough and Polio

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he plans any new schemes to increase parental compliance with the need for increased vaccination against measles, whooping cough and polio;

(2) by what percentage the uptake of *(a)* measles, *(b)* triple vaccine, including whooping cough, and *(c)* poliomyelitis vaccination falls short of the target level of 90 per cent. in each of the health authorities in Wales for each of the last six years.

Mr. Grist: Considerable efforts, including notably the designation of an appropriate individual in each district health authority to co-ordinate immunisation activity, have been made in recent years to achieve a significant improvement in the uptake rates for vaccination against a range of childhood infectious diseases. A public education campaign aimed both at raising awareness of the need for children to be protected against these illnesses and at motivating parents and health professionals alike has been promoted by Health Departments. There has been a marked improvement in the rates of vaccination against each of these diseases in all Welsh district health authorities, though some remain disappointingly low. Our officials will be considering with the Welsh Health Promotion Authority and district health authorities what further measures might be appropriate to achieve further improvement. In particular, consideration will be given to sensitive and appropriate methods of overcoming the resistance which continues to be evident in relation to the take-up of vaccination against both measles and whooping cough. The introduction of the new combined vaccine against measles, mumps and rubella later this year is expected to play a major part in this process.

Health authorities in Wales were advised of the target uptake rate of 90 per cent. by 1990 for measles immunisation only in August 1985. At the same time they were invited to establish their own individual targets for diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus and poliomyelitis. The tables set out the percentage uptake rates for immunisation against each of these diseases, by health authority, for the years 1981 to 1986 inclusive.

Children vaccinated as percentage of the total born in the second previous year

Health Authority and year	*Measles*	*Diphtheria*	*Whooping Cough*	*Tetanus*	*Polio*
Clwyd					
1981	50·1	81·2	39·8	81·3	81·5
1982	53·6	82·8	45·6	82·8	83·3
1983	54·9	84·9	52·8	84·9	85·3
1984	57·1	83·9	59·7	84·0	84·1
1985	64·4	86·0	59·7	86·0	86·1
1986	71·4	87·1	62·7	87·2	87·3
East Dyfed					
1981	27·9	86·1	27·3	87·9	81·2
1982	30·8	86·4	31·1	86·6	82·3
1983	45·1	83·7	33·6	83·7	83·8
1984	53·5	86·5	44·9	86·5	86·5
1985	63·3	87·7	47·8	87·7	87·9
1986	65·0	88·6	50·0	88·7	88·2
Gwent					
1981	48·4	84·2	30·5	84·2	85·0
1982	51·7	85·3	38·0	85·5	86·2
1983	54·4	86·2	46·7	86·3	87·1
1984	57·4	85·9	53·9	85·9	86·2
1985	62·5	87·4	52·2	87·4	87·8
1986	64·6	87·2	54·1	87·2	87·7
Gwynedd					
1981	33·9	80·6	27·6	80·8	80·5

Health Authority and year	Measles	Diphtheria	Whooping Cough	Tetanus	Polio
1982	37·5	82·2	35·8	82·3	81·9
1983	37·1	79·8	44·5	80·0	80·0
1984	46·0	81·5	52·9	81·6	81·1
1985	58·4	86·2	55·8	86·2	85·6
1986	68·0	89·9	60·1	89·9	90·1
Mid Glamorgan					
1981	28·6	76·1	18·6	76·2	76·8
1982	34·7	79·7	24·1	79·6	80·9
1983	36·6	80·1	31·7	80·1	80·7
1984	40·8	79·1	42·1	79·0	79·6
1985	48·5	81·2	42·3	81·2	81·5
1986	50·2	81·0	43·7	81·1	81·5
Pembrokeshire					
1981	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1982	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1983	61·8	88·9	60·6	88·8	89·1
1984	64·0	85·8	64·0	85·8	85·7
1985	71·3	87·8	64·1	87·9	88·1
1986	76·7	87·4	64·8	87·5	87·5
Powys					
1981	53·2	74·6	32·4	74·5	74·3
1982	56·4	91·8	46·9	92·1	93·2
1983	60·7	91·0	40·4	91·0	91·6
1984	64·9	91·1	63·3	91·3	91·4
1985	70·8	94·5	61·9	94·6	94·5
1986	76·9	95·9	65·1	95·5	96·5
South Glamorgan					
1981	27·2	69·0	22·4	69·0	69·1
1982	34·7	77·8	31·6	77·8	78·4
1983	37·6	77·0	40·4	77·1	77·2
1984	42·2	75·2	47·6	75·2	74·9
1985	53·8	78·4	49·5	78·4	77·1
1986	55·6	79·0	52·0	79·0	79·1
West Glamorgan					
1981	22·7	70·3	19·1	70·3	70·8
1982	25·9	75·2	24·4	75·2	75·4
1983	31·4	76·7	33·7	76·9	77·2
1984	35·9	76·3	43·0	76·3	76·3
1985	49·9	79·7	43·9	79·7	80·1
1986	56·5	84·0	51·3	84·0	85·0
Wales					
1981	35·0	77·8	26·2	78·0	77·6
1982	[illegible]	81·4	32·7	81·5	81·7
1983	43·9	81·8	41·6	81·9	82·3
1984	48·3	81·3	49·9	81·3	81·1
1985	57·3	83·7	50·4	83·8	83·7
1986	61·3	84·9	53·3	84·9	85·2

n/a—Not available.

Obstetric Units

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many of the obstetric units run by general practitioners for each area health authority in Wales have no provision of anaesthetic services.

Mr. Grist: This is a matter of operational policy for the health authorities concerned and I suggest that the hon. Gentleman writes to the district general managers.

AIDS

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has about the decision of the United States national institutes of health to instruct all biological laboratories to review their safety guidelines following the reported infection of two laboratory workers with the AIDS virus after working with concentrated samples; and whether he will carry out such a review of procedures in medical and biological laboratories in Wales.

Mr. Grist: The Department receives advice on such matters from the Government's Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens and the expert advisory group on AIDS.

In July 1986 comprehensive advice was issued to all concerned in the ACDP document "LAV/HTLVIII—the causative agent of AIDS and related conditions—revised guidelines". Guidance is constantly under review to ensure that it reflects the latest expert opinion both in the United Kingdom and abroad. We have no plans to initiate a special review to supplement these arrangements.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has as to the median waiting time for operations in each Welsh health district for the 10 most common types of operation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: I shall write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Labour Statistics

12. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many men and how many women were in full-time employment in June 1979 and December 1987 in *(a)* Bridgend, *(b)* Mid Glamorgan and *(c)* Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: In Wales, total male employment was 618,000 in June 1979 and 486,000 in September 1987 (the latest available date); equivalents for full-time female employment are 250,000 and 210,000 (these figures exclude self employed). Figures for Bridgend and Mid Glamorgan are not available, nor are separate figures for full-time male employees.

Gwynedd Health Authority

19. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the chairman of Gwynedd health authority; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend and I, together with the Minister of State, met the chairman of Gwynedd health authority on 15 December 1987, when the authority's financial position and plans for financial recovery were discussed.

Rating Reform

28. **Mr. Raffan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his policy with regard to the charge which will be payable for static caravans used as second or holiday homes under the community charge in Wales; and whether he will make it his policy that the charge will be the same as in England and Scotland.

Mr. Grist: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett).

DEFENCE

Army Vehicles

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about army vehicles driving on public highways after dark without lights; and what steps are taken to warn other road users when this occurs.

Mr. Freeman: No representations have been received about army vehicles driving on public highways after dark without lights. It is against regulations for army vehicles to use the public highway after dark unless in exceptional circumstances a special exemption has been secured; no such exemptions have been sought in recent years.

Black Officers

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the name and rank of the highest ranking black officer in the armed forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The armed forces are fully integrated, non-discriminating organisations and no records are kept of the ethnic origins of personnel. Therefore, no information can be provided on the origins, number or rank of those from the ethnic minorities.

Defence Procurement

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will give the value of procurement business given to Moores Wallisdown Ltd in each of the years from 1980 to 1985 separately.

Mr. Sainsbury: The overall value of HQ contracts placed with Moores Wallisdown Ltd. is as follows:

	£ '000
1982-83	30
1983-84	161
1984-85	nil
1985-86	238

Information for earlier years could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will state the value of procurement business given to Altonjet in the years 1985, 1986 and 1987 separately.

Mr. Sainsbury: We have no record of any HQ contracts having been placed with this company. No central record is maintained of orders placed locally and an investigation could only be carried out at disproportionate cost.

Research Contracts

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many research agreements or contracts his Department has currently placed with the University of Southampton; and what are the subjects into which the research is being carried out;

(2) how many research agreements or contracts his Department has currently placed with the University of Birmingham; and what are the subjects into which the research is being carried out;

(3) how many research agreements or contracts his Department has currently placed with the University of Aston in Birmingham; and what are the subjects into which the research is being carried out.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Mrs. Gordon) on 14 January at column 775.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many research agreements or contracts the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment has currently placed with universities and other establishments of higher education; and what is the total cost of these agreements and contracts.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Atomic Weapons Establishment has currently 41 research contracts or agreements placed

with universities and other establishments of higher education. The total value of these agreements and contracts is £2 million.

Service Engagements (Termination)

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many soldiers from each regiment of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers left the Army without completing three years service; in each year since 1979;

(2) how many soldiers from the Parachute Regiment left the Army before completing three years service in each year since 1979;

(3) how many soldiers from the Royal Welsh Fusiliers left the Army before completing three years service, in each year since 1979;

(4) how many soldiers from the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders left the Army before completing three years service, in each year since 1979;

(5) how many soldiers from each regiment of the Royal Engineers left the Army before completing three years service, in each year since 1979;

(6) how many soldiers from each regiment of the Royal Signals left the Army before completing three years service, in each year since 1979.

Mr. Freeman: I will write to the hon. Member.

Captain Fred Holroyd

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if any assistance was given by his Department to the Royal Ulster Constabulary inquiry in 1982 into the allegations of Captain Fred Holroyd, retired.

Mr. Freeman: Yes.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what full and careful investigations were carried out into the allegations made by Captain Holroyd, retired, and Mr. Colin Wallace, referred to in the *Official Report*, 3 March 1987, column 577, and when.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 20 July 1987, at column 93.

Nuclear Tests (Radiation Victims)

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence up to which date the recent National Radiological Protection Board report studied mortality in relation to Britain's nuclear test veterans; by how many since that date the number of deaths from multiple myeloma among nuclear veterans has increased; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: In planning the conduct of the study, before any mortality data had been obtained, NRPB decided that it would attempt to take account of all deaths prior to 1 January 1984. The main results of the study refer to that date, although the authors refer in passing to some notifications received later than the above cut-off date. The Government, in the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on 28 January at column *309*, have already said they would co-operate in implementing the recommendations by NRPB to continue the study for a further period of 10 years. The further data to which the hon. Member refers will be included in that extension to the study.

European Fighter Aircraft

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to receive notification from his West German counterpart of his Government's agreement to the further development phase of the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Sainsbury: The co-ordination of four separate national approvals is necessarily complex, and allowance must be made for the different timings involved. We are encouraging our partners to reach their decisions as quickly as possible.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the F18 fighter aircraft or any of its derivatives meets the agreed operational requirements of the proposed European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Sainsbury: No.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the future progress of the European fighter aircraft project.

Mr. Sainsbury: Further to the reply I gave to the hon. Members for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) and for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) on 10 November 1987 at column 157, the processing of national development submissions in each of the four partner nations is continuing. The development phase will be formally launched as soon as these activities have been brought to a successful conclusion. We expect this to be in the next few months.

Service Personnel (Electors)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will detail the process by which members of each branch of the armed services may register as electors.

Mr. Freeman: Service personnel are encouraged to register as voters and may then vote in local, parliamentary and European elections. They register by service declaration form F/Vote/33 available in all ships, units or stations. Service declarations do not have to be completed annually. They are valid for the whole of the individual's service but may, of course, be amended.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are taken to encourage service personnel in each branch of the armed forces to register as electors.

Mr. Freeman: It is our aim to achieve the highest possible level of service registration and we use a variety of means to encourage service men to register, including annual Defence Council instructions to commanding officers, compulsory displays of noticeboard information material, articles and advertisements in service magazines and newspapers, and radio broadcasts on British forces broadcasting services. All recruit training includes a period on voting rights and registration procedures. Families posted overseas are issued with further advice. Registration performance is monitored by each of the three services.

Departmental Correspondence

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the written answer of 11 December 1987, *Official Report*, column *312*, to what inquiries about correspondence between third parties and his Department he is willing to respond.

Mr. Freeman: I have nothing further to add to the answer I gave on that occasion.

Army Chaplains

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many chaplains are currently attached to the Army; and how many are of each rank.

Mr. Freeman *(holding answer 4 February 1988):* There are currently 160 chaplains in the Regular Army. The numbers in each rank are:

1 Major General (Chaplain General)
1 Brigadier (Deputy Chaplain General)
9 Colonels (1 Principal Roman Catholic Chaplain, 8 Chaplains Class I)
35 Lieutenant Colonels (Chaplains Class II)
64 Majors (Chaplains Class III)
50 Captains (Chaplains Class IV)

In addition, there are 108 chaplains commissioned into the Territorial Army and 140 Army Cadet Force chaplains. All TA and ACF chaplains join as chaplains class IV (Captains) and can attain the acting rank of chaplain class III (Acting Major) after six years service.

NORTHERN IRELAND

RUC (Injury and Sickness)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Belfast, South of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *292*, how many of the total days off sick or injured by members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary were attributable to *(a)* injury and *(b)* sickness; and if he will give this information for the last five years, stating average days off per capita.

Mr. Stanley: The information in respect of the regular RUC is as follows:

	Injury on duty	*Average per member*	*Sickness*	*Average per member*
1983	14,233	1·78	77,155	9·64
1984	17,444	2·15	92,604	11·39
1985	21,351	1·58	111,318	13·48
1986	23,527	2·86	124,780	15·15
1987	Figures not yet available			

Positive Vetting

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many civil servants in the Northern Ireland Office between 1965 and 1985 failed positive vetting.

Mr. Stanley: As the Government have made clear previously, it would be inconsistent with the confidentiality of the positive vetting procedure to give information of this kind.

Criminal Injury Claims

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the numbers of criminal injuries claims for each year since 1975 arising from so-called punishment attacks, the total amounts of compensation paid and the number of cases contested in court.

Mr. Stanley *[holding answer 29 January 1988]:* The information that is readily available relates only to criminal injury claims for punishment shootings in the form of "kneecapping" and is as follows:

Kneecapping cases

Year	*Claims received*	*Claims withdrawn*	*Compensation refused*		*Compensation awarded*		*Claims outstanding*	*Compensation paid (£)*
			By Secretary of State	*By courts*	*By Secretary of State*	*By courts*		
1977	15	1	3	3	7	1	—	16,841
1978	19	3	5	2	8	1	—	29,797
1979	14	2	3	2	6	1	—	16,200
1980	18	2	6	1	6	3	—	36,100
1981	37	2	1	9	17	7	1	170,600
1982	28	3	—	2	13	8	2	168,150
1983	6	—	3	2	1	—	—	1,750
1984	5	—	—	—	3	—	2	85,500
1985	3	—	—	—	—	—	3	—
1986	2	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
1987	5	—	—	—	—	—	5	—
Totals	152	13	21	21	61	21	15	524,938

United States Politicians (Visits)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many locally and nationally elected United States politicians have been invited during each of the last 10 years to visit Northern Ireland at public expense; what positions they held; what was the full cost in each case; how many were involved in each party; how many brought their spouses or other relatives; and, in those cases, who paid.

Mr. Stanley *[holding answer 3 February 1988]:* Invitations to United States politicians to visit Northern Ireland at public expense are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Mortgage Tax Relief

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals received mortgage tax relief in shared accommodation, not counting married couples; and what was the value of such relief in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It is tentatively estimated that about 500,000 individuals (excluding married couples) are involved in multiple borrower mortgages. The direct revenue cost in 1987-88 of the additional mortgage interest relief which is available to sharers is estimated to be about £25 million.

Capital Gains Tax

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the revenue derived in the last year for which figures are available from capital gains tax on assets held for more than *(a)* 10 years, *(b)* 15 years and *(c)* 20 years.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The liability to capital gains tax, expressed as a proportion of the total net liability accruing on the disposal of assets during 1985-86, is estimated to be about *(a)* 50 per cent., *(b)* 30 per cent. and *(c)* 20 per cent. respectively. These figures exclude tax on the capital gains of companies chargeable to corporation tax.

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the effects of capital gains tax upon the deployment of investment in British business.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations.

Income Tax

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any estimate of what a 1p, 2p, 3p, 4p, 5p, 6p and 7p cut in the standard rate of income tax would represent as a percentage pay increase for a man on national average earnings.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The information is in the table:

Reduction in basic rate of income tax
Increase in income after tax as a percentage of gross earnings for a married man on average earnings, 1988-89

Pence	*Per cent.*
1	0·7
2	1·4
3	2·1
4	2·8
5	3·4
6	4·1
7	4·8

It is assumed that the man's earnings are his only source of income. Average earnings are those for men in all occupations paid at adult rates who work a full week and whose pay is unaffected by absence. This figure is projected to 1988-89 in accordance with the assumptions given to the Government Actuary for reviewing national insurance contributions in paragraph 3.02 of the Autumn Statement 1987. The married man's allowance for 1988-89 is calculated by reference to the statutory formula for indexation.

Income Tax

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what additional annual income net of tax and national insurance would result from (a) a 2p cut in the basic rate of income tax and (b) the reduction of all high rate income tax bands to 40 per cent. for (i) a person, (ii) an income tax payer, (iii) a household and (iv) average family of four.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 29 January 1988]:* The effects of the proposed changes depend on the level of income. Estimates are given in the tables, for selected specimen incomes. The income tax changes are compared with the 1987-88 tax regime indexed to 1988-89 according to the statutory provisions and disregard any changes in the social security income related benefits to which the family may be entitled. The number of children in a family would not affect the tax liability.

Increase in income after tax and national insurance (£ per annum) compared with indexation in 1988-89

	Multiple of average male earnings[1]					
	½	¾	*1*	1¼	*2*	*3*
Increased derived from:						
(a) 2 pence cut in basic rate						
(i) single	77	141	204	331	459	1,222
(ii) married couple wife not earning	48	112	176	303	430	1,194
(iii) married couple wife earning[2]	82	188	294	505	716	1,985
(b) reduction of all higher rates of income tax to 40 per cent.						
(i) single	—	—	—	—	87	5,971
(ii) married couple wife not earning	—	—	—	—	15	5,685
(iii) married couple wife earning[2]	—	—	—	—	87	7,794

[1] Average male earnings assumed to be £244·70 per week; an increase of 6·5 per cent. on 1987-88 in line with the assumptions used by the Government Actuary for reviewing National Insurance contributions (paragraph 3.02 of the Autumn Statement 1987).
[2] Assuming that the wife's earnings are the same multiple of average earnings as her husband's.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the estimated income tax forgone in 1986-87 by the Treasury from taxpayers earning *(a)* between £20,000 and £50,000 and *(b)* more than £50,000 as a result of beneficial loans from employers;

(2) what was the estimated income tax forgone in 1986-87 by the Treasury from taxpayers earning *(a)* between £20,000 and £50,000 and *(b)* more than £50,000 as a result of loans from an employer to purchase a residence;

(3) what was the estimated income tax forgone in 1986-87 by the Treasury from taxpayers earning *(a)* between £20,000 and £50,000 and *(b)* more than £50,000 as a result of loans from an employer to purchase a car.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answers 4 February 1988]:* Employees earning at a rate of £8,500 or more per year and all directors who receive an interest-free or cheap loan from their employer are liable to income tax on the difference between interest calculated at the official rate and the actual interest paid. When the benefit of the cheap loan is less than £200 in the year, no tax is charged. Estimates of the cost of this tax exemption are not available.

Tax is not charged if the loan is such that any interest paid on it would be eligible for tax relief—for example, qualifying loans up to £30,000 to purchase a main residence. It is estimated that the total income tax forgone as a result of this exemption is around £100 million, but I regret that it is not possible to estimate the cost attributable to those earning over £20,000 per year.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the estimated income tax forgone in 1986-87 by the Treasury from taxpayers earning *(a)* between £20,000 and £50,000 and *(b)* more than £50,000 as a result of personal equity plans.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 4 February 1988]:* The income tax relief on personal equity plans is in respect of dividend and interest payments on investments. Since personal equity plans were not available until January 1987, the income tax forgone in 1986-87 was negligible.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what was the estimated income tax forgone in 1986-87 by the Treasury from taxpayers earnings *(a)* between £20,000 and £50,000 and *(b)* more than £50,000 as a result of savings-related share option schemes.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 4 February 1988]:* The total cost of income tax forgone in 1986-87 as a result of approved savings-related share option schemes is estimated at £50 million. I regret that it is not possible to subdivide this between different income groups.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what was the estimated income tax forgone in 1986-87 by the Treasury from taxpayers earnings *(a)* between £20,000 and £50,000 and *(b)* more than £50,000 as a result of the 1984 share option scheme.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 4 February 1988]:* The cost of income tax forgone in 1986-87 as a result of approved Finance Act 1984 share option schemes is negligible since options must generally be held for at least three years in order to qualify for relief.

Income Tax

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many earners did not directly benefit from the cut in the standard rate of income tax in 1987-88; and how many earners would not benefit from a further cut in the standard rate to 25 per cent. in 1988-89, assuming indexation of personal allowances.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 26 January 1988]:* It is estimated that in 1987-88 and 1988-89 between 3 and 3·5 million earners (including part-time workers) would have insufficient income to benefit from reductions in the basic rate.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost of reintroducing a reduced rate band of income tax, worth the same as that band in 1978-79 in real terms, in 1988-89.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 26 January 1988]:* The full-year direct revenue cost of reintroducing a reduced rate band of income tax in 1988-89, charging the first £1,650 of taxable income at 19 per cent. and worth the same to taxpayers in real terms as the band in 1978-89, would be about £3 billion. The cost assumes indexation of the current income tax bands and allowances according to the statutory formula.

Budget Statement

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about his forthcoming Budget Statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend has received a large number of representations covering a variety of proposals.

Luncheon Vouchers

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received seeking a review of the 15p tax-free allowance on luncheon vouchers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations. Decisions on changes in taxation are a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer and will be announced in his Budget Statement.

Pension Funds

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will detail the type of information requested on pension funds by the Inland Revenue (technical division) special office, Sheffield.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Tax-approved pension funds are exempt from tax only on their income and gains derived from holding investments. In each case, inquiries have been made to establish whether the tax exemption applies to all the fund's activities.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, pursuant to his answer of 25 January, *Official Report*, column 85, he will list the 12 pension funds from whom information has been requested.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 4 February 1988]:* No. Information about particular taxpayers is confidential to the Inland Revenue.

Private Health Insurance

Mr. Chris Butler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received seeking relief from the taxation of employees' contributions to private health care insurance.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations.

Deputy Secretaries

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the responsibilities of each of the deputy secretaries in his Department and the number and ranks of staff reporting to each.

Mr. Brooke: The information as at 1 January 1988 is as follows:

Deputy Secretary (Grade 2) Overseas Finance
Responsibilities:
European Community Group
Aid and Export Finance Group
Senior UK Director of the European Investment Bank
United Kingdom representation at international financial and economic meetings
Two Grade 3, four Grade 5 and 38½ other staff

Deputy Secretary (Grade 2) Public Finance
Responsibilities:
Fiscal Policy Group
Financial Institutions and Markets Group
Monetary Group
Public Sector Finances Group
North Sea Development and Policy
Three Grade 3, eight Grade 5 and 99 other staff

Deputy Secretary (Grade 2) Industry
Responsibilities:
Public Enterprises Group
Industry, Agriculture and Employment Group
Two Grade 3, five Grade 5 and 64 other staff

Deputy Secretary (Grade 2) Public Services
Responsibilities:
Social Services and Territorial Group
Local Government Group
Home, Transport and Education Group
Treasury Officer of Accounts and Purchasing
Financial Management Group
Running Costs Group
Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency
Chairman of the Public Expenditure Survey Committee
Chairman of the Procurement Policy Committee
Seven Grade 3, 18 Grade 5 and 635 other staff

Deputy Secretary (Grade 2) Deputy Chief Economic Adviser
Responsibilities:
Public Enterprises Analytic Unit
Manpower Statistics
Economics of Taxation
Public Expenditure Economics and Operational Research
Micro Economic Analysis of Trade Issues
One Grade 3, seven Grade 5, 56½ other staff

Establishments and organisation group, econonic briefing division, the information division and the rating of Government property department (1,046 staff) report direct to the permanent secretary; the defence policy and material group, the general expenditue policy group and the central unit on purchasing (87½ staff) to the second permanent secretary (public expenditure); the forecast and analysis group and the medium-term and policy analysis group (36 staff) to the chief economic adviser; the international finance group (24 staff) to the second permanent secretary finance; the pay and personnel management group, the Civil Service catering organisation and superannuation division (982½ staff including 598½ industrial civil servants at CISCO) to the second permanent secretary (Civil Service management and pay); and the accountancy advice group (43 staff) reports to the accountancy adviser to the Treasury and the head of the Government accountancy service.

Inland Revenue (Sheffield)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer who is the head of the Inland Revenue (technical division) special office, Sheffield.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Mr. M. G. Longden.

Pin-ups

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will issue instructions for the removal of all offensive pin-ups in all his departmental premises.

Mr. Brooke: Sexual harassment at work, of which the display of sexually offensive material is a form, is not tolerated and is dealt with, if appropriate, as a disciplinary matter through the usual Civil Service complaints procedures. Against the background of the general instructions and guidance which already exist, there is no evidence to suggest that any further instructions to deal with this particular form of sexual harassment are warranted in the Treasury.

London Weighting

Mr. Cran: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the cost to the Exchequer of paying London weighting to those civil servants in receipt of such weighting over the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Brooke: The estimated cost to the Exchequer of paying London weighting to civil servants in the last five financial years has been:

	£ million
1983-84	126·4
1984-85	126·8
1985-86	133·2
1986-87	141·3
1987-88	147·8

These figures exclude additions to ERNIC, superannuation and pensions as a consequence of London weighting.

Flotations

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how long before flotation stockbroking firms were invited to make proposals for the tender and how long before flotation the firm eventually used was actually chosen, in the cases of *(a)* British Telecom, *(b)* British Gas and *(c)* Britoil.

Mr. Norman Lamont: In the case of British Telecom, stockbroking firms were invited to tender in a press notice issued in October 1983. The broker was appointed in December 1983, and flotation took place in November 1984.

In the case of the 1985 Britoil sale, brokers were invited to tender and were appointed in May 1985. The sale of the Government's residual shareholding was in July 1985.

In the case of British Gas, brokers were invited to tender in June 1985 and the broker was appointed in July 1985. The flotation took place in November 1986.

Income Distribution

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his reply of 8 April 1987, *Official Report*, columns 263-4, to give the income distribution table for 1987-88, and his estimate for 1988-89.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 26 January 1988]:* The latest available estimates are given in the tables. They are based on projections from the 1984-85 survey of personal incomes and are therefore provisional.

Distribution total income[1] 1987-88

Numbers

Range of total income Lower limit £ per annum	*Tax units aged under 65*			*Tax units aged over 65*		
	Single people '000s	*Married couples without wife's earned income* '000s	*Married couples with wife's earned income* '000s	*Single people* '000s	*Married couples without wife's earned income* '000s	*Married couples with wife's earned income* '000s
1,000[2]	1,160	200	20	30	10	5
2,000[2]	1,090	230	70	340	30	10
3,000	980	160	70	410	90	30
4,000	910	190	100	250	180	90
5,000	1,020	210	100	140	180	90
6,000	920	270	150	100	160	70
7,000	850	350	180	70	110	70
8,000	650	370	240	100	70	60
9,000	600	410	270	50	50	60
10,000	760	800	740	80	50	80
12,000	460	830	1,260	70	60	70
15,000	310	520	1,530	50	40	80
20,000	100	180	660	30	20	50
25,000	40	90	310	10	10	20
30,000	50	110	340	20	20	20
50,000	20	40	70	5	10	10

[1] Total income for income tax purposes.
[2] Excluding those who have no Inland Revenue tax record because their earnings are below the PAYE reporting limit.

Distribution total income[1] 1988-89

Numbers

Range of total income Lower limit £ per annum	*Tax units aged under 65*			*Tax units aged over 65*		
	Single people '000s	*Married couples without wife's earned income* '000s	*Married couples with wife's earned income* '000s	*Single people* '000s	*Married couples without wife's earned income* '000s	*Married couples with wife's earned income* '000s
1,000[2]	1,090	200	20	30	10	5
2,000[2]	1,000	220	60	280	20	10
3,000	890	140	60	390	50	20
4,000	840	190	90	260	180	90
5,000	960	190	100	160	160	80
6,000	870	190	110	110	170	80
7,000	830	280	150	60	130	60
8,000	710	330	190	80	90	60
9,000	560	380	240	70	50	50
10,000	980	820	620	90	70	90
12,000	590	890	1,110	80	60	80
15,000	360	700	1,650	50	40	80
20,000	150	220	820	30	20	50
25,000	50	100	410	20	20	30
30,000	60	130	450	20	20	30
50,000	30	60	100	10	10	10

[1] Total income for income tax purposes.
[2] Excluding those who have no Inland Revenue tax record because their earnings are below the PAYE reporting limit.

Tax Allowances

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his reply of 1 May 1986, *Official Report*, column to show what extra revenue would result from allowing all tax allowances, both personal and non-structural, at the standard rate of tax only.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 26 January 1988]:* The direct revenue cost at 1987-88 levels of income of allowing personal tax allowances at rates in excess of the basic rate of income tax is estimated to be about £810 million. Information on the similar cost of other income tax reliefs is available only in respect of mortgage interest, retirement annuity premiums, employees' superannuation contributions, the business expansion scheme, and donations to charities; in total it is about £750 million. It is not possible to estimate precisely the combined yield from restricting these reliefs and personal allowances to the basis rate, but it is thought to be about £1,750 million.

These estimates make no allowance for any possible behavioural effects if allowances and reliefs were to be restricted to the basic rate.

Forestry

Ms. Quin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implication of Her Majesty's Government policy on the fiscal regime for forests of the report by the economic consultancy PIEDA, commissioned by the Council for the Protection of Rural England on tax relief for forestry, a copy of which has been forwarded to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 1 February 1988]:* My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will give careful consideration to this report along with the many other representations he receives at this time of year.

Toxic Waste

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what physical checks are made by Customs and Excise officers at all ports registered to receive toxic waste containers, to assess if the inventory carriage notes are commensurate with the materials carried.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* Customs and Excise officers do not normally make physical checks to assess whether inventory carriage notes are commensurate with the materials carried in toxic waste containers.

Privatisation

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has anything to add to his answer to the hon. Member for Bridgend of 14 January, *Official Report*, at column *388*, concerning privatisation.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 4 February 1988]:* I have nothing to add to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) on 14 January.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Sheffield

Mr. Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the figures for Sheffield health authority's in-patient waiting lists for each of the years from 1979 to the latest year for which figures are availble.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is given in the table.

Total number of patients on the in-patient waiting list for Sheffield District Health Authority from 31 March 1979 to 31 March 1987.

Year	Position at	Total number of in-patients
1979	31 March	12,111
	31 September	11,277
1980	31 March	10,919
	31 September	10,673
1981	31 March	10,932
	31 September	11,280
1982	31 March	11,924
	31 September	14,678
1983	31 March	14,216
	31 September	13,489
1984	31 March	12,488
	31 September	12,549
1985	31 March	11,659
	31 September	11,307
1986	31 March	11,903
	31 September	11,002
1987	31 March	11,051

Macclesfield Health Authority

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will tabulate by specialty the waiting list figures in the Macclesfield health authority as at 31 March in each year since 1981.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is given in the table.

Number of patients by specialty on in-patient waiting list as at 31 March 1981 to 1987 for Macclesfield District Health Authority

Specialty	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
General medicine	0	1	0	0	18	0	0
Geriatrics	51	27	13	14	11	0	8
General surgery	1,144	1,024	1,047	1,127	550	364	261
Ear, nose and throat	179	153	149	127	85	101	37
Traumatic and orthopaedic	590	658	555	463	326	310	270
Ophthalmology	0	0	0	0	0	0	71
Urology	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Oral surgery	135	118	75	65	40	53	43
Orthodontics	0	0	0	0	3	2	2
Gynaecology	372	334	337	231	201	249	139
Mental handicap	0	8	10	3	3	0	0
Mental illness	53	48	34	17	0	0	0
Total	2,524	2,371	2,220	2,047	1,237	1,159	931

Mentally Ill People

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the cost per annum of caring for mentally ill patients at the lowest and highest dependency level.

Mr. Newton: The Department does not collect information on costs of caring for the mentally ill by dependency level. Health Service costing returns indicate that the cost per in-patient week in a mental illness hospital is £296 at 1987-88 prices.

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what action he proposes to take in response to the criticisms of deficiencies in regional hospital authority plans identified by the Comptroller and Auditor General in the report on community care, HC 108; and what assessment he has made of the impact of such deficiencies of the ability of his Department to formulate an accurate national overview on community care for the mentally ill;

(2) if it would assist his Department, in overseeing and guiding the development of community care policies, if some aspects of regional health authority plans could be produced to a standard format; what assessment he has made of the areas which could be standardised; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what action he proposes to take to ensure that information about the planned level of local authority services for the mentally ill is included in future National Health Service plans, in the light of the Comptroller and Auditor General's identification of the need for a balanced consideration of the service changes proposed.

Mr. Newton: We are considering how we can specify clearly in future planning guidance the key quantitative information we expect plans to contain. This consideration includes services for mentally ill people in the community, whether provided by health authorities themselves or by other agencies.

Hospitals (Funding)

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will revise his policy of 1982 of not giving extra resources allocated to run newer bigger hospitals in areas where they have been built.

Mr. Newton: Special protection within regional health authority allocations for the revenue consequences of capital schemes ceased in 1977-78, when the recommendations of the resource allocation working party were implemented. Regional health authorities are responsible both for planning their capital investment with regard to the likely availability of revenue, and for ensuring that their annual revenue allocations to districts are sensitive to service plans, including new capital developments.

Hospital Hostels (Places)

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many places in hospital hostels or their equivalent are available in each district health authority.

Mrs. Currie: "Hospital hostel" is the name that has been given to a form of accommodation commended in the 1975 White Paper "Better Services for the Mentally Ill" (Cmnd. 6233) in which a small group of long stay patients requiring 24-hour medical and nursing supervision are provided with in-patient care in an informal domestic environment. We intend such units to form a permanent part of district psychiatric services; a number of evaluations have reported encouragingly on the quality of life obtained. I regret that present statistics do not distinguish places in this type of accommodation from other accommodation for psychiatric in-patients.

Motor Oil

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any proposals for the compulsory labelling of motor oil, warning of the possible link between used motor oil and skin cancer; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The evidence from animal tests suggests that repeated exposure to used engine oil could lead to the development of skin cancers. However, there is no evidence of an increase in skin cancers among motor mechanics. Any risk will be reduced if those exposed follow good hygiene practice, including using clean protective overalls and washing their hands.

Labelling is not a matter for the Department. I understand that my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Employment and for the Environment are considering the need for warnings, including labelling. Some manufacturers already label their oils and others are considering doing so. The trade associations recommend that vehicle and workshop manuals include a warning to follow good hygiene practice when changing the oil in vehicles.

Residential Care Homes

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list the residential care homes for the elderly run by local authorities in which cases of neglect and cruelty towards residents have resulted in disciplinary action or criminal prosecution against members of staff; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list those members of staff of municipal residential care homes for the elderly and handicapped who have been disciplined or prosecuted for neglect or cruelty towards residents.

Mrs. Currie: Disciplinary proceedings against local authority staff are a matter for the local authority concerned, while prosecutions are for the police and the Director of Public Prosecutions and the information requested is not recorded centrally.

Resettlement Unit, Bishopbriggs

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has reviewed the guarantee given in 1986 that the resettlement unit at Bishopbriggs would not be closed until he is satisfied that there are suitable alternative facilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Since the Government's policy on resettlement units was announced on 5 February 1985, it has been our aim to ensure that suitable alternative schemes are in operation before the units close. That is still our objective and review teams and officials are working towards it, making useful progress in respect of most of the units.

In the case of Bishopbriggs resettlement unit progress has been slow. Although we cannot guarantee that, regardless of eventualities, the unit will remain open indefinitely, we do believe that it should be possible to provide suitable alternative facilities before closure.

Retirement Pensioners

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to uprate the 25p additional amount paid to retirement pensioners aged 80 years and over; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans at present to increase the 25p addition. Basic pension is however increasing by £1·65 for a single person and £2·65 for a couple in April.

Special Payments

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in the Seaham and Peterlee area will not receive the recently announced £8 special payment because their pension is paid from their husband's pension book; and if he will take steps to rectify this anomaly.

Mr. Scott: There are no married women whose retirement pensions are paid from their husbands' order books; all have their own order books and are therefore eligible for an £8 special payment.

Basingstoke and North Hampshire Health Authority

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what has been the approved financial programme of the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority for each year since 1974-75, expressed *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* in real terms (based on 1987-88) and *(c)* as a real term percentage increase or decrease on each preceding year and on the 1974-75 approved financial programme;

(2) what has been the cost of the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority's development schemes for each year since 1974-75, expressed *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* in real terms (based on 1987-88) and *(c)* as a real term percentage increase or decrease on each preceding year and as a real term percentage increase or decrease on the 1974-75 development scheme;

(3) what directly allocated growth and capital funding the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority has received each year since 1974-75, expressed *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* in real terms (based on 1987-88) and *(c)* as a real term percentage increase or decrease on each preceding year and on the 1974-75 allocations;

(4) by how much in each year since 1974-75 funds budgeted by the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority for annual National Health Service pay settlements have exceeded, or been exceeded by, the cost of such settlements expressed *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* in real terms (based on 1987-88) and *(c)* as a percentage excess-deficit.

Mrs. Currie: Allocations to the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority and the other information my hon. Friend requests are matters for the Wessex regional health authority. He may like to contact the regional chairman for the information he requires.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what funds the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority has raised in each year since 1974-75 through cost improvement programmes-savings against previous years or self-generated additional income, expressed *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* in real terms (based on 1987-88) and *(c)* as a real term percentage increase or decrease on each preceding year and on the 1974-75 cost improvement programme.

Mrs. Currie: In 1986-87, the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority reported cash savings of £419,000 from its cost improvement programme. Information is not available centrally for earlier years, but the hon. Member may wish to approach Wessex regional health authority for this information.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the percentage cost in each year since 1974-75 to the approved financial programme of the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority of wages and salaries of National Health Service employees, expressed *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* in real terms (based on 1987-88) and *(c)* as a percentage increase or decrease for each year.

Mrs. Currie: Following is information derived from the annual accounts of the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority since its establishment on 1 April 1982.

	Per annual accounts	*At 1987-88 prices*	*As a percentage of total revenue expenditure*		*Annual increase/(decrease) in real terms at 1987-88 prices*	
	£'000s	£'000s	*Annual figure*	*Increase/ (decrease) in annual figure*	£'000s	*Per cent.*
1982-83	23,581	29,384	74·95	—	—	—
1983-84	23,038	29,807	74·55	(0·40)	423	1·44
1984-85	26,375	30,058	74·43	(0·12)	251	0·84
1985-86	27,477	29,550	73·69	(0·74)	(508)	(1·69)
1986-87	29,666	30,927	74·27	0·58	1,377	4·66

1. The figures have been expressed at 1987-88 prices by the use of the Gross Domestic Product deflator.
2. Prior to 1 April 1982 the authority's predecessor health district formed part of the Hampshire area health authority and district based figures were not collected centrally.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what have been the costs incurred in each year since 1974-75 by the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority for (i) cleaning, (ii) catering and (iii) laundry services, expressed *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* in real terms (based on 1987-88) and *(c)* as a percentage increase on the cost of the previous year and on the 1974-75 costs.

Mrs. Currie: Following is the information requested derived from the annual accounts of the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority since its establishment on 1 April 1982:

	Domestic/cleaning services				Catering services				Laundry services			
	Expenditure per annual accounts £000	Expenditure at 1987-88 prices £000	Per cent. increase/ (decrease) at 1987-88 prices over previous year	Per cent. increase/ (decrease) at 1987-88 prices over 1982-83	Expenditure per annual accounts £000	Expenditure at 1987-88 prices £000	Per cent. increase/ (decrease) at 1987-88 prices over previous year	Per cent. increase/ (decrease) at 1987-88 prices over 1982-83	Expenditure per annual accounts £000	Expenditure at 1987-88 prices £000	Per cent. increase/ (decrease) at 1987-88 prices over previous year	Per cent. increase/ (decrease) at 1987-88 prices over 1982-83
1982-83	2,129	2,642	—	—	1,588	1,979	—	—	211	263	—	—
1983-84	2,171	2,585	(2·16)	(2·16)	1,663	1,980	0·05	0·05	223	265	0·76	0·76
1984-85	2,147	2,447	(5·34)	(7·38)	1,739	1,982	0·10	0·15	227	259	(2·26)	(1·52)
1985-86	2,046	2,200	(10·01)	(16·73)	1,829	1,967	(0·76)	(0·61)	210	226	(12·74)	(14·07)
1986-87	1,931	2,013	(8·50)	(23·81)	1,810	1,949	(0·92)	(1·52)	196	205	(9·25)	(22·05)

Notes:

1. The figures have been expressed at 1987-88 prices by the use of the Gross Domestic Product deflator.
2. Prior to 1 April 1982 the authority's predecessor health district formed part of the Hampshire Area Health Authority and district based figures were not collected centrally.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many in-patient cases have been treated by the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority in each year since 1974-75 and what has been the percentage increase or decrease on the preceding year and on the 1974-75 number of in-patient cases;

(2) how many day-patient cases have been treated by the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority in each year since 1974-75; and what has been the percentage increase or decrease on the preceding year and on the 1974-75 number of day-patient cases;

(3) how many out-patient cases have been treated by the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority in each year since 1974-75; and what has been the percentage increase or decrease on the preceding year and on the 1974-75 out-patient cases;

(4) how many patients have been treated for chronic renal failure in the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority district since 1974-75, or the year in which such treatment became significantly available, expressed also as a percentage increase or decrease on the previous year and on the first year of significant statistics;

(5) how many hip replacement operations have been performed in the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority district since 1974-75, or the year in which such treatment became significantly available, expressed also as a percentage increase or decrease on the previous year and on the first year of significant statistics;

(6) how many coronary artery by-pass grafts have been performed in the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority district since 1974-75, or the year in which such treatment became significantly available, expressed also as a percentage increase or decrease on the previous year and on the first year of significant statistics;

(7) how many surgical beds have been available in the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority each year since 1974-75, expressed also as a percentage increase or decrease on the previous year and on the 1974-75 number of surgical beds;

(8) how many patients have been treated in surgical beds in the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority in each year since 1974-75, expressed also as a percentage increase or decrease on the previous year and on the 1974-75 number of patients;

(9) how many general medical beds have been available in the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority in each year since 1974-75, expressed also as a percentage increase or decrease on the previous year and on the 1974-75 number of general medical beds;

(10) how many patients have been treated in general medical beds in the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority in each year since 1974-75, expressed also as a percentage increase or decrease on the previous year and on the 1974-75, number of patients;

(11) how many geriatric patients attended day units in the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority district in each year since 1974-75 expressed also as a percentage increase or decrease on each preceding year and on the 1974-75 number of geriatric patients.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that I cannot give my hon. Friend all the information he seeks. The available information is given in the tables. My hon. Friend may like to approach the chairman of the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority for the further information he requires.

NHS hospitals, Basingstoke and North Hampshire District Health Authority
All specialties

Year	In-patients Number	In-patients Per cent. change over previous year	In-patients Per cent. change over 1974	Day cases Number	Day cases Per cent. change over previous year	Day cases Per cent. change over 1974	Out-patients Number	Out-patients Per cent. change over previous year	Out-patients Per cent. change over 1974
1974	16,713	0	0	3,341	0	0	78,724	0	0
1975	15,540	−7·0	−7·0	3,548	6·2	6·2	60,647	−23·0	−23·0
1976	17,140	10·3	2·6	5,000	40·9	49·7	71,796	18·4	−8·8
1977	17,871	4·2	6·9	3,551	−29·0	6·3	76,533	6·6	−2·8

Year	Number	In-patients Per cent. change over previous year	Per cent. change over 1974	Number	Day cases Per cent. change over previous year	Per cent. change over 1974	Number	Out-patients Per cent. change over previous year	Per cent. change over 1974
1978	19,395	8·5	16·0	2,996	−15·6	−10·3	84,445	10·3	7·3
1979	17,864	−7·9	6·9	3,065	2·3	−8·3	89,592	6·1	13·8
1980	19,704	10·3	17·9	4,188	36·6	25·4	92,490	3·2	17·5
1981	19,563	−0·7	17·1	4,188	0·0	25·4	98·338	6·3	24·9
1982	20,148	3·0	20·6	4·053	−3·2	21·3	99,882	1·6	26·9
1983	20,701	2·7	23·9	3,533	−12·8	5·7	105,677	5·8	34·2
1984	22,171	7·1	32·7	3,291	−6·8	−1·5	104,603	−1·0	32·9
1985	22,128	−0·2	32·4	4,117	25·1	23·2	103,510	−1·0	31·5
1986	23·201	4·8	38·8	4,431	7·6	32·6	107,532	3·9	36·6

Surgical specialties

Year	Daily average of available beds Number	Per cent. change over previous year	Per cent. change over 1974	In-patients Number	Per cent. change over previous year	Per cent. change over 1974
1974	304·5	0	0	7,114	0	0
1975	300·2	−1·4	−1·4	6,206	−12·8	−12·8
1976	278·2	−7·3	−8·6	7,336	18·2	3·1
1977	287·7	3·4	−5·5	7,563	3·1	6·3
1978	299·3	4·0	−1·7	8,104	7·2	13·9
1979	299·7	0·1	−1·6	7,809	−3·6	9·8
1980	308·5	2·9	1·3	8,503	8·9	19·5
1981	314·4	1·9	3·3	8,866	4·3	24·6
1982	313·2	−0·4	2·9	8,970	1·2	26·1
1983	296·9	−5·2	−2·5	9,374	4·5	31·8
1984	315·6	6·3	3·6	9,805	4·6	37·8
1985	308·5	−2·2	1·3	9,170	−6·5	28·9
1986	288·7	−6·4	5·2	9,090	−0·9	27·8

Medical specialties

Year	Daily average of available beds Number	Percentage change over previous year	Percentage change over 1974	In-patients Number	Percentage change over previous year	Percentage change over 1974
1974	82·0	0	0	2,772	0	0
1975	85·0	3·7	3·7	2,669	−3·7	−3·7
1976	91·9	8·1	12·1	2,845	6·6	2·6
1977	89·9	−2·2	9·6	3,111	9·3	12·2
1978	104·3	16·0	27·2	3,500	12·5	26·3
1979	98·4	−5·7	20·0	3,089	−11·7	11·4
1980	101·9	3·6	24·3	3,356	8·6	21·1
1981	103·1	1·2	25·7	3,375	0·6	21·8
1982	106·2	3·0	29·5	3,763	11·5	35·8
1983	110·5	4·0	34·8	3,631	−3·5	31·0
1984	113·4	2·6	38·3	4,083	12·4	47·3
1985	115·8	2·1	41·2	4,051	−0·8	46·1
1986	115·0	−0·7	40·2	4,163	2·8	50·2

Geriatric regular day cases: Total attendances

Year	Number	Percentage change over previous year	Percentage change over 1982
1974	n.a.	—	—
1975	n.a.	—	—
1976	n.a.	—	—
1977	n.a.	—	—
1978	n.a.	—	—
1979	n.a.	—	—
1980	n.a.	—	—
1981	n.a.	—	—
1982	1,131	—	—
1983	2,608	130·6	130·6
1984	2,913	11·7	157·6
1985	2,893	−0·7	155·8
1986	2,455	−15·1	117·1

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many visits by health visitors have been made in the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority district in each year since 1974-75; and what has been the percentage increase or decrease on the preceding year and on the 1974-75 number of visits;

(2) how many people have been visited by health visitors in the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority district in each year sinc 1974-75; and what has been the percentage increase or decrease on the preceding year and on the 1974-75 number of people visited.

Mrs. Currie: Basingstoke and North Hampshire District Health Authority was formed in 1982. Comparable figures are not available before that date when these data were collected by area health authority only. The available information is given in the table.

Persons visited by health visitors (first visit)
Basingstoke and North Hampshire District Health Authority

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Number of persons visited by Health Visitors	13,883	13,696	13,986	14,102	14,239
Per cent. change year by year	—	−1·3	2·1	0·8	1·0
Per cent. change from 1982	—	−1·3	0·7	1·6	2·6

Notes:
1. A visit includes each occasion when professional help or advice is given by health visiting staff.
2. The "first visit" refers to the first visit received by a person from any member of the health visiting staff during the calendar year for any problem.
3. Visits to households where there is tuberculosis or other infectious diseases are not included in this table.

Total visits made by health visitors
Basingstoke and North Hampshire District Health Authority

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Total visits	46,484	44,569	46,958	49,135	49,430
Per cent. change year by year	—	−4·1	5·4	4·6	0·6
Per cent. change from 1982	—	−4·1	1·0	5·7	6·3

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the cost of capital projects undertaken by the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority in each year since 1974-75, expressed *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* in real terms based on 1987-88 figures and *(c)* as a real term percentage increase or decrease on each preceding year and on the 1974-75, capital project cost.

Mrs. Currie: Following is the information derived from the annual accounts of the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority since its establishment on 1 April 1982:

Total capital expenditure

	Per annual accounts £000	*At 1987-88 prices £000*	*Percentage increase/(decrease) at 1987-88 prices*	
			On preceding year	*On 1982-83*
1982-83	2,427	3,024	—	—
1983-84	2,356	2,805	(7·24)	(7·24)
1984-85	3,081	3,511	27·17	16·10
1985-86	3,314	3,564	1·51	17·86
1986-87	3,682	3,838	7·69	26·92

Notes:
1. The figures have been expressed at 1987-88 prices by the use of the Gross Domestic Product deflator.
2. The figures include sums in respect of capital schemes within the district recorded in the annual accounts of the Wessex Regional Health Authority. Expenditure incurred by the latter authority for the region as a whole is excluded.
3. Prior to 1 April 1982 the authority's predecessor health district formed part of the Hampshire Area Health Authority and district based figures were not collected centrally.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many places there have been in adult training centres for the mentally handicapped in the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority in each year since 1974-75, or the first year of the significant availability of such places, expressed also as a percentage increase or decrease on the previous year and on the 1974-75 figure, or the first significant year;

(2) how many adults attended training centres for the mentally handicapped in the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority in each year since 1974-75, or the first year of the significant availability of places at such centres, expressed also as a percentage increase or decrease on the previous year and on the 1974-75 figure, or for the first significant year.

Mrs. Currie: Information on the number of places for mentally handicapped people in adult training centres is given in the table. It is based on the number of places reported by Hampshire social services department. The

information my hon. Friend seeks on the number of people attending adult training centres is not available centrally. He may wish to approach the Hampshire social services department for the further information he requires.

Number of places for mentally handicapped people in adult training centres in the area covered by Basingstoke and North Hampshire DHA, and percentage changes, 1982-87.

	Number of places (at 31 March)	Percentage Change On 1982	Percentage Change On previous year
1982	232	—	—
1983	232	0·0	0·0
1984	246	6·0	6·0
1985	246	6·0	0·0
1986	252	8·6	2·4
1987	252	8·6	0·0

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what funds have been devoted by the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority to the care and treatment of the mentally ill in each year since 1974-75, expressed *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* in real terms based on 1974-75 and *(c)* as a real term percentage increase or decrease on each preceding year and on the 1974-75 allocation.

Mrs. Currie: Information on health authority expenditure by type of patient is not collected centrally: hospital costing returns submitted to the Department show expenditure on hospitals of different types and costing returns in respect of community health services show expenditure relating to the major areas of activity only.

Following is information derived from the hospital costing returns submitted by the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority since its establishment on 1 April 1982:

Revenue expenditure on hospitals categorised "mental illness"

	Per costing returns	At 1987-88 prices	Percentage increase/(decrease) at 1987-88 prices	
	£000	£000	On preceding year	On 1982-83
1982-83	8,285	10,324	—	—
1983-84	8,645	10,291	(0·32)	(0·32)
1984-85	8,800	10,029	(2·55)	(2·86)
1985-86	9,104	9,791	(2·37)	(5·16)
1986-87	9,429	9,830	0·40	(4·78)

Notes:

1. The figures have been expressed at 1987-88 prices by the use of the Gross Domestic Product deflator.
2. The figures exclude expenditure on hospitals categorised "mental handicap" and expenditure incurred for the mentally ill within community health services. The latter costs are not separately identifiable centrally.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many mentally ill patients have been treated by the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority in each year since 1974-75, expressed also as a percentage increase or decrease on each previous year and on the 1974-75 number of patients.

Mrs. Currie: The number of admissions of in-patients into mental illness hospitals and units, managed by the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority, for each year since 1974, are shown in the table.

The figures do not relate to individuals, and will include patients who have been discharged and readmitted during each year.

Year of admission	Number of admissions of mentally ill patients	Percentage change in admissions on previous year	Percentage change in admissions on 1974
1974	1,001	[1]	[1]
1975	982	−1·9	−1·9
1976	1,103	+12·3	+10·2
1977	1,060	−3·9	+5·9
1978	1,138	+7·4	+13·7
1979	1,129	−0·8	+12·8
1980	1,278	+13·2	+27·7
1981	1,252	−2·0	+25·1
1982	1,034	−17·4	+3·3
1983	1,133	+9·6	+13·2
1984	1,102	−2·7	+10·1
1985	1,305	+18·4	+30·4
1986	1,518	+16·3	+51·6

[1] Not available.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people in the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority district have received help to pay for residential and nursing care in each year since 1974-75, expressed also as a percentage increase or decrease on each previous year and on the 1974-75 number of patients.

Mrs. Currie: People in independent residential care or nursing homes can claim supplementary benefit to help with their fees. Information on the numbers claiming supplementary benefit in homes in the area of the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority could be obtained for this period only at disproportionate cost.

Health authorities may enter into contractual arrangements with private health care providers, but must meet the costs incurred. Health authorities have no power to pay part of the costs of a patient's care in private establishments.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people, divided into convenient categories of employment, particularly specifying nursing staff, have been employed by the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority in each year since 1974-75.

Mrs. Currie: Because of the 1982 NHS reorganisation, figures on a consistent basis are not held centrally for years prior to 1982.

The available information from 1982 is shown in the table.

NHS Staff by Main Staff Groups: in Post Basingstoke and North Hampshire District Health Authority 30 September

Whole-time Equivalents[1]

	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Medical and Dental[2]	100	90	100	90	90
Nursing and Midwifery[3]	1,710	1,730	1,710	1,660	1,680

	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Professional and Technical (Excluding Works)	200	220	220	230	250
Works	20	20	20	20	20
Maintenance	90	90	80	80	70
Administrative and Clerical	360	390	370	380	380
Ancillary	740	730	710	660	600
Total NHS Staff	3,230	3,270	3,220	3,110	3,080

Source: DHSS Annual Censuses of NHS Medical and Non-medical Manpower.

[1] Figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents.

[2] Includes permanent paid, honorary and locum staff. Excludes all Consultants and Senior Registrars whose contracts are held by the regional health authority.

[3] Includes agency staff.

Drugs

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what measures he proposes to take to control the rising cost of the drugs bill to National Health Service hospitals.

Mr. Newton: The Department is taking a wide range of measures to control the drugs bill in National Health Service hospitals. In the last year each region has reviewed pharmaceutical buying and has drawn up an action plan to ensure maximum value for money, particularly in high-spend, high-volume medicines.

The Department has also encouraged the formulation of local multi-disciplinary drug and therapeutic committees to promote the rational and economic use of drug therapy. These are now commonplace within health authorities, and an effective means they are adopting to achieve their objective is the use of hospital drug formularies. Following the Nuffield report, the Department is also reviewing clinical pharmacy which could further assist in improving the cost-effectiveness of expenditure on drugs in hospitals.

Agency Staff

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what measures he proposes to take to control charges imposed on the National Health Service by agencies which provide locum staff replacements for hospitals;

(2) what approaches he has made to the Wessex region with regard to the control of charges imposed on the National Health Service by agencies providing locum staff replacements for hospitals within the Wessex region;

(3) what approaches or responses he has received from the Wessex region with regard to the control of charges imposed on the National Health Service by agencies providing locum staff replacements for hospitals within the Wessex region.

Mr. Newton: The Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority has expressed concern, in correspondence with officials, about the costs of locum medical staff engaged through agencies. A number of regional health authorities are currently collaboratng with the aim of containing such costs. We intend to consider the need and scope for central action in the light of their progress.

Basingstoke District Hospital (Appointments)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people in each year since 1974-75 have been taken to and from Basingstoke district hospital for day appointments by the ambulance service.

Mrs. Currie: I am sorry that the information my hon. Friend seeks is not available centrally. He may like to contact the chairman of the Winchester health authority, which is responsible for the Hampshire ambulance service, for the information he requires.

Thamesmead Town Limited

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many applications for housing benefit by tenants of Thamesmead Town Ltd. include service charges; and what advice has been provided by his Department to Thamesmead Town Ltd., Greenwich council and Bexley council about the eligibility of service charges for housing benefit.

Mr. Portillo: Information on the number of applications for housing benefit by tenants of Thamesmead Town Ltd. which include service charges is not held centrally. Advice on both the existing regulations and the regulations which take effect in April has been issued to all authorities with responsibility for the administration of housing benefit, including the London boroughs of Greenwich and Bexley. The most recent guidance makes it clear that our policy remains that charges for services which the tenant has no option but to pay and which are connected with the provision of adequate accommodation should be eligible for housing benefit.

Minister for the Disabled

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the responsibilities of the Minister for Social Security and the Disabled.

Mr. Scott: The Minister for Social Security and the Disabled has particular responsibility for co-ordinating policy on disablement and for benefits, aids and services for disabled people. These functions are discharged in conjunction with other departmental Ministers as necessary.

AIDS

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has about the decision of the United States national institutes of health to instruct all biological laboratories to review their safety guidelines following the reported infection of two laboratory workers with the AIDS virus after working with concentrated samples; and whether he will carry out such a review of procedures in medical and biological laboratories in England.

Mr. Newton: We are aware of the recent decision of the United States national institutes of health to instruct all biological laboratories to review safety guidelines. Such a review was carried out in the United Kingdom by the advisory committee on dangerous pathogens which, in 1986, issued revised guidelines on the safe handling of laboratory specimens containing the AIDS virus — including working with concentrated samples. These guidelines apply to all medical and biological laboratories in the United Kingdom and have been endorsed by the health departments, the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive.

Abortions

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make it his policy to *(a)* gather and *(b)* publish the names of individual doctors concerned in abortions after 18 weeks' gestation carried out in the private sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Information about doctors carrying out abortions in all private sector places approved under the Abortion Act is provided to the Department on a confidential basis.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the figure for the number of abortion notifications mentioning rape in cases where abortions were performed at or after 18 weeks' gestation in the latest period for which figures were collected.

Mr. Newton: Statistics on the number of abortion notification forms which mention rape may be provided reliably only for the period from 1 January 1987. The provisional number of abortion notification forms with any mention of rape for gestation at 18 completed weeks and over for the period 1 January to 31 October 1987 inclusive is one.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number of fully equipped emergency ambulances in the London ambulance service on 31 December 1987; what are the changes planned in that number for future years; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: There were 363 emergency ambulances on 31 December 1987. Of these, the 263 "front-line" ambulances were all equipped with "motivus resuscitation packs"; the rest were day ambulances which are otherwise fully equipped but do not carry resuscitation packs.

Following a detailed examination of day ambulances, the London ambulance service found that the work allocated to them could be more effectively dealt with by transferring the patient workload to non-emergency vehicles and front-line ambulances. On average, 450 walking and chair case patients per day will be transferred to non-emergency vehicles and 97 stretcher case patients per day will be transferred to front-line ambulances. Front-line and non-emergency staff complements are to be amended to take up the transferred work.

As a result of removing the patient demand from 100 day ambulances, the total emergency fleet size of ambulances will be reduced as follows:

During Year	*Fleet Size*
Ended 31 December 1987	363
1987-88	351
1988-89	314
1989-90	273

This planned reduction of 90 ambulances will be closely monitored by the London ambulance service and pursued only if there proves to be sufficient flexibility in the fleet to deal with peaks in demand and large-scale incidents.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number of crews of emergency ambulances rostered, or planned for, by the London ambulance service during each 24-hour cycle of normal weekdays in 1987; whether any changes are planned in that number for the future; and what are the reasons for any change of policy.

Mrs. Currie: The number of crews of emergency ambulances rostered by the London ambulance service during each 24 hours of normal weekdays in 1987 and planned for the future are:

Shift period	*Number of rostered crews in 1987*	*Number of rostered crews planned*
Early shifts	170	188
Late shifts	154	151
Night shifts	94	90

The London ambulance service's aim is to achieve a better balance of resources throughout London in line with patterns of demand and a more effective relief system for covering absences. This will bring about a further improvement in the response time of ambulances to emergency incidents. Relief staff will be increased from 164 to 270, thereby increasing the actual number of manned front-line ambulances.

The effect on the staffing levels of the service, including additional ambulance persons to convey non-emergency patients transferred from day ambulances is as follows:

	Proposed	*Change*
Staff rostered on front-line ambulances (including extra staff for day ambulance stretcher cases)	1,161	+17
Relief staff	270	+106
Emergency service staffing		+123
Day ambulance staff	0	−200
Non-emergency ambulance personnel	853	+93
Whole service	2,284	+16

Sight Test

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many sight tests were carried out under the National Health Service during the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available; and if he will make an estimate of the number of such tests for which payment will be demanded, allowing for the proposed exemptions, if the charges proposed in the Health and Medicines Bill are enacted.

Mr. Newton: Some 10·75 million sight tests were conducted in England under the NHS in the 12-month period to 30 June 1987. We estimate that around 70 per cent. of sight tests would in future be paid for privately.

Claimants (Wales)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the total number of claimants *(a)* claiming for board and lodging from his Department and *(b)* with dependent children in the latest year for which figures are available (i) in Wales and (ii) in each of the Department of Employment travel-to-work areas in Wales.

Mr. Portillo: In May 1987 an estimated 8,000 people were claiming for board and lodging accommodation charges in Wales. Less than 500 had dependent children. I regret that the information requested on the numbers in each of the Department of Employment travel-to-work areas in Wales is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. These estimates have been obtained from the Department's May 1987 quarterly statistical inquiry. The sample size for this exercise is too small to obtain a precise figure of the number of claimants with dependent children.

Supplementary Benefit (North-East)

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people were receiving supplementary benefit for 1983-84, 1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87 and the latest figures for 1987-88, for *(a)* Cleveland, *(b)* Durham, *(c)* Northumbria and *(d)* Tyne and Wear.

Mr. Portillo: Information is not available in the precise form requested. The Department's local offices serving each district are listed although the boundaries are not conterminous.

The number of people in receipt of supplementary benefit is as follows:

	2 August 1983	*31 July 1984*	*31 July 1985*	*13 August 1986*	*29 July 1987*
Cleveland (Eston, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar, Stockton)	67,458	75,340	79,214	78,781	74,048
Northumberland (Ashington, Berwick, Blyth, Hexham)	19,543	20,218	21,298	21,229	21,235
Durham (Bishop Auckland, Chester-le-Street, Darlington, Durham, Peterlee, Seaham, Stanley)	59,262	62,557	65,603	65,263	63,247
Tyne and Wear (Gateshead, Houghton-le-Spring, Jarrow, Newcastle St. James, Newcastle East, Newcastle West, North Shields, South Shields, Sunderland North, Sunderland South, Wallsend)	144,005	153,122	160,354	158,940	157,404

Source: 100 per cent. count of cases in action at the dates specified.

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people were receiving supplementary benefit for 1983-84, 1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87 and the latest figures for 1987-88, for his Department's local offices at *(a)* Darlington, *(b)* Bishop Auckland and *(c)* Peterlee.

Mr. Portillo: The number of people in receipt of supplementary benefit for the years requested is as follows:

	2 August 1983	*31 July 1984*	*31 July 1985*	*13 August 1986*	*29 July 1987*
Darlington	12,779	13,406	14,467	15,005	14,481
Bishop Auckland	13,587	14,510	14,937	15,212	14,290
Peterlee	6,411	7,046	7,392	7,316	7,304

Source: 100 per cent. count of cases in action at the dates specified

Social Security Reform

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the basis and the sources from which he compiled the estimated number of claimants in Great Britain who will be eligible for transitional payments under the income support scheme.

Mr. Scott: The source used for estimating the number of transitional additions under income support is the 1986 annual statistical inquiry, the latest information available, uprated to take account of subsequent increases in benefit rates. The rules governing the award and calculation of transitional additions have been applied to this information to provide the estimates.

RPI Error

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps are being taken to rectify the anomaly as between persons with multiple benefits payable from one payment book receiving one payment and those with separate books for different benefits receiving one payment for each benefit, under the scheme intended to correct the effect of the error in the retail price index.

Mr. Scott: We do not propose to alter the arrangements for the special payments exercise, which is designed to combine as far as possible fairness with speed of payment. Having benefits combined on one order book does not

automatically mean that the claimant has suffered more than once from the error in the RPI. The ex-gratia special payments fully compensate the great majority of people who have combined books: less than 10 per cent. of them will be under-compensated for the RPI error because of the method of payment.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many representations he has received regarding the offer of only one special payment to cover more than one social security benefit, following the error in the retail price index.

Mr. Scott: About 40.

Social Security (Young Claimants)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate how many 16 and 17-year-olds who are not still in education deliberately choose to remain on social security rather than take a job or accept a training place.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to the information contained in my hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) on 7 December 1987, at column *57*, and also to the reply which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Employment gave to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist), on 17 November 1987, at column *509*.

NHS Pay Deal

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether Her Majesty's Government will fully fund the 1988-89 Health Service workers' pay deal;

(2) whether Her Majesty's Government will pay the 1988-89 Health Service workers' pay rise from 1 April.

Mr. Newton: The additional funds which health authorities have been given for 1988-89 are intended to cover all pay and price rises. The Government will await the recommendations of the review bodies before taking any decisions on implementation and funding.

General Practitioner Consultations

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the estimated cost of each general practitioner consultation in England in 1986-87.

Mr. Newton: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Oldchurch Hospital, Romford

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to the results of the experimental reception system in the accident and emergency department Oldchurch hospital, Romford; and if he will make a statement on its possible adoption throughout the National Health Service.

Mrs. Currie: I understand that the nurse practitioner scheme, introduced in the accident and emergency department at Oldchurch hospital in 1986, has enabled patient care to be improved by reducing waiting times and inappropriate attendances.

We welcome the scheme and the recognition given to it by the award of the RIPA-Hay first prize for managerial innovation in the public sector in 1987 to Barking, Havering and Brentwood health authority. I understand that the health authority will shortly be publishing information about the scheme to other health authorities.

Nurses (Shifts)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received concerning the present pattern of nurses shifts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I am not aware of any representations, although I am aware of some local difficulties over proposed changes in the pattern of nurses shifts.

Detailed rostering arrangements are for local decision. Following reports by our auditors in 1983 of apparently wasteful use of nursing time due to log shift overlaps in some places, health authorities were asked to review this matter generally. Several health authorities have managed to re-order their nursing rosters to achieve more efficient working patterns without detriment to the service. It is important that others do the same and all should keep shift patterns under constant review.

Health authorities are asked to report any changes in the deployment of nursing staff in their short-term programmes and the matter will also feature in the normal review process as necessary.

Single Payments

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table showing the expenditure on single payments by each local office of his Department as a sum per head of the claimants registered with each office.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 14 January 1988]:* The information the hon. Member seeks has now been placed in the Library.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table showing the relevant figures in table 14.1 of Cm. 288-II adjusted by the hospital and community health services pay and price deflator.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 26 January 1988]:* The figures requested are given in the table for the years from 1982-83 to 1986-87. No forecasts of pay and price movements have been made for subsequent years. In addition health authorities had the benefit of recurrent savings of the order of £400 million over this period at 1986-87 prices from cash-releasing cost-improvement programmes.

Hospital community health and related services

£ million

	1982-83 outturn	*1983-84 outturn*	*1984-85 outturn*	*1985-86 outturn*	*1986-87 outturn*
Current expenditure					
Gross	10,355	10,364	10,356	10,368	10,421
Charges	90	96	96	99	101
Net	10,264	10,267	10,260	10,270	10,320
Capital expenditure					
Gross	835	846	915	940	961
Receipts	23	39	57	90	149
Net	812	808	859	850	812

Note: The above figures are at 1986-87 price levels, after adjusting for HCHS current and capital pay and price inflation.

Mentally Handicapped Patients

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the amount of his Department's allocation specifically for the care of mentally handicapped patients.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* In the main the Department does not allocate funds for specific purposes. Within a national framework of health care priorities it is for each health authority to determine how its resources, including allocations, should be used.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 9 February 1988

WALES

Road Costs

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the motorway and trunk road contracts in Wales with a works cost of £1 million or more which his Department intends to award in 1988-89 showing, in each case, the total value of the contract and the expenditure likely to be incurred in that year.

Mr. Wyn Roberts *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* Subject to the satisfactory completion of statutory procedures, the completion of engineering design and the availability of resources, we hope to let contracts for the following major schemes in 1988-89:

A48 Nantycaws-Coed Hirion Bypass
A55 Travellers Inn
A483 Chirk Bypass
A55 Pen-y-Clip Tunnels

It is not possible to give the cost of the contracts or the expenditure to be incurred in 1988-89, since this will depend on the value of the accepted tenders and the contractors' programmes of work.

Homelessness

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many households have been made homeless by the actions of private landlords for the periods *(a)* January to March 1987, *(b)* April to June 1987 and *(c)* July to September 1987, in each district authority area in Wales;

(2) how many households were accepted as homeless in Wales; and how many households were accommodated in temporary accommodation for the periods *(a)* January to March 1987, *(b)* April to June 1987 and *(c)* July to September 1987, in each district authority are *(a)* in Wales;

(3) how many households were placed in bed and breakfast as temporary accommodation in Wales for the periods *(a)* January to March 1987, *(b)* April to June 1987 and *(c)* July to September 1987, in each district authority area in Wales.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* The information requested is given in the following tables:

January to March 1987

Welsh districts	*Cases accepted*	*All cases*		
		Of which homeless due to action by landlord	*Placed in temporary accommodation*	*Placed in bed and breakfast*
Aberconwy	17	6	2	1
Alyn and Deeside	45	10	3	1
Arfon	9	5	6	0
Blaenau Gwent	86	6	9	2
Brecknock	13	5	0	0
Cardiff	184	44	117	76
Carmarthen	19	8	5	2
Ceredigion	19	6	3	0
Colwyn	9	3	4	4
Cynon Valley	63	4	2	0
Delyn	63	2	34	0
Dinefwr	20	3	6	6
Dwyfor	10	3	1	1
Glyndwr	6	1	0	0
Islwyn	17	1	3	1
Llanelli	55	16	4	4
Lliw Valley	18	1	0	0
Meirionnydd	14	6	2	0
Merthyr Tydfil	17	0	12	0
Monmouth	73	16	15	1
Montgomeryshire	6	1	0	0
Neath	70	19	25	12
Newport	74	18	35	0
Ogwr	75	7	15	3
Port Talbot/Afan	42	19	18	1
Preseli	17	7	10	8
Radnor	4	0	0	0
Rhondda	41	0	1	1
Rhuddlan	20	3	3	1
Rhymney Valley	39	2	0	0
South Pembrokeshire	22	6	6	0
Swansea	63	11	25	0
Taff-Ely	26	2	1	0
Torfaen	77	6	11	0
Vale of Glamorgan	32	8	8	0
Wrexham Maelor	83	14	4	0
Ynys Môn	8	2	1	1
Wales Total (LA)	1,456	271	391	126

April-June 1987

Welsh districts	Cases accepted	Of which homeless due to action by landlord	All cases: Placed in temporary accommodation	All cases: Placed in bed and breakfast
Aberconwy	7	0	1	1
Alyn and Deeside	43	6	1	0
Arfon	6	1	6	0
Blaenau Gwent	76	6	5	3
Brecknock	24	9	2	0
Cardiff	134	32	97	88
Carmarthen	27	5	7	4
Ceredigion	13	6	1	1
Colwyn	6	2	1	1
Cynon Valley	34	0	2	0
Delyn	68	15	26	1
Dinefwr	15	4	2	2
Dwyfor	15	8	3	3
Glyndwr	4	0	3	0
Islwyn	10	3	1	0
Llanelli	43	5	9	9
Llŷn Valley	17	4	1	0
Meirionnydd	12	4	1	0
Merthyr Tydfil	15	1	10	1
Monmouth	30	11	11	1
Montgomeryshire	10	0	1	0
Neath	77	15	12	6
Newport	47	16	33	0
Ogwr	147	23	15	3
Port Talbot/Afan	14	2	0	0
Preseli	15	2	6	6
Radnor	3	0	0	0
Rhondda	22	0	1	1
Rhuddlan	27	1	0	0
Rhymney Valley	34	4	2	2
South Pembrokeshire	17	4	7	0
Swansea	73	11	20	0
Taff-Ely	30	6	1	0
Torfaen	58	7	9	0
Vale of Glamorgan	25	5	14	0
Wrexham Maelor	79	8	4	0
Ynys Mon	5	2	0	0
Wales Total (LA)	1,304	228	313	113

July to September 1987

Welsh districts	Cases accepted	Of which homeless due to action by landlord	All cases: Placed temporary accommodation	All cases: Placed in bed and breakfast
Aberconwy	14	1	2	1
Alyn and Deeside	19	5	0	0
Arfon	7	0	3	0
Blaenau Gwent	50	6	10	4
Brecknock	19	11	1	0
Cardiff	142	31	120	96
Carmarthen	27	5	4	1
Ceredigion	15	7	2	1
Colwyn	12	3	4	1
Cynon Valley	53	1	4	0
Delyn	73	7	28	0
Dinefwr	8	0	3	3
Dwyfor	20	7	0	0
Glyndwr	4	1	0	0
Islwyn	14	2	3	1
Llanelli	32	6	5	5
Llŷn Valley	30	2	0	0
Meirionnydd	13	5	1	0
Merthyr Tydfil	17	2	7	0
Monmouth	36	14	9	0
Montgomeryshire	13	3	1	1
Neath	61	12	15	11
Newport	62	14	36	6

All cases

Welsh districts	Cases accepted	Of which homeless due to action by landlord	Placed in temporary accommodation	Placed in bed and breakfast
Ogwr	76	12	16	3
Port Talbot/Afan	35	6	7	2
Preseli	18	1	9	4
Radnor	2	0	0	0
Rhondda	23	2	9	0
Rhuddlan	18	3	4	0
Rhymney Valley	41	3	9	0
South Pembrokeshire	20	2	3	0
Swansea	67	10	24	0
Taff-Ely	23	2	1	0
Torfaen	111	12	18	0
Vale of Glamorgan	20	7	8	0
Wrexham Maelor	77	10	4	0
Ynys Môn	1	0	0	0
Wales Total (LA)	1,295	217	352	140

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of patients currently awaiting operations in each Welsh health district have been waiting for *(a)* under one month, *(b)* under two months, *(c)* under three months, *(d)* under six months, *(e)* under nine months, *(f)* under 12 months and *(g)* between 12 months and two years; and if he will make a statement as to the distribution of different operations outstanding according to length of time.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* The information requested is not available centrally for current patients. The table relates to patients discharged from hospital in 1986, the latest year for which complete information is available.

Percentage of cases admitted from waiting list who spent less than the specified time on the waiting list.

District health authority	1 month	2 months	3 months	6 months	12 months	2 years
Clwyd	33·6	58·3	69·9	86·1	93·6	99·1
East Dyfed	47·2	67·6	76·6	88·0	96·8	99·9
Gwent	34·8	52·8	63·4	80·3	92·2	98·0
Gwynedd	48·9	70·8	80·3	94·4	98·2	99·9
Mid Glamorgan	35·1	56·7	65·4	81·1	92·7	97·9
Powys	46·4	90·4	93·9	98·7	99·4	99·8
South Glamorgan	40·6	63·6	74·7	87·5	95·1	98·0
West Glamorgan	34·3	54·2	66·8	86·0	95·6	99·1
Pembrokeshire	39·6	56·0	64·9	75·8	90·4	96·8
Wales	38·8	59·6	70·4	83·2	94·6	98·7

Accident and Emergency Treatment

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated average cost of each treatment by a hospital accident and emergency unit in Wales.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* The available information is published in "Welsh Costing Returns: Year ending 31 March 1987", copies of which will be placed in the Library of the House.

General Practitioners

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated cost of each general practitioner consultation in Wales in 1986-87.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* This information is not available.

Hospitals (Accommodation and Food Costs)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated daily cost of *(a)* accommodation and *(b)* food in each district health authority in Wales.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* The information requested is set out in the table:

District Health Authority	Accommodation (£ per day)	Food (£ per day)
Clwyd	47,110	4,217
East Dyfed	29,378	2,619
Gwent	65,194	5,529
Gwynedd	30,583	2,414
Mid Glamorgan	76,885	6,409
Pembrokshire	7,401	565
Powys	14,448	1,342
South Glamorgan	75,964	5,971
West Glamorgan	49,614	4,182
WHCSA	2,198	—
Wales	398,785	33,248

1. Accommodation costs include: Catering, Domestic/Cleaning, Portering, Laundry, Linen Services, Transport, Estate Management, Rent and Miscellaneous expenses.

2. These figures relate to all accommodation and food costs and are therefore not related exclusively to patient services' costs.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Training and Scholarships

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how much money given by Her Majesty's Government was applied for training and scholarships for *(a)* Greek Cypriots and *(b)* Turkish Cypriots in the last three financial years;

(2) how many *(a)* Greek Cypriots and *(b)* Turkish Cypriots received training or scholarships funded wholly or partly by Her Majesty's Government in each of the last three financial years.

Mr. Chris Patten: Information for the period in question could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Cyprus

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, in view of the finding of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs that by most criteria the southern sector of Cyprus is no longer eligible for economic aid, how much money will be applied in future in aid to or for the benefit of Greek Cypriots.

Mr. Chris Patten: Bilateral aid is provided on a Government-to-Government basis. Our bilateral aid to Cyprus in 1986-87 was £222,000. We expect to spend about the same in 1987-88.

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he will take to increase aid to the Turkish Cypriots, in the light of their lower per capita income than Greek Cypriots.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer the hon. Member to paragraphs 7-9 of the Government's observations on the third report of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Session 1986-87, on Cyprus (Cm. 232).

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Unification Church

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Attorney-General if he will specify the sources and nature of the evidence obtained while preparing for the now abandoned appeal against the decision not to remove charity status from the Unification Church.

The Attorney-General: The Treasury Solicitor, on my behalf, obtained and considered evidence from some 70 persons, and from additional groups, who have in the past been associated with the Unification Church or who have had experience of its activities. They fell within the following categories:

Those who gave evidence in the libel action against Associated Newspapers Group Ltd.

Those identified by Members of Parliament and others as potential witnesses;

Those identified from television programmes and from other media sources as potential witnesses;

Those who came forward as potential witnesses.

Inquiries were also made of persons and groups who were believed to have special knowledge of the Unification Church. Evidence was additionally obtained from a professor of the history and philosophy of religion and from a reader in sociology.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Attorney-General pursuant to his statement of 3 February *Official Report*, column 978, if he will specify in what ways the evidence gathered for the now abandoned appeal against the decision not to remove charity status from the Unification Church was found to be insufficiently reliable.

The Attorney-General: In most cases the evidence obtained on my behalf was directed to specific matters or events from which the court would have been asked, in support of my appeal, to draw inferences as to the general character of the practices and teachings of the Unification Church. The process of considering and testing the evidence adduced in these proceedings by the defendant trustees, together with further material which since the institution of the proceedings has become available to me, has now satisfied me that I can no longer properly invite the court, on the basis of the evidence originally available, to draw those inferences to which I have referred.

In so concluding, I have had in mind that the court would require strong evidence before inferring that the practices and teachings of the Unification Church are open to such objection as to deny it the strong legal presumption of charitable status which the law accords to all religions without distinction, and to which I refeired in my oral answer of 3 February.

ENVIRONMENT

Crown Suppliers (Employees)

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether clerical grades in the Crown Suppliers will be given the option of transferring back into the Civil Service, were the Crown Suppliers to be sold.

Mr. Chope: Yes, but only if there are vacant posts for which Crown Suppliers clerical employees are suitable at the appropriate time.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provisions will be made in respect of Civil Service pension rights for clerical grades in the event of the sale of the Crown Suppliers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: In the event of a sale, clerical and other grades would have the benefit of pension rights under their new employer comparable to those which they now possess.

London Docklands

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates the London Docklands development corporation has made of construction industry labour requirements for each of the years of the next decade in London docklands.

Mr. Trippier: Detailed information is not available at present, but the LDDC proposes to commission a survey to enable detailed estimates to be made.

Swimming Facilities (Disabled People)

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the provision of swimming facilities for the disabled in England and Wales.

Mr. Moynihan: The British Association for Disabled People regularly inspects the 1,000 or so public sector

pools in England and Wales and maintains a register of their suitability for those with various handicaps. Of this total, organised swimming sessions for disabled people are held in about 2,490 swimming pools.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Beyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the implications of the resignation of the chief executive of the London Docklands development corporation, Major-General Jeremy Rougier; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: None. Major-General Rougier resigned for private family reasons.

Water Supplies

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to take to ensure that nitrate levels in water do not increase to a level that exceeds EEC directives and endangers public health in Stoke-on-Trent and north Staffordshire; what is the cost of such action; who will bear these costs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: These are matters for the Severn-Trent water authority to consider in the first instance. I understand that no public water supplies in the areas contain nitrate concentrations which exceed the limit laid down in the EC drinking water directive.

Mr. Beyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* showing the price of water from each water authority from 1978-79 until the latest date available, taking the 1978-79 price as a base of 100.

Mr. Moynihan: Information on average household bills for water supply is shown in the table, in the form requested by the hon. Member.

Water Authority	*1978-79*	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
Water Supply										
North West	100·0	109·5	139·9	155·1	164·5	164·5	167·4	190·5	210·1	224·4
Northumbrian	100·0	105·3	127·5	158·6	185·5	209·7	225·2	241·0	251·6	260·8
Severn Trent	100·0	114·7	138·4	164·1	182·9	187·2	194·2	209·3	225·5	241·9
Yorkshire	100·0	110·2	136·3	151·3	167·1	174·2	184·5	206·3	227·5	245·4
Anglian	100·0	117·2	153·9	176·8	190·4	192·6	201·8	223·0	250·3	266·0
Thames	100·0	113·8	142·0	156·0	171·3	189·3	204·3	224·8	231·5	244·2
Southern	100·0	105·3	136·0	153·2	171·6	178·8	187·4	207·9	226·1	238·2
Wessex	100·0	119·2	141·7	155·6	163·3	167·4	169·7	184·8	202·6	213·3
South West	100·0	114·1	131·4	149·2	162·0	171·2	177·1	184·7	196·6	204·4
English Averages	100·0	112·4	140·1	158·2	172·4	181·3	189·0	208·6	225·8	239·3
Welsh	100·0	112·8	135·6	163·4	200·9	209·8	209·8	231·6	242·6	267·8
National Average	100·0	112·4	139·8	158·6	175·4	163·3	169·5	187·0	202·3	214·6

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the quality of water supplies in the metropolitan district of Bradford in relation to EEC standards; how many complaints he has received in each of the last five years on this matter; and what action is being taken to improve the quality of water supplies in the district.

Mr. Moynihan: The major water supply serving the metropolitan district of Bradford complies with the EC drinking water directive. Seven smaller supplies, serving parts of the district, do not comply with the directive, mainly because of naturally occurring aluminium and manganese, which are not considered to be a risk to health. I have not received any complaints about these supplies. In order to improve the water quality, Yorkshire water authority proposes to modify or replace the treatment works for these supplies. A programme of action is under way and in all but one case should be completed by April 1989.

Nature Reserves

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the responses he has received following the suggestion that nature reserves should be privatised.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department has received a number of letters on this subject following press publicity last month which overlooked the fact that the majority of national nature reserves are already in private ownership. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) on 13 January 1988, at columns 281-82.

Nature Conservancy Council

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment met the chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council on 14 December 1987. A wide range of topics related to NCC operations were discussed.

Cash Limits

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any changes to announce to his Department's cash limits.

Mr. Ridley: The cash limit for class X, vote 2 (Central Environmental Services, etc.) has been reduced by £0·15 million from £199·318 million to £199·168 million. The

cash limit for class X, vote 4 (Royal Palaces, Royal Parks, Historic Buildings, Ancient Monuments and National Heritage) has been reduced by £0·5 million from £106·697 million to £106·197 million. The cash limit for class X, vote 9 (Sale of shares in the water services public limited companies) has been reduced from £2 million to £1 million. These changes all reflect reduced forecast expenditure this financial year. The savings of £1·65 million have been surrendered to the reserve.

Receipts to the Housing Corporation's approved development programme are now forecast to exceed provision by some £30 million-£35 million. I have given my approval for the corporation to increase gross expenditure equal to the major part of the excess. The corporation's net cash limit (DOE/HC1) has, however, been reduced by £2·9 million from £638·33 million to £635·43 million. £2·39 million of the reduction will be used to offset increased expenditure of that amount on class IX, vote 1, resulting from higher claims by local authorities for main housing subsidy in the current year. The remaining £0·51 million has been surrendered to the reserve.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the Ordnance Survey plan for 1988 to 1991.

Mr. Moynihan: I have today approved the Ordnance Survey plan for 1988-91 and I shall arrange for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

Urban Programme

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources will be available for local authorities in the urban programme in 1988-89; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I am today announcing initial urban programme resource allocations for 1988-89, totalling £259 million. This will support projects in 57 urban programme partnership and programme authorities. It will help further the Government's commitment to revitalising inner cities by, amongst other things, regenerating local economies and creating jobs, encouraging training and supporting environmental improvements.

The urban programme is just one of the Government's tools in the drive to improve conditions in inner cities. More than £200 million will be spent by the urban development corporations in England in 1988-89. Private investment projects in the 57 urban programme areas will receive additional support though the Department's urban development grant, urban regeneration grant and derelict land grant. In addition, other Government Departments provide a wide range of support for investment, training and business development, all designed to foster enterprise and promote new opportunities and economic growth in rundown urban areas.

The urban programme allocations made today are provisional: formal allocations are made — after inner area programmes (IAPs) have been assessed and approved. In the case of authorities with partnership or programme status in 1986-87, allocations are also conditional on their providing a satisfactory annual report on achievements through the UP in 1986-87. Additional resources sometimes become available for redistribution in the course of the year which may lead to outturn being different from these initial allocations.

I attach considerable importance to the improvement in the management of the urban programme and am grateful to authorities for their continuing commitment to and achievements in the urban programme management initiative (UPM).

The allocations to individual authorities are as follows.

Region and Authority	*Initial Allocation 1988-89 £ million*
Northern	
Newcastle/Gateshead	16·84
Hartlepool	1·75
Langbaurgh	1·75
Middlesbrough	5·50
North Tyneside	3·42
South Tyneside	4·40
Stockton	1·37
Sunderland	4·40
North West	
Manchester/Salford	22·20
Blackburn	4·00
Bolton	3·75
Burnley	1·60
Oldham	3·70
Preston	2·00
Rochdale	3·40
Wigan	2·20
Merseyside	
Liverpool	20·50
Halton	1·43
Knowsley	3·91
St. Helens	1·70
Sefton	1·50
Wirral	3·42
West Midlands	
Birmingham	24·68
Coventry	4·79
Dudley	1·25
Sandwell	4·67
Walsall	1·50
Wolverhampton	5·39
The Wrekin	0·57
East Midlands	
Derby	1·41
Leicester	5·43
Nottingham	5·50
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Barnsley	1·50
Bradford	4·50
Doncaster	1·75
Hull	4·89
Kirklees	0·82
Leeds	4·40
Rotherham	1·75
Sheffield	5·50
London	
Hackney	9·66
Islington	9·65
Lambeth	11·75
Brent	3·91
Greenwich	1·90
Hammersmith and Fulham	4·31
Haringey	2·25
Kensington and Chelsea	1·85
Lewisham	1·95
Newham	2·25
Southwark	2·25
Tower Hamlets	4·50

Region and Authority	Initial Allocation 1988-89 £ million
Wandsworth	4·50
South West	
Bristol	1·50
Plymouth	1·0

Secure Car Service

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the annual cost of the secure car service in each of the past five years.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* All Ministers are entitled to a secure chauffer driven official vehicle when on Government business. The cost of providing this service for the years 1982-83 to 1985-86 were provided on 23 February 1987, at column 95. The costs for 1986-87 were provided on 23 July 1987, at column 180.

Women's Indoor Abseiling

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the facilities which are made available for women's indoor abseiling; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* I think I know what may have prompted my hon. Friend to ask this interesting question. So far as I am aware, there is no such provision in the Palace of Westminster. However, there are about 145 special climbing wall facilities in England and Wales as well as over 1,000 sports halls which provide abseiling facilities. Women, as well as men, have access to these facilities. Details of their location can be obtained from either the Sports Council or the Sports Council for Wales—Cyngor Chwaraeon Cymru.

Leeds-Bradford Airport

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the findings of the Leeds-Bradford airport public inquiry into extended flying hours; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The inspector has completed his report of the inquiry and his findings are now being carefully considered. When this has been concluded, a decision will be issued jointly by the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport.

Whilst every effort will be made to reach the decision with the minimum of delay, I cannot predict at this stage when that will be.

Peak Park

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many members of the Peak Park planning board, as a percentage of the total, lived outside the area of the park, in the year the board first met, and at subsequent three-year intervals until the present day.

Mr. Moynihan *[pursuant to his reply 20 November 1987, c. 682]:* Sixty five per cent. at present. Records of the addresses of local authority members in previous years are not held centrally.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the present members of the Peak Park planning board, together with the body that appointed them, their qualifications, and place of residence;

(2) how many of the members of the Peak Park planning board live within the area of the Peak Park; and, of those, which were appointed by local authorities and which by himself.

Mr. Moynihan *[pursuant to his reply, 20 November 1987, c. 682]:* Four out of 23 appointed by local authorities and eight out of 11 appointed by my right hon. Friend. Current membership and places of residence are:

Name	Appointing authority	Place of residence
Mrs. E. Andrews	Secretary of State	Flash
Mr. J. Beadle	Derbyshire CC	Derby
Councillor R. J. Beaver	North-East Derbyshire DC	Stretton
Mr. K. Campbell	Secretary of State	Dore
Mr. J. Cant	Secretary of State	Youlgreave
Major-General P. B. Cavendish	Secretary of State	Youlgreave
Councillor Mrs. C. M. N. Gowthat	Derbyshire Dales DC	Bakewell
Councillor G. M. Doughty	Derbyshire CC	New Mills
Councillor G. W. Driver	Macclesfield BC	Higher Poynton
Councillor J. H. Edwards	Staffordshire CC	Stoke-on-Trent
Mr. J. S. Elliott	Secretary of State	Hope
Miss C. H. Harlow	Derbyshire CC	Whaley Bridge
Councillor K. C. Hinchcliffe	Cheshire CC	Rainow
Councillor of C. B. Hoole	Derbyshire Dales CC	Bonsall
Councillor D. J. Hunter	Barnsley MBC	Barnsley
Councillor L. Kershaw	Kirklees MBC	Bradford
Mr. C. Langford-Myoock	Secretary of State	Waterhouses
Mrs. P. Mason	Secretary of State	Hope
Mr. L. G. Meadowcroft	Secretary of State	Stockport
Councillor J. M. Murphy	Derbyshire CC	Staveley
Councillor M. J. Pye	Sheffield CC	Sheffield
Mr. J. C. Ratcliffe	Derbyshire CC	Church Gresley
Miss E. J. Robinson	Secretary of State	Sheffield
Councillor R. Semple	Oldham MBC	Oldham
Councillor D. A. Skinner	Sheffield CC	Sheffield
Councillor G. Speight	Kirklees MBC	Batley
Councillor M. Tappin	Staffordshire CC	Stoke-on-Trent

Name	Appointing authority	Place of residence
Mrs. J. Thornton	Secretary of State	Matlock
Councillor Mrs. E. M. Tomlinson	High Peak BC	Buxton
Mr. M. Vallance	Secretary of State	Ilyam
Councillor Mrs. Watkins	Derbyshire CC	Derby
Councillor L. A. Watson	Cheshire CC	Congleton
Councillor G. N. Wilson	Derbyshire CC	Youlgreave
Vacancy	Derbyshire CC	

Biographical details of the entire membership are not held centrally.

National Parks

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list how many members of each national park planning board live within the area of that park as a percentage of the total numbers on each board.

Mr. Moynihan *[pursuant to his reply, 20 November 1987, c. 683]:* The information for the seven English national parks has been reassessed as follows:

Park	Members	Number living within park	Percentage of total number
Dartmoor	21	7	33
Exmoor	21	6	29
Lake District	30	12	40
Northumberland	27	1	4
North York Moors	27	6	22
Peak District	34	12	35
Yorkshire Dales	24	6	25

The three Welsh national parks are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Waste Disposal (Dawdon)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the amount of waste being tipped annually off Dawdon as *(a)* slurry, *(b)* solid waste and *(c)* toxic waste; and if he will indicate for each category the points of origin;

(2) if he will make a statement on the environmental implications of recent proposals by British Coal to dispose of increased amounts of slurry and coal waste off Dawdon.

Mr. Gummer: I have been asked to reply.

The discharge of waste, including slurry, by pipeline at Dawdon is a matter for the Northumbrian water authority which regulates such disposal under the Control of Pollution Act 1974.

Beach tipping is regulated by my Department under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985; 2·5 million tonnes of solid colliery waste is licensed annually for disposal in the Dawdon area in this way. The material originates from Easington, Dawdon, Vane Tempest, Seaham and Hawthorn collieries. No proposal has been made by British Coal for an increase in this licensed quantity. No dumping of other wastes at Dawdon is currently licensed under the 1985 Act.

TRANSPORT

Low-Alcohol Beers

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact of the sale of low-alcohol and alcohol-free beers at prices higher than alcoholic beers on the Government's campaign to discourage drinking and driving; and if he will make representations to the Brewers' Society on the situation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Prices should be determined by supply, demand and competition. Sales of low alcohol and non-alcohol beers have been increasing rapidly. The choice of brands is increasing.

There are encouraging efforts by the brewers to promote low and non-alcoholic beers. The wide availability of attractive alternatives to alcoholic drinks is an important contribution to the campaign against drinking and driving.

PRIME MINISTER

European Fighter Aircraft

Q23. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next intends to meet other Heads of Government to discuss the future of the European fighter aircraft.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so at present.

South-East Wales (Visit)

Q100. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit south-east Wales in the near future.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Lychett Minster (Visit)

Q114. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Prime Minister if she plans to visit Lychett Minster.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Pay Scales

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what is the pay scale of *(a)* a personal secretary employed in her office and *(b)* a trained nurse, including London weighting, and so on.

The Prime Minister: The information requested is as follows:

Personal Secretary £ per annum	Staff Nurse £ per annum
8,134	8,230
8,399	8,490
8,664	8,750
8,986	9,010
9,373	9,270
	9,530

The scales include inner London weighting of £1,527 per annum for personal secretaries, and London weighting of £930 per annum for nurses. Both groups are eligible for

various other payments including overtime, which are excluded from the scales quoted above. Personal secretaries can receive proficiency allowances depending on skill and a special pay addition of £400 based on recruitment and retention needs. Nurses are eligible for various leads and allowances, including special duty payments of up to 60 per cent. of basic pay for working unsocial hours on top of any overtime payments.

Surplus Industrial Capacity

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister whether the Government will provide funds for surplus industrial capacity to be set aside for use in times of war; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: We have no plans to do so.

Doctors and Dentists (Pay)

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the latest report by the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration.

The Prime Minister: I have received the review body's report on the proposed new hospital staff grade, which is being published this afternoon. Copies will be available in the Vote Office. The Government are grateful to the chairman and members for the speed and thoroughness of their deliberations. The salary scale they have recommended is from £13,720, progressing by six equal increments to £20,470. The Government propose to accept the review body's recommendation. There will be further discussions with the profession's representatives to finalise detailed arrangements with the aim of introducing the new grade in the spring.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 9 February.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 9 February.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 9 February.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 9 February.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 9 February.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 9 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. I attended the memorial service for Lord Duncan Sandys at St. Margaret's, Westminster. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

DEFENCE

AIDS

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply of 14 December 1987, *Official Report*, column *415*, if he will give his reasons for not testing all Army recruits for HIV status.

Mr. Freeman: The scale of the AIDS problem is such that we see no need at present for general compulsory screening. The MOD policy not to test all Army recruits for HIV status is in accordance with Government policy on employment. Within the service, those who consider themselves to have been at risk are encouraged to undergo voluntary screening and to seek immediate confidential advice from their unit medical officers.

Service Personnel (Electors)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the total number of service personnel in each branch of the armed forces who are registered as electors for the latest year for which statistics are available; and what is the percentage these figures represent of the total manpower in each service.

Mr. Freeman: The statistics requested are as follows:

As at 31 December 1987

	RN-RM	*Army*	*RAF*
Numbers registered as electors	51,684	103,480	50,855
As percentage of strength	79	65	54

All figures exclude service spouses also registered under the service voters provisions.

Nuclear Weapons (Transportation)

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many nuclear weapons have been transported within or through the Clydesdale constituency since 1979.

Mr. Ian Stewart: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to give details of the movement of nuclear weapons.

HOME DEPARTMENT

South African Embassy (Incident)

Mr. John Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received reports from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis of an incident that took place outside the South African embassy on Tuesday 19 January which resulted in injury to a superintendent of police.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My hon. Friend may be referring to an incident which took place at the Strand entrance to Charing Cross underground station on 19 January. I understand fronm the commissioner that a police superintendent was pushed down the underground stairs and assaulted. The assailant ran off before help could be summoned and to date has not been identified. Police inquiries into the incident are continuing.

Lunar House (Unopened Mail)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many unopened items of mail were held at Lunar house, Croydon, as at 21 January.

Mr. Renton: The number of unopened items of mail, and those opened for the extraction of fees but not yet acknowledged, on 21 January 1988 was approximately 200,000. Vigorous steps are being taken to deal with this backlog, the prime reason for which is the very large number of applications for registration as British citizens received before the deadline of 31 December 1987.

Lunar House (Staff)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed in the various departments at Lunar House, Croydon, on 1 January for each of the years 1985 to 1988.

Mr. Renton: The figures for staff in post in the immigration and nationality department based at Lunar house in January for each of the years 1985 to 1988 are as follows:

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
B1 Division	434	472	468	484
B2 Division	33	55	54	58
B3 Division	167	176	168	161
B4 Division	258	217	225	230
B5 Division[1]	404	382	472	492
Immigration Service Headquarters	96	98	98	101

[1] B5 figures include staff providing common services (eg messengers) for non-IND Home Office Departments at Lunar House. From 1987 the B5 figures also include staff working on IND computer projects who were previously working in the central Home Office computer division.

Variations of Leave

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average length of time it takes for his Department to process applications for *(a)* variation of leave for a visitor and *(b)* variation of leave for a person who arrives as a visitor and wishes to remain on the basis of marriage.

Mr. Renton: Excluding cases decided on the same day by the public inquiry office, the average length of time between the receipt of an application and the decision for cases decided in 1987 was about three months for those who applied to extend their leave as a visitor and between eight and nine months for visitors who applied to remain on the basis of marriage.

Police (Personal Records)

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to which police forces keep records of complaints against police officers that are unsubstantiated; and why some of these forces are proposing to transfer to police officers' personal records such unsubstantiated material.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Regulation 12 of the Police (Complaints) (General) Regulations 1985 requires all chief officers of police to keep a register of complaints against members of his force and this records the outcome of all such complaints.

The contents of a police officer's personal record are determined by regulation 19 of the Police Regulations 1987; they do not include records of unsubstantiated complaints against the officer concerned. We have no information to suggest that forces are failing to comply with this regulation or are proposing to ignore it. But personnel management considerations suggest that a chief officer should make arrangements to be aware of the complaints attracted by individual members of his force. Such arrangements are a matter for the chief officer concerned.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why he is proposing that police officers personal records shall be expanded to include material at present included only in divisional discipline books.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have made no such proposal.

Prisoners (Lock-up Charges)

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for the metropolitan and county police forces the lock-up charges for prisoners, as invoiced to the prison service; and what is the annual total amount spent under this heading.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In the current financial year up to 31 January 1988, a total of £13,431,673 had been paid to police authorities for accommodating prisoners in police cells. This compares with expenditure of £6,152,858 in the financial year 1986-87. Charges raised by police forces are for actual additional costs incurred, but it is possible to calculate an implied per capital rate per night from the invoices submitted. The table shows the implied per capita rate per night for each police force which accommodated prisoners in the current financial year.

Police Force	*Implied per capita rate per night* £
Avon and Somerset	73
Bedfordshire	66
Cambridgeshire	176
Cheshire	[1]63
Cheshire	[2]113
Devon and Cornwall	144
Essex	44
Greater Manchester	45
Gwent	123
Hampshire	105
Kent	138
Merseyside	72
Metropolitan	201
Norfolk	55
Northamptonshire	102
Sussex	65
Surrey	149
West Midlands	21
Wiltshire	45

[1] For prisoners held on behalf of North Region.
[2] For prisoners held on behalf of South East Region.

Mr. Orkechurkwu Emmanuel Ejoh

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will release from detention Orkechurkwu Emmanuel Ejoh, pending his consideration of written representations made by the hon. Member for Bradford, West; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: No. Mr. Ejoh claimed on arrival to have been born in the United Kingdom but the immigration officer was not satisfied that this was so and refused him leave to enter. An independent adjudicator dismissed his appeal on 14 December and leave to appeal to the immigration appeals tribunal was refused on 12 January.

Unification Church

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the light of the Attorney-General's withdrawal of his appeal against the decision not

to remove charity status from the Unification Church, he will indicate what plans he has to review charity legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Government have already announced their intention to bring forward legislation to improve the supervision of charities by implementing the recommendations of Sir Philip Woodfield's efficiency scrutiny. The implications of the Attorney-General's recent decision to discontinue his action against the Unification Church are being studied closely.

Offenders (Electronic Tagging)

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to evaluate electronic tagging for offenders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Several systems are in use in North America and others are being developed here. We are considering whether electronic monitoring would be useful to enforce curfews or track an offender's whereabouts. This could be part of new arrangements for punishment in the community, as an alternative to custody. We hope to announce proposals later this year.

Immigration

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons in *(a)* Bangladesh, *(b)* India, *(c)* Pakistan, *(d)* Ghana and *(e)* Nigeria applied for a visa to visit the United Kingdom in the 12 month period November 1986 to October 1987; and what was the outcome of those applications.

Mr. Renton: The information is given in the table. The visa requirement for citizens of Nigeria was not introduced until 1 February 1987.

Applications for a visit visa, November 1986 to October 1987

Number of persons

	Received	*Granted*	*Refused initially*	*Withdrawn or lapsed*[1]	*Increase in applications awaiting decision*[2]
Bangladesh	9,380	6,740	1,920	300	420
India	98,020	90,630	4,670	1,490	1,240
Pakistan	58,440	47,900	6,650	1,860	2,020
Ghana	12,100	9,440	2,330	270	50
Nigeria[3]	43,530	38,120	2,920	[4]2,490	
	221,470	192,830	18,500	10,130	

[1] Net of applications revived.
[2] Most of which had been deferred for further inquiries or referred to the Home Office for decision.
[3] Data relate to the period February to October 1987.
[4] Based on incomplete information it is estimated that all these applications had been withdrawn or lapsed, and that there had been no increase in applications awaiting decision.

SCOTLAND

Health and Personal Social Services

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table setting out for 1987-88 and 1988-89 the estimated number of *(a)* families and *(b)* persons in each health region or equivalent, and in Scotland as a whole, showing net average expenditure on health and personal social services per family and per person in each year, and distinguishing between expenditure on the National Health Service and on the personal social services

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not available in the form requested.

The following table gives population projections for each health board area at June 1987 and June 1988. These figures are assumptions derived from actual population figures in June 1985.

	1987	*1988*
Argyll and Clyde	444,742	443,648
Ayrshire and Arran	375,571	375,780
Borders	102,323	102,667
Dumfries and Galloway	147,419	147,909
Fife	345,109	346,029
Forth Valley	272,400	272,550
Grampian	504,939	506,556
Greater Glasgow	954,913	949,070
Highland	202,331	203,593
Lanarkshire	563,786	562,003
Lothian	743,141	743,672
Orkney	19,298	19,302
Shetland	23,713	23,823
Tayside	393,041	393,180
Western Isles	31,453	31,401
SCOTLAND TOTAL	5,124,179	5,121,183

No data are available on the number of families in Scotland.

Expenditure on the National Health Service cannot be broken down by health board area since a significant part of Health Service expenditure is incurred centrally. Most expenditure on social work is incurred by local authorities and figures by health board area are not held centrally.

Estimates of net total expenditure on health and social work per head of population in Scotland are as follows:

	1987-88 £	*1988-89* £
Health	444	467
Social Work[1]	81	85

[1] The local authority current expenditure element of the 1987-88 figure is based on actual social work budgets, while the 1988-89 figure is based on the service provision within the rate support grant settlement.

Coatbridge Ambulance Depot

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what facilities are available for personnel at the Coatbridge ambulance depot.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Staff facilities at the ambulance station comprises a mess room, kitchen, separate male and female toilets and locker rooms.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons are employed at the Coatbridge ambulance depot; and what are their designations.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are 52 staff based at the ambulance station, as follows:

1 station officer
28 qualified ambulancemen
15 ambulancemen
6 relief ambulancemen
1 mechanic
1 semi-skilled mechanic.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many vehicles are in use at the Coatbridge ambulance depot; and what arrangements are made for their repair and maintenance.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are 22 ambulances and one van based at Coatbridge ambulance station. Most maintenance and repair work is carried out at the station itself where there is a fully-equipped one-bay workshop. Back-up is provided by the Motherwell ambulance station, which has a six-bay workshop.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what geographical areas are serviced by the Coatbridge ambulance depot.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The areas normally served by Coatbridge ambulance station include Airdrie, Bellshill, Coatbridge, Uddingston and Bothwell, Viewpark and parts of the local motorway network. Ambulances from the station may also be called upon to assist throughout Lanarkshire and Forth valley as necessary.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what hospitals are serviced by the Coatbridge ambulance depot.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The station serves Monklands district general hospital, Bellshill maternity hospital, Law hospital, Stonehouse hospital and Hairmyres hospital. Patients are also conveyed to and from hospitals in Glasgow.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans for extending and improving facilities at the Coatbridge ambulance depot; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I understand that a proposal to build a replacement for the present station is, together with other competing priorities, under consideration by the Common Services Agency, of which the Scottish ambulance service is a division.

NHS (Administrative Staff)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give *(a)* the number of administrative staff employed by the Health Service in Scotland since 1979; and *(b)* the total sums each year since 1979, spent on administrative salaries.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The numbers of administrative and clerical staff, including medical secretaries, employed by health boards and the Common Services Agency, together with their salary costs, are set out in the table:

	Number of administrative and clerical staff[1]	*Expenditure on salaries £'thousand*
1979-80	13,121·6	54,091
1980-81	13,225·7	70,603
1981-82	13,628·8	77,078
1982-83	13,880·4	83,398
1983-84	14,088·0	88,280
1984-85	14,052·8	93,089
1985-86	14,315·1	98,649
1986-87	14,455·5	106,305

[1] Whole-time equivalents as at 30 September each year.

Clydesdale (Population)

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the population of each of the towns and villages in the Clydesdale constituency.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information available at the required level of detail is derived from the 1981 census. The continuously built-up areas in Clydesdale constituency with usually resident populations of 500 or more at that time were as follows:

Area	*Population*
Ashgill	958
Biggar	1,921
Carluke (including Castlehill)	11,708
Carnwath	1,363
Carstairs	763
Carstairs Junction	908
Coalburn	1,222
Douglas	1,718
Forth	2,891
Kirkmuirhill	3,619
Lanark (including Bellefield Hospital & Kirkfieldbank)	9,672
Law	2,738
Lesmahagow	3,396
Netherburn	757
Rigside	1,059
Stonehouse	5,093
West End (including Carstairs State Hospital)	661

School Nurses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report*, for each year over the last five up to the latest year for which figures are available *(a)* the number of school nurses employed, given as total, whole-time, part-time, and whole-time equivalent, *(b)* the establishment figure for school nurses and *(c)* the number of vacant posts.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The number of school nurses employed by health boards in Scotland and in post at 30 September in each of the last five years is as follows. Information about funded establishments and vacant posts is not held centrally.

	1983	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	[1]*1987*
Whole time	129·0	118·0	117·0	120·0	116·0
Part time	162·0	167·0	179·0	189·0	189·0
Whole time equivalent	234·9	227·4	234·5	245·9	240·7

[1] Provisional figure.

Private Health Insurance

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has of the proportion of the population of Scotland which is not covered, in whole or in part, by private health insurance.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None.

Children's Hearings System

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he intends to introduce any proposals to significantly alter the children's hearing system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No. In setting up a review of child care law in Scotland we made it clear that children's hearings will continue their central role in the Scottish system for dealing with children in need of compulsory measures of care.

Child Law Reform Group

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to announce the membership of the child law reform group.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Within the next few days.

District Councils (Capital Allocations)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how the amount of capital receipts received by a district council affects its capital allocations; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: District councils receive two allocations covering housing and general services respectively. Gross housing capital allocations are determined, within the total gross resources available, on the basis of individual authorities' relative needs. The net allocation for each authority is calculated by deducting estimated receipts from its gross allocation. The estimate of receipts is discussed fully with each authority and can be updated until March, when final allocations are issued.

After final allocations are issued, each authority has consent to incur during that year's capital expenditure up to its net figure, plus actual receipts generated. It is therefore in an authority's interest to generate as great a volume of receipts as possible; for example, by encouraging the sale of council houses under tenants' right to buy.

Authorities' estimates of the capital receipts they expect to raise are one of the factors taken into account in determining their general services allocations, which are issued, on a net basis, in February. A district council may augment its capital allocation by an amount equivalent to the actual capital receipts it raises in the year. Receipts raised on general services may not be applied to housing expenditure and vice versa.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how he deals with the covenant proposals of district councils in deciding capital allocations; and how covenant proposals are allocated for accounting purposes between different financial years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In deciding the level of an individual authority's capital allocation, full account is taken of the expenditure projections contained in the authority's financial plan submitted each year to my Department. The public accounting treatment of covenant schemes depends on the sums involved and the date on which they are entered into. Precise guidance on the treatment of covenant schemes is included in the explanatory memorandum enclosed with the letter issued each year by my Department notifying authorities of their capital allocations.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the principles used to decide upon capital allocations to district councils.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The allocation of resources for capital expenditure by district councils are determined, within the resources available, on the basis of their relative needs. In the light of the financial plans they submit each year, authorities' relative needs are assessed taking account of a number of factors, including the capital costs of individual projects, the current expenditure consequences, their previous spending patterns and performance; authorities' forecast of capital receipts and the desirability of aiding continuity in financial planning by adhering to the provisional allocations already issued and the need to adjust these to reflect changes in circumstances or of emphasis in their financial plans.

For housing allocations, also taken into account are authorities' capital programmes as set out in their housing plans and checklists.

Housing Budget

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total amount allocated for housing in his Department's budget for 1988-89; and how it is disaggregated.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Gross expenditure is planned to be £882 million, disaggregated as follows:

	£ million
Gross capital expenditure	
Local authorities	517
Scottish Special Housing Association	55
Housing Corporation	133
Urban Regeneration	12
New Towns	31
Total	748
Current expenditure	
Local authorities	76
Scottish Special Housing Association	22
Housing Corporation	4
New Towns	27
Administration	4
Total	133
Total programme (gross)	[1]882
Capital receipts	243
Total programme (net)	639

[1] Total does not add due to rounding.

"Secret Society"

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his reply of 27 January, *Official Report*, columns *244-95*, what representations he made to

the BBC when it consulted the Government concerning the inclusion in the programme entitled "Cabinet" of the series "Secret Society" of classified information.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 1 February 1988]:* My right hon. and learned Friend made no such representations.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Trans-Atlantic Fibre Optic Cable

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the implications for United Kingdom participation in the private trans-Atlantic fibre optic cable project of the Republic of Ireland's decision to participate therein.

Mr. Butcher: Through the decision to land a spur in the Republic of Ireland, Telecom Eireann has become the first European telecommunications administration to demonstrate a financial commitment to the private trans-Atlantic cable project. Telecom Eireann's decision is an important landmark in the success of this project and has been welcomed, in a message from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the Taoiseach, as an excellent example of combined American and Anglo-Irish industrial development.

Copyright

Mr. Rost: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether it is his intention, under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Bill *[Lords]*, that copying done for private study of research using a reprographic process in a university library should be an infringement of copyright; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: It is our intention that copying for private study and research purposes should be permitted, subject to certain conditions. The circumstances in which copyright material may be copied without infringement are set out in chapter III of part I of the Bill.

Patent Office

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) if he will publish as percentages the work of the Patent Office that is undertaken *(a)* by telephone, *(b)* as correspondence and *(c)* by applicants in person;

(2) if he will publish a report on the work of the Patent Office including full details of the regions of the United Kingdom from which the work originated.

Mr. Butcher: Information about the work of the Patent Office is provided in the annual report to Parliament of the Comptroller-General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks. However, the details which the hon. Member seeks are not available centrally and could not be compiled other than at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what consultations took place with users of Patent Office services, and its staff, before the decision was announced to move the office out of central London;

(2) which owners of patents, trade marks or registered designs were consulted concerning the likely total cost to them in Government fees, professional fees and ancillary costs arising from implementation of the proposal to move the Patent Office to south Wales;

(3) what steps he is taking to ensure that the Patent Office retains the existing corps of technical examiners so as to maintain the continuity of experience required for the competent examination of patent applications across the full technical spectrum;

(4) when the current independent financial basis for the functioning of the Patent Office will continue in such a way that its operations will neither be supported from, nor contribute to, Government revenues; and if he will make a statement;

(5) whether the whole of the proportion of fees received for the renewal of European Patents (UK), currently retained by the Patent Office, will continue to accrue solely to the benefit of its operations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The final decision on the future location of the Patent Office has not yet been announced, but, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster stated in his reply to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) and for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) on 10 December 1987, column 239, we have been examining the possibility of relocating the Patent Office to Cardiff or Newport.

With this in mind our officials have had discussions with representatives of the relevant professional organisations and the Federation of Trade Mark, Patent and Design Owners on the services needed to be retained in central London in order to ensure that the Patent Office continues to provide the range of services needed by industry and commerce for the efficient conduct of their business at the point where they are needed. The provision of a public office in London should ensure that no additional professional costs fall on customers, while the relocation of the main operations of the office away from London will reduce running costs to the ultimate benefit of users.

A review of the financial basis of the Patent Office, including the level of European patent (UK) renewal fees to be retained by the office, is in progress.

Patent examiners are mobile grades liable to serve anywhere in the country. I do not anticipate any problem in finding sufficient staff willing to work in south Wales.

Further statements will be made about these issues in the near future.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish in the *Official Report* the bids for European regional development fund for 1988-89 and the comparative bids and allocations for 1987-88 British regions.

Mr. Atkins: The table shows European regional development fund commitments to the United Kingdom for the calendar year 1987 and the value of applications submitted during this period.

£ million

	Commitments	*Applications*
North	56	—
Yorkshire and Humberside	30	—
East Midlands	2	—

	Commitments	Applications
South West	28	—
West Midlands	65	—
North West	36	—
England	217	256
Wales	54	82
Scotland	83	153
Northern Ireland	39	53
Multi-Regional	3	—
United Kingdom	396	544

The columns are, however, not directly comparable, since corresponding applications and commitments are not necessarily made in the same calendar (or financial) year. Thus, many 1987 commitments were applied for in 1986, and many of the outstanding 1987 applications can be expected to lead to commitments in 1988.

The total of new applications in 1988 will exceed £400 million. Together with applications outstanding from 1987, they will comfortably suffice for 1988 commitments to a total at least similar to that in 1987. Full or regional estimates cannot however yet be made.

Internal Market Council

Dr. Blackburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will report on the meeting of EC/EFTA Ministers and the Internal Market Council held on 2 February.

Mr. Alan Clark: The meeting of the European Community and European Free Trade Association Ministers re-affirmed the European Community's commitment to strengthen mutual co-operation with the European Free Trade Association in tackling barriers to trade at the same time as the Community makes progress on completion of its single market. European Community and European Free Trade Association Ministers also agreed a joint statement highlighting specific areas for action in the coming months. This gives priority to tackling problems of direct concern to industry, notably in the area of technical standards, origin documentation, and co-operation against counterfeiting.

A meeting of the Internal Market Council followed, which considered proposals for a Community patent conversion and a regulation to establish a Community trade mark system. Technical issues will be pursued by the presidency and the Commission, and at working group level, with a view to further discussion at a forthcoming Council.

British Steel

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what preparations he has made for the appointment of underwriters for the flotation of British Steel; when he hopes to make an appointment; and on what basis and when the advertising budget will be decided.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* Preparations for the flotation of the British Steel Corporation are at an early stage. No decisions have yet been taken therefore on the matters raised.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what discussions he has had with stockbroking firms about the tendering for the British Steel flotation; when he expects to make the choice; and what prospectus has been issued to applicants for the flotation contract.

Mr. Atkins: *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* My Department announced on 2 February the appointment of Rowe and Pitman Ltd. as stockbroking advisers for the flotation of the British Steel Corporation. This appointment followed an open competition, during which selected applicants were sent a brief description of the work involved.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what discussions he has had with advertising agencies about the flotation of the British Steel Corporation.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* Two advertising agencies have approached the Department to express an interest in appointment for the British Steel Corporation flotation. The nature of the marketing campaign has not yet been decided, however, and no substantive discussions have been held.

Enterprise Consultants

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which firms of chartered accountants his Department invited to provide enterprise consultants prior to the publication of his White Paper on the role of the Department of Trade and Industry; when; and by what means.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* On 12 November 1987, seven firms with national coverage were invited to tender competitively for the provision of enterprise counsellor services. As a result of that competition two firms, Coopers and Lybrand and Ernst and Whinney, were awarded contracts. It would be a breach of commercial confidentiality to reveal the names of those firms which tendered unsuccessfully.

Lancashire (Grants)

Mr. Hind: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what grants he has allocated to Lancashire county council or Lancashire Enterprises Ltd. for 1988-89; what grants were made in 1987-88; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* The Department makes no allocation of grants to Lancashire county council. During 1987-88 Lancashire Enterprises made application for and was offered grant assistance under the European regional development fund's business improvement services scheme.

Textile Industry

Mr. Madden: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Lamond) on 13 January, what evidence of injury to United Kingdom textile firms as a result of Turkish acrylic yarns was contained in letters sent to him by Mr. B. J. Spencer, president of the Textile Confederation, on 25 November 1987 and by Peter Booth, national secretary of the Textile Transport General Workers Union group on 18 September 1987 and 6 January, drawing his attention to firms in the United Kingdom forced into short-time working and layoffs; what action he is taking substantially to reduce Turkish acrylic yarn imports into the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 1 February 1988]*: I have written to the hon. Member.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Northern Ireland (Administration of Justice)

Mr. McCusker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, during any meetings of the Intergovernmental Council, the representatives of the Government of the Irish Republic have raised with him their objections to the administration of justice in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council (AIIC) itself last met in November 1985. Both then and since, the Irish Government have put forward a number of views and proposals concerning the administration of justice in Northern Ireland. These have been considered at the Intergovernmental Conference which was set up under the Anglo-Irish Agreement within the framework of the AIIC. We have considered their proposals as part of our continuing commitment to increase public confidence in the administration of justice in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Boris Chernobilsky

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Soviet Government about Mr. Boris Chernobilsky and his family, of Profsoyuznaya 119, Moscow, who are seeking exit visas to enable them to leave the Soviet Union.

Mr. Meller: My right hon. and learned Friend last raised the issue of Soviet citizens awaiting permission to emigrate with the Soviet Foreign Minister at Brize Norton on 7 December, when he handed over a list of cases about which we had received representations, including that of Mr. Boris Chernobilsky and his family. My right hon. and learned Friend expects to press for rapid progress again when he visits the Soviet Union from 14-17 February.

Miss. Nasreen Akhtar

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the British embassy in Islamabad will permit Nasreen Akhtar to return to Bradford; on how many occasions since 2 January Nasreen Akhtar has visited that embassy to ask for a re-entry visa; how many official telex messages have been sent to that embassy confirming the identity of Nasreen Akhtar and on what dates; what replies have been received; why letters from the hon. Member for Bradford, West confirmin Nasreen Akhtar's identity have not been accepted by that embassy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Meller: Her Majesty's Embassy in Islamabad informed Nasreen Akhtar by registered letter on 4 February 1988, that a returning resident visa was available on an any day basis. The only recorded visit by Nasreen Akhtar to the embassy was on 27 January, the date of application. The embassy received two official telex messages concerning Nasreen Akhtar's immigration status (not her identity) on 14 January and 3 February 1988. The embassy telexed the Home Office on 20 January requesting their reference number in order to locate previous papers, and again on 28 January after the application was actually lodged.

Miss Akhtar's recently issued passport bore only a United Kingdom departure stamp and this was not sufficient to confirm her returning resident status. While the hon. Member for Bradford, West's letter confirmed Miss Akhtar's identity, it did not confirm her status.

EMPLOYMENT

Disabled People (Employment)

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what reviews have been carried out by his Department since 1979 of the effectiveness of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 in increasing the number of disabled people in employment; if he has any plans to seek to amend the Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The programmes which derive from the Act have been kept under internal review.

The effectiveness of the quota scheme was the subject of a Manpower Services Commission-led review and report undertaken in 1979-81. The report of a subsequent Manpower Services Commission-led working group which examined ways of improving the scheme was published in 1985. An important conclusion in that report was that research was needed into the numbers and characteristics of people with disabilities. Arrangements for such research are currently under way.

I have no plans at present to amend the Act.

Restart Programme

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have benefited from the restart programme in *(a)* the Northwich travel-to-work area, *(b)* the Chester travel-to-work area and *(c)* the Runcorn travel-to-work area in each year since the programme's inception; and what has been the cost in each year.

Mr. Lee: I regret that the information is not available in the form requested. However, figures for the Cheshire employment service area, which includes Northwich, Chester and Runcorn, are shown in the table:

	1 July 1986 to 9 April 1987	*10 April 1987 to 25 December 1987*
Number of restart interviews	23,333	22,136
Percentage of those interviewed who received a positive offer of help	95	94

The estimated cost of delivering restart counselling in the Cheshire area in 1986-87 was £310,000 and so far in 1987-88 has been £294,000.

Major Accident Hazards

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the industrial installations with their locations in the county of Durham which are covered by the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations.

Mr. Nicholls: One industrial installation in the county of Durham has been notified to the Health and Safety Executive under the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984. The installation is:

Norske Hydro Polymers Ltd.
Aycliffe Industrial Estate
Newton Aycliffe
Co. Durham

Productivity Payments

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his policy on wage earners being rewarded for increases in productivity achieved with their co-operation.

Mr. Nicholls: I am, of course, in favour of rewarding genuine productivity achievement provided it can be afforded and does not add to unit wage costs. Primary responsibility for pay must remain a matter for employers and employees directly concerned.

Job Training Scheme

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of entrants to the job training scheme obtained credits, or qualifications, as a direct result of their time on the scheme.

Mr. Cope: The information is not available. The Manpower Services Commission has commissioned a follow-up survey which has now commenced and which will provide information on qualifications. The results should be known in the spring.

THE ARTS

Public Libraries (Nottinghamshire)

Mr. Haynes: To ask the Minister for the Arts what information he has about the level of loans from public libraries in Nottinghamshire in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Luce: Information about public library loans is collected and published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. In the latest year for which information is available — 1985-86 — public libraries in Nottinghamshire issued 12·05 million books and more than 296,000 other items.

Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister for the Arts how many first-time corporate donors to the arts were registered under the business sponsorship incentive scheme in 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: The scheme continues to bring a stream of new sponsors into the arts, attracting 216 first-time business sponsors in 1987. As I announced in the House on 26 January at column *154*, the scheme will be strengthened and extended in 1988-89 to reflect the existing and anticipated growth in sponsorship.

National Collections

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he has requested the national collections to publish lists of items held in store.

Mr. Luce: The national museums and galleries already maintain, and in some cases publish, catalogues of their collections in whole or in part. I have encouraged them to improve their inventories by the use of modern computerised information systems. Many are doing so, though in the case of the largest collections the task will necessarily take a number of years.

Arts Council

Mr. Butler: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on the Arts Council's progress fund and its enterprise fund.

Mr. Luce: I have discussed with the Arts Council its plans for the progress and enterprise funds. The council will be publishing details of the schemes, and inviting applications, before the end of February.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Banks (Tax Relief)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on tax relief for British banks on their operations in developing countries.

Mr. Norman Lamont: British banks operating in developing countries qualify for tax relief under general tax law on the same criteria as other traders.

EC Budget

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether, pursuant to the reply of 24 July, *Official Report*, column *558*, concerning the United Kingdom contributions to the EEC Budget, he will publish in the *Official Report* corresponding figures for 1987, together with the outturn for 1986 and a forecast for 1988.

Mr. Brooke: I regret that outturn information on our net contribution to the Community budget in 1987 is not yet available. An outturn figure for 1987 along with a forecast for 1988 will be included in the statement on the 1988 Community budget, to be published shortly after the 1988 budget is adopted. Information concerning the outturn for 1986 was given in my reply of 24 July, to which the hon. Member refers. The Government's latest projections for the financial years 1987-88 and 1988-89 are contained in the public expenditure White Paper, Cmnd. 288.

European Community (Financial Structure)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, with reference to the proposal of the Commission of the European Economic Community draft decision Com. (87), relating to a new financial structure, he will give the maximum limit of overall expenditure in percentage of the gross national product of the Community which is equivalent to the expenditure on a basis of 1·4 per cent. of its harmonised value added tax base and income from other own resources in 1987, together with the respective percentage of that harmonised base necessary to achieve the maximum proposed overall expenditure for each of the years 1988 to 1992, expressed as a percentage of Community gross national product, on the assumption that income from non-percentage based own resources remains stable from year to year.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 1 February 1988]:* The information requested is shown in the table below. Line 1 shows the VAT rate required to finance the maximum level of expenditure that can be afforded within the annual sub-ceilings on own resources set out in the Commission's draft own resources decision (COM(87)420). It is assumed that there is no change in the structure of the own resources system, but an increase in the VAT ceiling. Line 2 shows what the equivalent maximum level of expenditure would be year by year as a proportion of Community GNP. The revenue figures for 1988 onwards used in the calculations are consistent with those in the Commission's report on the future financing of the Community (COM(87)101) and allow for some erosion in customs duties and levies in real terms over time.

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
1. Percentage VAT rate required to finance maximum level of expenditure which can be afforded within proposed sub-ceilings	1·4	1·72	1·80	1·87	1·96	2·05
2. Maximum level of expenditure as a percentage of EC12 GNP	1·05	1·20	1·22	1·24	1·27	1·30

Note: Line (1) assumes continuation of the present structure of own resources. Lines (1) and (2) both assume that the correction for the United Kingdom's budgetary imbalance continues to be financed within the own resources ceiling.

Charities

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has as to how much money has been donated by individuals to charities in the United Kingdom in each of the last three available years.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 1 February 1988]:* I regret that no comprehensive information on all types of giving to charities is available. Covenanted giving to charities amounted to some £350 million in 1983-84, £400 million in 1984-85, and £450 million in 1985-86. With regard to gifts to charities on death, the figures available relate only to estates above the value at which capital transfer tax or inheritance tax would be payable in the absence of exemptions. For these estates the amounts reported were £200 million in 1983-84, £260 million in 1984-85, and £400 million in 1985-86.

Money Supply

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the increase in the real money supply and the change in the velocity of circulation of broad money order between 1974 and 1979 and from 1979 to date, together with *(a)* the average annual rate of growth in each case and *(b)* the annual rate of increase in real personal disposable increases in each period.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 4 February 1988]:* There is no single measure of the real money supply. Recent figures for M0, M3, M4 and M5 are shown in the Bank of England's press release on the monetary aggregates dated 29 January 1988 and in "Financial Statistics". For earlier periods, figures for M0, M3, and M5 are shown in "Economic Trends, Annual Supplement", 1987 edition, and figures for M4 were made available by the Bank of England in June 1987. All of these series have been subject to changes in coverage as the financial system has evolved and in the case of M5 there was a change in definition in June 1986. For this reason, no meaningful growth rates can be calculated over the whole of the periods requested. Recent figures for the velocity of circulation of broad money are shown in "Financial Statistics", table 11·5. Earlier figures for velocity can be derived from figures shown in the "Economic Trends, Annual Supplement", but comparisons over time are affected by the difficulties noted above. Assuming that the hon. Member seeks figures on real personal disposable incomes, these are readily accessible in "Economic Trends".

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the increase in the amount of broad money between *(a)* February 1974 and June 1979 and *(b)* June 1979 to the end of 1987, together with the average annual rate of growth; and if he will account for the difference and explain the effect on prices in each period.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 4 February 1988]:* There is no single measure of the broad money supply. Recent figures for M3, M4 and M5 are shown in the Bank of England's press release on the monetary aggregates dated 29 January 1988 and in "Financial Statistics". For earlier periods, figures for M3 and M5 are shown in "Economic Trends, Annual Supplement", 1987 edition, and figures for M4 were made available by the Bank of England in June 1987. All of these series are subject to changes in coverage as the financial system evolves and in the case of M5 to a change in definition in June 1986. For this reason, no meaningful growth rates can be calculated over the whole of the periods requested.

As was made clear, for example, in chapter 2 of the 1987-88 FSBR, there is no simple relationship between the growth of broad money and money GDP and inflation. The Government monitors the growth of broad money as one of the range of factors taken into account in assessing monetary conditions.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Council of Agriculture Ministers

Mr. Nicholas Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Council of Agriculture Ministers meeting on 8 and 9 February in Brussels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The Council of Agriculture Ministers met in Brussels on 8 February 1988. I represented the United Kingdom.

I raised the question of fraud and the CAP, drawing the Council's attention to the recent report by the Comptroller and Auditor General on external trade measures for agricultural produce. I explained that this report commented adversely on the complexity of the Community's agricultural legislation and the scope which this created for fraud. I stressed my own concern on this issue, reminded the Council that the Community's Court of Auditors, in a report last autumn, recommended

increased efforts to combat fraud, and asked the Commission for a progress report on the action it had taken in the light of this.

The Commission informed the Council of changes it is making to supervise more effectively the implementation and control of Community law by member states. The Commission also expressed the hope, which the United Kingdom shares, that the Council would pay greater attention to matters of control and monitoring when considering new proposals. The Council took note and agreed to pursue this issue on a future occasion.

The Council agreed on quotas for manufacturing beef, high quality beef and young cattle to be imported from third countries in 1988. The Community quota for manufacturing beef, in which our industry has the principal interest, is to be 12,000 tonnes.

The Council adopted a proposal for a minor change in the milk quota rules. I took the opportunity again to urge the Commission to enable member states to have greater flexibility over the detailed operation of milk quotas while remaining firmly within the basic framework regulations to ensure that quotas are applied effectively.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (Uruguay Round)

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will specify the proposals for agriculture being prompted by the European Economic Community in the Uruguay round of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade negotiations; and when these proposals were approved by the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Gummer: The Commission's proposals for approaching the negotiations on agriculture in the Uruguay round, approved by the Council on 20 October 1987, are for a two-stage negotiating process. The first stage would comprise, in addition to short-term measures to improve market conditions in the cereals and cereals substitutes, sugar and dairy sectors, a reduction in the levels of agricultural support aimed at bringing markets into better balance. The second stage would comprise further reductions in support, coupled with readjustments in external protection and the development of detailed GATT rules to secure the progress made in the negotiation on a lasting basis. It is also proposed that an appropriate framework of rules be negotiated to govern the use of animal and plant health regulations.

Feedstuffs Substitutes (Tariffs)

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if Her Majesty's Government support proposals on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade proposed by the Commission of the European Economic Community for imposing higher tariffs on produces used as substitutes for animal feedstuffs.

Mr. Gummer: When the Council of Ministers endorsed Commission proposals for a Community approach to the negotiations on agriculture in the Uruguay round, the Government made it clear that we would regard it as difficult to justify proposals for increasing Community protection when the main aim of the GATT negotiation is to liberalise agricultural trade and, in particular, to lower import barriers.

Alternative Land Use

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the Government's estimate of the likely cost of taking agricultural land out of productive use in the United Kingdom in the event of the German proposals being accepted as part of a settlement of the EEC budget.

Mr. MacGregor: The Government believe that a scheme of set-aside could form a useful complement to effective stabilisers in helping to reduce surpluses and stabilise costs. It is not possible at this stage to estimate the likely cost of implementing the proposal in the United Kingdom, as this will depend on rules of implementation which have not yet been determined.

Agricultural Support

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total level of support provided to the British agriculture industry in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. MacGregor: Support to the agricultural industry is provided directly by means of grants and subsidies, and indirectly through expenditure on research and development, advisory services, administration and so on. The annual review of agriculture reports direct expenditure while the public expenditure White Paper covers total expenditure — direct and indirect — on agriculture, fisheries, food and forestry. The latest figures in these two categories are:

	Direct support £ million	*Total support[2] £ million*
1978-79	537	1,008
1979-80	677	1,244
1980-81	1,012	1,639
1981-82	972	1,669
1982-83	1,432	2,157
1983-84	1,717	2,424
1984-85	1,710	2,418
1985-86	2,162	2,879
1986-87	1,444	2,190
[2]1987-88	1,736	2,512

[1] Including fisheries, food etc.
[2] Estimated.

Dead Sheep (Cumbria)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *422*, what advice was given to knackers in Cumbria specifically in respect of the treatment of dead sheep from restricted areas and the resale of meat obtained from such animals.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I have nothing to add to my earlier reply.

Bovine Somatotrophin

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many farms in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, respectively, are currently involved in trials of bovine somatotrophin;

(2) whether consumers are currently receiving milk deliveries from farms involved in trials of bovine somatotrophin; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what results concerning *(a)* the farm animal welfare aspects, *(b)* the economic and production aspects and *(c)* the human health aspects, respectively, have been ascertained thus far from trials of bovine somatotrophin currently being conducted in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Donald Thompson: As I have made clear on a number of occasions, the applications for animal test certificates for BST were rigorously assessed by the veterinary products committee before being granted. It found no reason to recommend that milk from treated cows should be withheld from human consumption or be subject to any other restriction. The animal test certificates were therefore granted accordingly.

The certificates currently authorise trials on 15 sites in the United Kingdom. However, trials may not be in progress on all sites at any one time. It is not possible to provide separate figures for each region as the small numbers involved might allow identification of some individual farms which might contravene section 118 of the Medicines Act.

The work continuing under these animal test certificates is taking full account of the recommendations of the Farm Animal Welfare Council on this product which were contained in my reply of 17 December 1987 at columns *740-1*. No evidence has emerged which would change the veterinary products committee's assessment on human safety. The economic and production aspects of the use of BST are matters for commercial assessment and do not fall under the scope of the Medicines Act.

Food Contamination (Emergency Schemes)

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the Ministry review of contingency plans for dealing with emergency contamination of food and agriculture to be completed.

Mr. Donald Thompson: We are continually reviewing our contingency plans in the light of improvements in information technology and scientific knowledge nationally and internationally.

Milk

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much milk has been imported into the United Kingdom from Canada in the last 12 months; and what were the figures for each of the last five years.

Mr. Donald Thompson: No milk has been imported into the United Kingdom from Canada in the last five years.

Surplus Commodities

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements are being made to distribute European Economic Communities surplus commodities if voluntary bodies are unable to undertake the task;

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* As my right hon. Friend made clear in the announcement on 12 January, the Government are making butter and beef from intervention stores available, for distribution to the most needy, in response to specific applications from suitably qualified organisations. We do not intend to introduce alternative arrangements.

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if local authorities are able to deal with the distribution of European Economic Communities surplus commodities, and whether the cost of the distribution will be fully reimbursed from central Government sources.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* Local authorities may be designated under these arrangements provided they apply and can meet the conditions of the scheme. Reimbursement of administrative costs is available up to about 1 per cent. of the value of the products authorised for release to an organisation; and transport costs may be reimbursed at rates set in the Commission regulation. The cost of payments in both these categories would fall on Community funds.

Land Drainage Rates

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to publish his consultation paper on the future of land drainage rates.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* I cannot yet give any indication as to the likely timing.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Pin-ups

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will issue instructions for the removal of all offensive pin-ups in all his departmental premises.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department has issued guidance to staff informing them that sexual harassment at work is not tolerated and is dealt with as a disciplinary matter through the usual complaints procedures. Further guidance on what is meant by sexual harassment is planned.

Water Safety Training

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the provision of water safety training in schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government recognise the importance of children being able to learn to swim and to be aware of the risks attached to activities where water is involved. The Department's publication "DES Safety Series No. 1 (Safety in Outdoor Pursuits) includes a chapter on "Safety Afloat" and give guidance on various water-based activities.

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of school pupils learn to swim by the age of *(a)* seven, *(b)* eleven and *(c)* 14 years in England and Wales.

Mrs. Rumbold: This information is not collected by the Department.

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what national guidelines are laid down for the assessment of school pupils' ability to swim.

Mrs. Rumbold: No national guidelines are at present laid down, this being a matter for individual local education authorities to determine.

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what national guidelines are laid down for the qualifications required for the teaching of swimming in schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: My Department does not prescribe qualifications for the teaching of swimming in schools but in its general advice on the matter it recommends that swimming teachers should be competent in the principles and practice of life-saving and resuscitation.

Capital Expenditure

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the proportion of sums allocated for capital projects to individual schools which is retained by local authorities to cover administrative expenses; what amounts were allocated in 1987-88 to each school in the Devon local education authority area under the headings *(a)* special education, *(b)* maintenance and repair and *(c)* administrative and other; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: This information is not available.

The administrative expenses of authorities are not capital expenditure, and do not figure in the allocations made by this Department. These are block allocations which are not earmarked to specific projects.

Local authorities are free to apply their allocations as they wish. They may move resources between services and to a limited extent between years. They may supplement the total of their allocations for all services in 1988-89 by the application of 30 per cent. of their accumulated capital receipts.

Devon local education authority's education capital expenditure allocation for the 1987-88 financial year was £4,734,000, and for 1988-89 is £6,262,000. It is the authority's responsibility to decide on its priorities for using these resources.

Student Grants

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average amount of grant received by students in full-time education.

Mr. Jackson: In 1985-86, the latest year for which figures are available, the average maintenance grant, net of assessed parental and other contributions, paid to students in receipt of mandatory or full-value local education authority discretionary awards was £1,202.

Academic Freedom

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has had from Sir David Smith FRS, principal of Edinburgh university, on the place of academic freedom as a component of the conduct of university teaching and research; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) has sent my right hon. Friend a copy of a letter dated 28 January from Sir David Smith. Sir David says that the senatus of Edinburgh university approved unanimously a motion which expressed and reaffirmed the belief that academic freedom is an essential component of the conduct of university teaching and research. He also drew attention to the court's anxiety about the lack of any reference in the Bill to the maintenance of academic freedom.

The Government believe wholeheartedly that academic freedom is fundamental to a healthy system of higher education. I refer the hon. Member to the detailed statements I made in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) on 20 November 1987 at columns *676-78* and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) on 13 January 1988 at columns *268-69*.

Mathematics Teachers

Mr. Alison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what estimate he has made of the optimum number of new mathematics teachers required in Britain for *(a)* the year 1987-88, *(b)* 1992-93 and *(c)* 1997-98; how many properly qualified maths teachers were actually recruited in 1987-88; and what actual recruitment is predicted for 1992-93 and 1997-98.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information is given for England only. The supply of teachers in Wales and in Scotland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland. The Department estimates that about 600 newly qualified secondary mathematics teachers entered service in 1987-88. This is some 15 per cent. short of the number planned. The Government have introduced a range of special measures to attract more teachers to the secondary shortage subjects, including mathematics. For the years 1992-93 and 1997-98 the need for and supply of mathematics teachers for secondary schools will have to be weighed against the demands of mathematics within the national curriculum. It is too early to come to precise estimates for particular subjects.

On the future supply of newly qualified teachers, my right hon. Friend announced on 19 January, at column 629, the timetable for bringing forward proposals for intakes to initial teacher training institutions for the year 1990 and for the period 1991-93.

Education Reform

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has for retaining each of the following facilities and services, currently provided by the Inner London education authority as a united and comprehensive review to all pupils and parents in inner London *(a)* educational prospectus, *(b)* census advice services, *(c)* computer services, *(d)* visual aids equipment, *(e)* library levies, and *(f)* playing fields and sports facilities.

Mr. Dunn: Under the proposals announced by my right hon. Friend on 4 February, each inner London council will become the local education authority for its own area. Councils will be required to publish in 1989 development plans for the education services they will provide from April 1990; these plans will be expected to provide information about the range of support services, such as those listed by the hon. Member, which the council will maintain. In the light of these development plans, and of discussions which the Department will have with the

councils concerned, my right hon. Friend will consider whether formal steps are necessary to promote co-operation between councils in respect of any such services.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science in pursuance of his policy of parental choice and preference, what steps he is taking to consult parents in inner London, concerning the legislation he plans to place before Parliament in respect of education in inner London.

Mr. Dunn: As my right hon. Friend explained in his statement to the House on 4 February, at columns 1178-79, each local council will be required to publish in 1989 a development plan, as a basis for local consultation. These plans will set out the way in which councils propose to organise the transfer of responsibilities and the services they propose to run.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, pursuant to his statement of 4 February, *Official Report*, columns 1178-79, relating to his objective of obtaining better standards of education in inner London, he will state those means of resources which he intends to make available to the new proposed education authorities which are currently not obtainable from the existing Inner London education authority.

Mr. Dunn: The new system of local government finance, which will be introduced at the same time as the transfer of education responsibility to the inner London boroughs, will provide a fair means of distributing resources to local authorities, taking account of local social need. Boroughs will have the opportunity to ensure that the education service in their area is meeting local needs.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, pursuant to his statement of 4 February, *Official Report*, column 1179, he will state the groups of inner London boroughs that he expects to establish joint education committees for specific functions.

Mr. Dunn: The question whether joint education committees need to be established for specific functions, and, if so, the composition of such committees, is a matter which the Department will be discussing with the councils concerned as they draw up development plans for their education service.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to publish his proposals for the operation of further and special education in inner London to continue single comprehensive services, following the abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Dunn: Each inner London council will become the local education authority for its own area, responsible for securing statutory provision such as that referred to by the hon. Member. The question whether these or other aspects of the education service in inner London would benefit from formal or informal co-operation between the new inner London LEAs is one that the Department will be discussing with the councils concerned.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, pursuant to his statement of 4 February, *Official Report*, column 1178, he will state the precise evidence on which he based his conclusion that the service provided by the Inner London education authority is poor.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend's statement explained that pupil performance in ILEA over the past seven years has remained disappointing, despite increasing levels of expenditure which are sharply in excess of those of other inner city authorities. This is borne out by published reports on ILEA schools by HM Inspectorate, and by many of the authority's own reports.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Newham, South of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *534*, he will now obtain and publish the information not then available centrally about pupil and student numbers in each London borough.

Mr. Dunn: As I explained to the hon. Member, my Department does not collect centrally the statistics he has requested. That information is held and published by the Inner London education authority. I will ensure that a copy of the 1987 "Annual Schools Statistics" published by the ILEA, is deposited in the Library of the House.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* the evidence for his assertion, 4 February, *Official Report*, column 1186, that the political leaders of the Inner London education authority had condemned competitive sport.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend based his statement on remarks made by ILEA's inspector for physical education on Thames Television in July 1986, remarks which were never convincingly repudiated by ILEA's political leaders. The lukewarm attitude of ILEA to competitive sports is reflected in the McIntosh report, which recommends that the authority encourages competitive activities within and outside school time.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the inner London boroughs which have *(a)* finally resolved or *(b)* indicated an interest in taking over the functions of the Inner London education authority in their area.

Mr. Dunn: The City of Westminster, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the Borough of Wandsworth have publicly stated their wish to apply for LEA status. Reports in the press have made it clear that other inner London boroughs have been considering the implications of such a step.

Free School Meals

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has about the numbers, or percentage of primary and secondary school pupils in the area of the Inner London education authority in receipt of free meals.

Mr. Dunn: In October 1986, the latest date for which data are available, 58,097 primary and 28,279 secondary pupils in ILEA were in receipt of free school meals. These represented 35·7 per cent. and 29·1 per cent. of the totals respectively.

General Certificate of Secondary Education

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what specific steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to ensure the availability of comparative figures for the whole of the United Kingdom which objectively measure the results of the new general certificate of secondary education examination system and the previous one, and in particular, how both systems compare in respect of *(a)* the percentage of pupils opting out before examinations, *(b)* the percentage of pupils actually taking academic qualifications and *(c)* the percentage of pupils failing the examinations.

Mrs. Rumbold: The range of Government statistics which currently provide information on the nature and extent of academic qualifications obtained by school leavers will be maintained and enhanced. This will permit broad comparisons to be made of the proportions of school leavers entering for, and attaining specific levels of achievement in, the new GCSE examinations and in the former O-level/CSE examinations. These statistics do not cover Scotland, which has a separate examination system from the rest of the United Kingdom.

Science Budget

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the distribution of the science budget for 1988-89.

Mr. Jackson: Having considered the recommendations of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils, my right hon. Friend has decided that the science budget for 1988-89 should, subject to approval by Parliament of the Estimates in due course, be allocated as follows:

1988-89	*£ million cash*
Agricultural and Food Research Council	58·44
Economic and Social Research Council	27·66
Medical Research Council	146·68
Natural Environment Research Council	90·86
Science and Engineering Research Council	366·28
The Royal Society	7·94
The Fellowship of Engineering	0·75
Science Policy Studies (ABRC)	0·10
Centre for Exploitation of Science and Technology	0·08

I am publishing the board's advice today. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many claims were made for mobility allowance in each of the last three years; and how many appealed to *(a)* a medical board, *(b)* a medical appeal tribunal, *(c)* a social security appeal tribunal, *(d)* the commissioner and *(e)* a court, indicating the number of allowances granted at each stage.

Mr. Needham: The information available is given in the table. The figures provided relate to decisions given on claims and appeals in the relevant years not to the outcome of the claims and appeals made in those years.

	1985	*1986*	*1987*
Claims			
Lodged	5,017	5,427	6,382
Total decisions	4,655	5,556	5,608
Decided in claimant's favour	2,330	2,959	2,838
Appeals to medical boards			
Lodged	781	908	772
Total decisions	733	822	697
Decided in claimant's favour	196	186	135
Appeals to medical appeal tribunals			
Lodged	286	261	305
Total decisions	222	273	273
Decided in claimant's favour	79	75	93
Appeals to social security appeal tribunals			
Lodged	43	52	28
Total decisions	36	36	26
Decided in claimant's favour	5	1	1
Appeals to the commissioner			
Lodged	—	2	4
Total decisions	—	2	1
Decided in claimant's favour	—	—	1
Appeals to court of appeal			
Lodged	2	1	1
Total decisions	2	1	1
Decided in claimant's favour	2	—	1

Green Week

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many days the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, the noble Lord Lyell, was in Berlin during Green Week; to which radio, press, and television outlets the Minister gave interviews about Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the benefits to the people of Northern Ireland of this visit.

Mr. Viggers: My noble Friend Lord Lyell attended Green Week in West Berlin from 28 to 30 January 1988 as the United Kingdom representative at the invitation of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, where he had discussions with the President of the Federal Republic, the Federal Minister of Food, Agriculture and Forestry and EC Commissioner Andriessen.

General interviews with the media included the BBC, the British Forces Broadcasting Services and Downtown Radio; *The Scotsman; The Press and Journal*, Aberdeen; *East Anglia Times;* Holt Publications, Australia and Tyne Tees Television.

My noble Friend found the visit to be most useful, as he was able to bring back the message to the food industry in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom that there is a continuing need for the British food industry to recognise consumer demands and the opportunity to capture new markets in Germany by combining all those resources which contribute to high quality and well-presented products.

Extradition

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *291*, he will make it his practice to give *(a)* the summary facts and *(b)* available total figures on possible individual extradition cases.

Mr. Stanley: I shall certainly continue the practice of giving the total figures on the number of applications for

extradition made in a given period as in my reply to the hon. Member on 27 January, at column 292. It would not, however, be in the public interest to give the number of cases where possible extradition applications are being considered, or details of individual cases prior to Irish court proceedings.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made towards the handing over to the Royal Ulster Constabulary of the three persons for whom applications for extradition from the Irish Republic were made between 1 December and 14 December 1987.

Mr. Stanley: One man is currently the subject of extradition proceedings before the district court.

Cars (Imports)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he takes to ensure that all personal car imports into Northern Ireland comply with current regulations.

Mr. Needham: All personal car imports into Northern Ireland must be registered with the Department of the Environment. The Department ensures that the requirements of the regulations relating to personal imports are met before effecting registration.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the cars brought into Northern Ireland from the Irish Republic in each month in 1987 are recorded as having road fund licences paid by a person other than the importee.

Mr. Needham: The information is not available.

Stalker Inquiry

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will establish a judicial inquiry to examine the role of Sir John Hermon, Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and other senior Royal Ulster Constabulary officers, in relation to specific allegations arising out of the Stalker-Sampson inquiry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: The Director of Public Prosecutions reached his conclusions on the results of a very thorough criminal investigation. There is no justification for a judicial inquiry.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether in view of the fact that Mr. John Stalker had recommended the prosecution of Royal Ulster Constabulary officers, up to the rank of chief superintendent for offences, including conspiring to pervert the course of justice and perjury, he will seek the suspension of Sir John Hermon, Chief Constable, pending a full judicial inquiry.

Mr. Tom King: No.

Emergency Provisions Acts

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects the first report by the noble Lord Colville into the operation of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts of 1978 and 1987 to be available.

Mr. Tom King: Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses today.

Bray Urban District Council (Contract)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has received any representations about the cancellation by Bray urban district council of a contract with Macrete Ireland Ltd., Toombridge, to manufacture concrete pipes; if he will invite the European Commission to investigate this cancellation of contracts as a possible breach of Community law; and if he will refer the matter of discrimination against Northern Ireland firms for contracts in the Irish Republic to the next ministerial meeting of the Anglo-Irish conference.

Mr. Viggers *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* No.

Homelessness

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy that bed-and-breakfast accommodation will not be used in Northern Ireland for the homeless; what advice as to the cost to public funds of bed-and-breakfast accommodation he has had from interested parties; what is his assessment of its value as a means of providing for homeless families and individuals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The provision of temporary accommodation for the homeless in Northern Ireland is currently the responsibility of the four health and social services boards. At present boards make limited use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation to meet the immediate needs of homeless people in emergency situations.

Precise information as to the cost of providing bed-and-breakfast accommodation is not readily available. I understand that, to date, the cost has not been greater than the daily board and lodging allowance available under supplementary benefit regulations. The overriding requirement is to meet the immediate needs of the homeless person, which in some instances may be met only by using such accommodation. Given that such accommodation is used only in emergencies and for short periods, I am content with these arrangements.

SOCIAL SERVICES

NHS (Administration)

11. **Mr. Meale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what changes he envisages which will have implications for the cost of administration in the National Health Service.

72. **Mr. Allan Roberts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what changes he envisages which will have implications for the cost of administration in the National Health Service.

89. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what changes he envisages which will have implications for the cost of administration in the National Health Service.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has any plans to reduce the numbers of administrative staff in the National Health Service.

Mr. Moore: It is far too early to speculate on this matter.

Regional and District Health Authority Chairmen

12. **Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what criteria he uses in appointing regional and district health authority chairmen.

Mrs. Currie: In appointing regional and district health authority chairmen we take into account a wide variety of factors, but the most important are the individual's personal qualities, his or her interest in and commitment to health care, any management or other relevant experience, and his or her knowledge of the locality.

Nurse Recruitment

13. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the level of recruitment of nurses into the National Health Service.

Mr. Newton: The level of recruitment of nurses in the National Health Service varies between locality and specialty. Provisional figures for 30 September 1987 show the highest number of nursing and midwifery staff ever —405,200—and overall between September 1979 and September 1987 nursing and midwifery staff in England increased by nearly 47,000 whole-time equivalents. Nevertheless, the National Health Service, particularly in London and the south-east is facing the same decline in the number of suitably qualified school leavers as other large employers. We have, therefore, announced a range of measures on accommodation, the grading structure and training designed to improve recruitment and retention.

Optical Appliances (Vouchers)

14. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will carry out an early review of the voucher system at present operating with regard to optical appliances.

Mrs. Currie: The voucher system has been a great success. In the White Paper, "Promoting Better Health", we said that we would,

give special consideration to the voucher values for those with the poorest sight;
extend the repair/replacement facility to adults who are prone to frequent breakages on account of handicap;
allow vouchers to be used for contact lenses.

These changes will come in on 1 April.

AIDS

15. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he will announce the Government's response to the recommendations of the working group under Dr. Joe Smith concerning ways in which the surveillance of the AIDS epidemic can be improved.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he will publish and when he expects to reach a decision on the recommendation of the working group chaired by the director of the public health laboratory service on ways in which the surveillance of the AIDS epidemic could be improved.

Mr. Newton: We have recently received the report of the expert group chaired by Dr. Joe Smith and are carefully considering its recommendations. We plan to publish it in the near future so that we can take account of the views of those concerned.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what help he will give to local authorities towards the cost of personal social services provided for people with AIDS; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The Government's reply to the report of the Social Services Committee on problems associated with AIDS (Cm. 297) stresses the importance of provision of care and treatment in the community for people who have HIV-related illness and AIDS. That requires good community support services. The demand for such services is at present heavily concentrated in a few local authority areas in inner London.

For 1988-89 we have decided to make available additional joint finance of £2 million for those inner London boroughs. In allocating this sum, we shall take account of the need for personal support services for people with AIDS resident in these boroughs and the services which local authorities are providing or plan to provide. Details of the arrangements which will apply are being sent to the authorities concerned.

The number of people with AIDS who need personal social services will continue to grow and we are currently considering longer-term financial approaches with the local authority associations.

Personal Pensions

16. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the latest forecast date for the introduction of the new personal pensions arrangements.

Mr. Scott: The date from which it will be possible for individuals to join a personal pension scheme as an alternative to the state earnings-related scheme is 1 July 1988.

Maudsley Hospital (Neuro-sciences Centre)

17. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to reach a decision about the building of a neuro-sciences centre at the site of Maudsley hospital, London SE5.

Mrs. Currie: The proposal from the South East Thames RHA will cost at least £29 million and was received in my Department on 22 June 1987. It is currently being examined by officials. Ministers will decide as soon as possible.

District General Managers

18. **Mr. Bidwell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many district general managers have resigned from the National Health Service over the past two years, identified by district; if he will show for each such manager the sector of employment prior to contract with the National Health Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Nine out of a total of 191. This represents a turnover rate of 2 per cent. per annum, which I understand is below average for posts at this level in large scale organistions. The other information is as follows:

District	*Previous employment*
West Surrey and North East Hants	Banking
Central Birmingham	Armed forces

District	Previous employment
Macclesfield	Company director
Nottingham	Communications industry
Bexley	Armed forces
Bromley	Armed forces
South Bedfordshire	Company director
Rochdale	National Health Service
West Dorset	National Health Service

Patient Treatment Statistics

19. **Mr. Baldrey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number of *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients treated in the Oxfordshire health district in 1979 and in the last year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie: There were 69,306 in-patient cases treated and 344,852 out-patient attendances in 1979 in this health district; in 1986 the comparable figures were 80,420 and 374,680.

58. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many in-patients and out-patients were treated under the National Health Service in 1978 and the latest available year.

Mrs. Currie: The requested information is given in the table.

Patients treated in NHS hospitals, England

	1978	1986	Per cent. increase 1978-1986
In-patients treated	5,370,319	6,413,789	19·4
New out-patients	7,711,912	8,767,788	13·7
Total out-patient attendances	33,950,339	37,727,608	11·1

Child Abuse

20. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will set up an inquiry to determine the extent and definition of child sexual abuse; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We have no plans to set up such an inquiry. Child abuse is defined already in the draft DHSS guide "Working Together". Further guidance will be issued when the Cleveland inquiry report has been received and considered. A national statistical return on the number of children on child protection registers will be piloted in March 1988.

Winter Mortality

21. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the causes and incidence over the past 30 years of excess winter mortality.

Mrs. Currie: There is no universally accepted definition of excess winter mortality. However, the table shows the number of deaths registered in the three-monthly periods January to March ("winter") and July to September ("summer"), the difference, and the difference expressed as a percentage of the "summer" figure, for each year from 1958 to 1987, and for five yearly periods 1958-62 to 1983-87, for England and Wales.

The causal relationship between cold weather and excess mortality is not clearly understood, and further research is needed.

'Excess' winter mortality: England and Wales, 1953-87

Year	Winter Deaths A	Summer Deaths B	Difference A − B	Percentage Excess (A − B) × 100 / B
1958	163,595	105,629	57,966	54·9
1959	176,880	103,398	73,482	71·1
1960	149,037	112,477	36,560	32·5
1961	177,043	110,747	66,296	59·9
1962	178,210	110,688	67,522	61·0
1963	196,875	113,918	82,957	72·8
1964	156,072	113,551	42,521	37·4
1965	157,184	119,173	38,011	31·9
1966	173,438	118,005	55,433	47·0
1967	145,323	118,552	26,771	22·6
1968	181,136	121,119	60,317	49·8
1969	168,493	120,987	47,506	39·3
1970	172,443	123,750	48,693	39·3
1971	159,347	124,663	34,684	27·8
1972	170,587	128,481	42,106	32·8
1973	169,799	126,645	43,154	34·1
1974	161,028	131,522	29,506	22·4
1975	159,816	128,981	30,835	23·9
1976	184,775	125,861	58,914	46·8
1977	160,233	127,418	32,815	25·8
1978	171,039	128,047	42,992	33·6
1979	175,423	128,112	47,311	36·9
1980	161,577	129,204	32,373	25·1
1981	160,554	128,802	31,752	24·7
1982	166,454	126,944	39,510	31·1
1983	167,638	130,008	37,630	28·9
1984	158,119	123,244	34,875	28·3
1985	173,199	129,569	43,630	33·7
1986	171,106	128,951	42,155	32·7
1987[1]	153,084	127,909	25,175	19·7

[1] Provisional.

Five Year Period	Percentage Excess Winter Mortality
1958-1962	55·6
1963-1967	42·2
1968-1972	37·7
1973-1977	30·5
1978-1982	30·2
1983-1987	28·6

Notes:
Winter: deaths registered in months January to March inclusive.
Summer: deaths registered in months July to September inclusive.

Disabled Claimants

22. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultation he has had with Disability Alliance about the effect on severely disabled claimants of reducing their entitlements in April.

24. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what proposals he has to protect disabled claimants in need of domestic assistance when the allowance for that purpose is abolished in April.

45. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a further statement about the protection of disabled claimants who will have a reduced entitlement when the Social Security Act 1986 comes into full effect in April.

55. **Mr. Terry Fields:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he proposes to take to protect disabled people whose allowance for domestic assistance will end in April.

59. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultation he has had with the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation in regard to the effects for severely disabled people of reducing the entitlements of those applying for benefit after April.

70. **Mr. Faulds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultation he has had with the Spastics Society about the effects on severely disabled people of reducing the entitlements of new claimants after April.

71. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what measures he intends to take to help provide for the needs of the very severely disabled after the implementation of the Social Security Act 1986.

75. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what further consultations he has had with the organisations of and for disabled people about the reduced entitlements of disabled claimants who will be applying for benefit in April.

98. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultation he has had with the Royal National Institute for the Blind about the effect of reducing the entitlements of severely disabled claimants after April.

110. **Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will now make a further statement about the protection of disabled people who will have a reduced entitlement in April.

111. **Miss Emma Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on measures to help severely disabled people to live independently in the community from April.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. and right hon. Members and my hon. Friends to my reply earlier today to the hon. Members for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) and for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn).

114. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the maximum loss new disabled claimants in need of domestic assistance can expect in April.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the form requested. Additional supplementary benefit of up to £51·12 may currently be awarded for essential residential domestic assistance. Otherwise, there is no upper limit to the charge met, provided it is reasonable in the circumstances. At February 1986, some 4,500 people received these additions, the average weekly amount was £6·35.

Pensioners (Incomes)

23. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services to what extent pensioners' incomes have changed since 1979.

Mr. Scott: Pensioners' incomes grew on average by 2·7 per cent. a year in real terms between 1979 and 1985—18 per cent. over the period. This rate of increase was more than twice as fast as for the population as a whole.

Junior Hospital Doctors

25. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate he has of how much unpaid overtime working is undertaken by junior hospital doctors; and if he will make a statement.

31. **Mrs. Golding:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate he has of how much unpaid overtime working is undertaken by junior hospital doctors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Under their national terms of service, junior hospital doctors may not be required to undertake unpaid additional duty other than, exceptionally, in occasional emergencies or unforeseen circumstances. Information is not collected centrally on the amount of such duty, but we have emphasised to employing authorities that it should not be undertaken on a regular or prolonged basis.

Northern Regional Health Authority

26. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the annual administrative costs of the Northern regional health authority.

Mrs. Currie: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health to my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on 15 December 1987 at columns *493-5*.

Young People

27. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many young people in England and Wales left local authority care to live independently in 1986-87.

Mrs. Currie: Information is not available centrally in exactly the form requested. Of the 12,400 young people aged 16 years and over who left local authority care in England during the year ending 31 March 1986, a total of 1,800 were living independently or in lodgings immediately prior to leaving care.

Information for 1986-87 is not available yet. Information for Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Sickle Cell Anaemia

28. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on National Health Service provision for sufferers from sickle cell anaemia.

Mrs. Currie: Screening and counselling services are provided by district health authorities which decide the resources to be devoted locally to this inherited blood disorder in the light of local needs, and competing priorities. There are 12 National Health Service sickle cell counselling centres in England. In addition, the Department makes grants of £15,000 per annum each to the Sickle Cell Society and to the Organisation for Sickle Cell Anaemia Research.

We shall be launching a new initiative in March, in which haemoglobinopathy cards will be provided for issue by haematologists to patients who have been tested for either sickle cell disease or thalassaemia. Patients will be able to use the card to provide doctors, nurses and dentists with information they may need before giving treatment.

Competitive Tendering

29. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the savings released by the competitive tendering of catering services.

33. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the savings released by competitive tendering of domestic services.

34. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the progress to date of the competitive tendering initiative.

80. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the savings released by the competitive tendering of laundry services.

Mr. Newton: The most recent information held centrally is for the quarter ended 30 September 1987. Estimated annual savings generated for the three services were: domestic services £77·8 million, catering services £17 million, and laundry services £8·2 million—a total of some £103 million. Good progress has been made by health authorities in testing the cost-effectiveness of these services. As at 30 September 1987, a total of 84 per cent. had been subject to competitive tendering.

Bexley Health Authority

30. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received concerning the funding of Bexley health authority in the financial year 1988-89.

Mr. Newton: I have received letters from two hon. Members who both refer to correspondence I have received from the chairman of Greenwich and Bexley family practitioner committee and to whom replies have been sent.

In the current financial year Bexley health authority is receiving an additional £275,000 from the additional resources I announce on 16 December 1987.

Pensions and Standing Charges

32. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what recent representations he has received from pensioners' organisations seeking the introduction of higher pensions and the abolition of standing charges.

Mr. Scott: We receive a large volume of regular correspondence from pensioners and pensioners' organisations alike on these issues. There have recently been 12 representations from pensioners' organisations on pension levels and items such as standing charges.

NHS (Industrial Relations)

35. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the current state of industrial relations in the National Health Service.

Mr. Newton: While I regret that some National Health Service staff have recently taken industrial action, NHS management and staff generally enjoy good industrial relations. There are well-established mechanisms for both national negotiation of pay and conditions of service and local disputes procedures which, allied to the commitment of management, staff and their representatives, ensure that disruption to patient services through industrial disputes is minimal. This is borne out by a comparison of the latest available figures published in the September 1987 Department of *Employment Gazette*. In 1986 an average of 89 days were lost per 1,000 employees in all United Kingdom industries and services through stoppage of work. In the United Kingdom industry group "medical and health services" (which includes private health care staff and general medical and dental services) only eight days were lost per 1,000 employees.

Information Technology Staff

36. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many information technology staff in his Department work in the north or north-west of England or in Yorkshire.

Mr. Scott: The total number of civil servants in the Department wholly employed on information technology tasks (as specified in Treasury-Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency guidelines) in grades from executive officer to unified grade 7 is 1,494. Of these, 730 work in the north-east of England and 320 work in the north-west. There are, in addition, 1,174 data processing staff below the grade of executive officer who work in the north-east and 146 who work in the north-west. The Department does not hold any details of information technology staff working in Yorkshire.

Unclaimed Benefit

37. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give his Department's current estimates of the amount of unclaimed supplementary, unemployment and other benefits.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to paragraph 21 on page 272 and table 15.17 on page 273 of Cmnd. 288 (the 1988 public expenditure White Paper).

EC (Health Statistics)

38. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of gross domestic product the public sector contributes to health in each EEC country.

79. **Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of gross domestic product the public sector contributes to health in each EEC country.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Members to my right hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) earlier today.

Prescription Charges

39. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total values of prescription charges collected by prescribing and dispensing doctors for 1986-87.

Mr. Newton: The total income from prescription charges collected by doctors in England during 1986-87 was £7,718,000.

Southend General Hospital (Radiotherapy Unit)

40. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is now in a position to determine the

appeal by the Southend community health council against the decision of the North-East Thames regional health authority on the future of the radiotherapy unit at Southend general hospital; and if he will make a statement.

104. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement about the future of the cancer treatment unit and radiotherapy department at Southend hospital.

Mrs. Currie: We hope to announce a decision on this proposal very soon.

NHS (Computer System)

41. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to establish a national computer system of National Health Service treatments and operations available and at which locations, against which patients' needs can be computed; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: We have at present no plans to establish a national computer system of National Health Service treatments and operations. We have asked regional health authorities to make available to GPs information, especially about waiting lists and waiting times, to enable them to make the most appropriate referrals for their patients. Some already make use of computerised systems.

Parents' Incomes (Report)

42. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has considered the recent report of the family policy study centre, "Family Fortunes; Parents' Incomes in the 1980s," a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement.

90. **Mr. Allen Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his policy towards home support in the light of the recent report of the family policy study centre "Family Fortunes; Parents' Incomes in the 1980s," a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I understand that the Central Statistical Office has written to the Family Policy Studies Centre expressing doubts about some of the methods and results used in this study. Particular reservations have been expressed about the treatment of family expenditure survey data on one-parent households where the results differ dramatically from those suggested by other findings. I await the outcome of this correspondence.

Single Payments (Rotherham)

43. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the expenditure on single payments incurred in the metropolitan borough of Rotherham in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Scott: Claimants who live in the metropolitan borough of Rotherham are served by the following local offices: Rotherham (North); Rotherham (South) and Wath-on-Dearne. The area boundaries of these offices are not conterminous with those of the metropolitan borough of Rotherham. The last complete statistical year for which figures are available is April 1986 to April 1987, and the total expenditure on single payments for that year by these three offices is included in a table which is in the Library.

NHS (Funding)

44. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects his internal inquiry into the funding of the National Health Service to be completed.

86. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plan to publish a Green Paper on financing and reform of the National Health Service.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friends to my right hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) earlier today.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make it his policy to apply for extra funds from next year's £3·5 billion spending reserve to meet the needs of the National Health Service.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 26 January 1988]:* I have nothing to add to the plans for public expenditure, including spending on the NHS, set out in the White Paper published in January (Cm. 288).

Family Credit

46. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to involve employers in disseminating information on the new family credit scheme.

Mr. Scott: We shall shortly be sending all employers a leaflet giving basic information about family credit so that they can, if they wish, tell employees about the new scheme. Claims and payment of family credit will, of course, be handled by the Department.

117. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what effect the introduction of family credit will have on the unemployment and poverty traps.

Mr. Scott: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) on 30 June 1987 at column 76.

Nurse Training

47. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what proposals he is examining on increasing spending in nurse training.

Mr. Newton: Our aim is to ensure that training provision matches the needs of the NHS; not to spend any particular sum of money. Expenditure is therefore determined largely by health authorities in the light of their own assessments of their future requirements for professional staff. We are however currently considering the UKCC's Project 2000 proposals for changes in the pattern of nurse education and training as a whole.

Project 2000

48. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the implementation of Project 2000.

Mr. Newton: We want nurses to receive an education and training which not only equips them for their future roles but is sufficiently attractive to recruit—and retain — those who might otherwise be tempted into other fields. So we fully recognise the importance of the

proposals that the UKCC has put forward which are designed to meet those ends and hope to be in a position to make a response by Easter.

Birth Statistics

49. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the comparative rate of caesarian section as opposed to spontaneous delivery of women giving birth in *(a)* NHS hospitals and *(b)* private hospitals during the last four years for which figures are available.

68. **Ms. Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the comparative rate of caesarian delivery as opposed to spontaneous delivery of women giving birth in *(a)* National Health Service hospitals and *(b)* private hospitals during the last four years for which figures are available.

107. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the comparative rate of caesarian delivery as opposed to spontaneous delivery of women giving birth in *(a)* National Health Service hospitals and *(b)* private hospitals during the last four years for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie: The table shows data from the hospital in-patient inquiry maternity statistics. These statistics are derived from registration material and from maternal discharges derived from a nominal one in 10 sample of in-patient records from maternity units of the National Health Service non-psychiatric hospitals in England. The latest available year for these data is 1985.

Comprehensive data on maternities in private hospitals are not available centrally.

Estimated total deliveries, number and percentage by mode of delivery, NHS hospitals, England, 1982-85.

Year	*Number or per cent.*	*Estimated total deliveries*	*Mode of delivery*	
			Caesarean	*Spontaneous*
1982	Number	574,620	58,110	441,440
	per cent.	100	10·1	76·8
1983	Number	578,380	58,370	440,950
	per cent.	100	10·1	76·2
1984	Number	586,110	59,140	449,300
	per cent.	100	10·1	76·7
1985	Number	605,120	63,270	461,860
	per cent.	100	10·5	76·3

District Health Authorities (Deficits)

50. **Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the estimated deficit of all district health authorities in England and Wales for the current financial year.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. McNair-Wilson) and the hon. Members for Burnley (Mr. Pike) and for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) on 18 December 1987 at columns *936-37*.

Questions concerning health authorities in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Families (Resources)

51. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will make a statement on the effects on the targeting of resources for families with children of the social security reforms.

65. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will make a statement on the effects on the targeting of resources for families with children of the social security reforms.

Mr. Scott: I refer my hon. Friends to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) on 12 January 1988 at column *251*.

Senior Hospital Doctors and Dentists (Disciplinary Procedures)

52. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the review of the disciplinary procedures affecting senior hospital doctors and dentists announced by him in May 1987 has yet reported; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We are expecting a report later this year from the joint working party which has been undertaking this review. We will then decide what changes might be made to the disciplinary procedures, and negotiations between the health Departments and the professions will follow.

Mobility and Attendance Allowance Tribunals

53. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans are in hand to improve the operational efficiency of mobility and attendance allowance tribunals.

Mr. Scott: The social security appeal tribunals — which consider appeals on claims for attendance allowance and mobility allowance—and medical appeal tribunals— which consider appeals on medical questions affecting mobility allowance — are the responsibility of the independent president of social security and medical appeal tribunals. Reviews of decisions on the medical criteria for attendance allowance are the responsibility of the independent Attendance Allowance Board. The tribunals and the board consider many thousands of appeals and reviews each year. I know that the president and the board are anxious to minimise the time taken to deal with appeals and reviews. They are in regular contact with our officials to see how arrangements for handling appeals and reviews can be improved.

Thames Region (Capital Expenditure)

54. **Mr. Leighton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what the revenue resource consequences of capital expenditure by Thames region have been for each year since 1984; if he will provide comparable information for each district health authority and special health authority in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that the information requested is not available centrally. The hon. Member may like to contact the chairmen of the health authorities concerned.

North Western Regional Health Authority

56. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he last met the chairman of the North Western regional health authority; what subjects were discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland) on 12 January at column *128*.

Divisional Relocations

57. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to complete his review of the possible relocation out of London of divisions within his Department; and what priority he attaches to achieving such a relocation.

Mr. Moore: It is expected that the first stage of the relocation study will be completed in the spring of this year. The study is being carried out as a part of the continuing requirement to ensure that the administration of the Department is carried out in the most efficient and cost-effective way: a requirement to which I attach the greatest importance.

Social Security Act 1986

60. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Social Security Act 1986.

Mr. Scott: Implementation of the Social Security Act 1986 is well advanced. Indications from our own local officers are that the process of implementation is going well. Introduction of the new family credit is on course and new cases will be accepted from the beginning of March. Existing supplementary benefit cases are now being reassessed for conversion to income support. The social fund manual was published in November, social fund officers are now being trained and local office budgets have been allocated. Preliminary results from a survey of progress in local authorities indicate that the majority of local authorities expect to implement the reform of housing benefit on time.

Pensioners

61. **Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people he expects to attain pensionable age in the decades commencing 1991, 2001 and 2011.

Mr. Scott: The numbers of people in the United Kingdom newly attaining pension age in the decades commencing 1991, 2001 and 2011 are estimated as follows:

Numbers attaining pension Age

Decade commencing	*(million)*
1991	5·4
2001	6·2
2011	6·8

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

105. **Mr. Summerson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the average annual income of pensioners in England in 1974, 1979, and the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Scott: The average total net annual income of a British pensioner couple was £5,025 in 1974, £5,185 in 1979, and £5,995 in 1985 at 1985 prices. That of a single pensioner was £2,700, £2,785 and £3,330 respectively.

Health Authorities (Funding)

62. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he has taken to ensure that the distribution of funds to both regional and district health authorities reflects their relative efficiency as well as their need.

Mr. Newton: Our general policy is to bring the allocation of resources to regions gradually closer to targets based on their relative health needs as assessed by the resource allocation working party formula. In judging the pace of change, however, we seek to take account of all relevant factors; and we urge regions in turn to take account of all relevant factors in determining their allocations to districts.

69. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will allocate additional money to health authorities to finance revenue costs of money raised by voluntary efforts.

Mrs. Currie: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him on 24 November 1987, at column *176*.

Cook/Chill Catering (Wakefield)

63. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he proposes to take on the call by Wakefield health authority for a public inquiry to be held into the circumstances surrounding the proposed introduction of a cook/chill system of catering into its hospitals.

Mrs. Currie: I can confirm that we have received such a request. It is currently under consideration and I expect to respond to the health authority's letter shortly.

Staff Turnover

64. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide details of the turnover of staff in social security local offices in London and north-east regions, the resignations of staff, by grade, and overall wastage and shortfall of staff in the London and north-east regions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The tables give details of the turnover, wastage, resignations and shortfall of staff, in each grade, in local offices in the London north, London south and north-east regions of the Department. The latest available

data have been provided in each case. The data concerning the shortfall of staff are not available by grade. Turnover is defined as the loss and movement of staff due to resignation, retirement, dismissal, death, transfer, promotion and reversion. Wastage is defined as the loss of staff due to resignation, retirement, dismissal, death and transfer to other Government Departments.

Period 1 October 1986 to 30 September 1987[1]

	Grade				
Region	*EO/LOII*	*AO/LOII*	*AA*	*Typists*	*Others*
Turnover					
London North	14·36	25·36	34·99	17·87	16·56
London South	18·70	27·48	48·51	18·75	14·97
North East	11·98	13·87	45·80	12·15	14·89
Wastage					
London North	4·45	17·06	22·38	14·73	6·09
London South	6·95	17·49	27·43	17·31	6·24
North East	3·51	7·24	11·48	6·34	4·58

[1] The figures shown are the number of "leavers" expressed as a percentage of the staff complement for each grade.

Shortfall of staff—position as on 1 January 1988[1]

Region	*Percentage*
London North	0·76
London South	1·49
North East	0·48

[1] Percentage shortfall of staff below planned staffing levels.

Total number of resignations for the period 1 April 1986 to 31 March 1987[1]

	Grade				
Region	*HEO*	*EO/LOI*	*AO/LOII*	*AA*	*Total*
London North	4	93	901	386	1,384
London South	9	125	844	424	1,402
North East	0	28	247	135	410

[1] The figures shown give the position in the regional as well as the local offices within each region.

Thames Regional Health Authorities

66. **Ms. Abbot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to reverse the cut in real resources to Thames regional health authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: There has been no cut in real resources. Over the period 1978-79 to 1986-87, gross revenue expenditure in the four Thames regions rose by 119·5 per cent. Compared with general inflation this represents a real terms increase of 12·8 per cent.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the percentage change in *(a)* revenue expenditure and *(b)* capital expenditure on hospital and community health services in real terms, using the National Health Service pay and prices deflator, for the four Thames regional health authorities in total, between 1981-82 and 1986-87.

Mr. Newton: The information required on revenue expenditure was given in my right hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member on 12 January at column *132*. The increase in gross capital expenditure in the Thames regions over this period was 37 per cent. after allowing for the effects of capital inflation in the hospital and community health services.

Operation Costs

67. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he is taking to establish the costs of various operative procedures, including hip replacement operations, within the National Health Service.

Mrs. Currie: The Department currently relies on estimates and ad hoc surveys to establish these costs, which will vary significantly according to the type of patient and severity of the condition. An estimate of the cost of a hip replacement operation was made in 1984. At current prices this amounts to about £3,300. But this does not take account of the subsequent fall in the average length of in-patient stay in hospital which will tend to reduce the cost per case treated.

The Department will continue to use these estimates until more comprehensive information systems are available. One such is the resources mangement initiative which is currently being piloted at five acute hospital sites. The projects concerned will be evaluated later in the year.

Resettlement Review

73. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects the work of the resettlement review advisory steering group to be completed.

Mr. Scott: The advisory steering group advises the Department on the best strategy to achieve better resettlement provision and the closure of resettlement units. No date has been set for the completion of this process or the work of the advisory steering group.

Diabetics

74. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received concerning the ending of the diet allowance for diabetics under the new system of income support.

Mr. Scott: Apart from correspondence from hon. Members, we have received a number of representations from individual members of the public.

Hospital Building

76. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will make a statement on the hospital building programme.

Mrs. Currie: The largest ever health building programme in the history of the National Health Service is continuing. Information held centrally shows that there and currently more than 480 health building schemes, each costing over £1 million, at various stages of planning, design and construction. The total value of the programme is estimated at over £3·5 billion, and the total capital expenditure this year is expected to exceed £990 million.

These building schemes, which are located throughout the country, are providing a better health care environment for National Health Service patients and more attractive working conditions for staff. They are helping to improve productivity and value for money. Newer designs have been generally very well received by patients and the public.

Community Care

77. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what funds have been made available to London local authorities from health authorities for care in the community initiatives for each year since 1984, identified by amount and by authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The information held centrally on joint finance expenditure does not identify separately expenditure on individual schemes such as those related to the care in the community initiative. The hon. Member may wish to seek further information from the chairmen of the health authorities concerned.

82. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a further statement about the Government's plans for care in the community.

Mr. Newton: Sir Roy Griffiths's recommendations on various aspects of community care, including provisions for people leaving long-stay hospitals under the care in the community arrangements, are expected to reach us very soon. We shall give them very careful consideration.

Voluntary Unemployment

78. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when regulations will be introduced to extend the maximum period of benefit reduction in alleged cases of voluntary unemployment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We hope to introduce an order to amend section 20(1) of the Social Security Act 1975, which gives the power to disqualify a person for unemployment benefit, in the near future. Regulations amending the income support regulations consequential on provisions in the current Social Security Bill will follow.

It is the Government's intention that the periods of disqualification for unemployment benefit and for the reduction of income support in cases of voluntary unemployment will be increased from a maximum of 13 weeks to a maximum of 26 weeks from 11 April 1988. Falling unemployment and the strengthening economy are bringing a reduction in the total number of claims for benefit from unemployed people. The number of claims from people who have left jobs voluntarily without just cause has, however, increased.

Departmental Offices

81. **Mr. Boateng:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average interval between redecorations in his Department's local offices; what plans he has to provide play facilities for claimants with young children and to reduce smoking in the public waiting areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Redecorations of local offices are scheduled for every six years, with shorter intervals for offices in more dirty environments or for parts of offices affected by heavy usage, for example public waiting areas. No information is held centrally on the actual interval between redecorations in individual offices. Play facilities are not normally provided unless there is a particular local need. Smoking in local offices, including within the public waiting area, is currently being reviewed by a joint working party with the trade unions.

Health Services (Plymouth)

83. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will arrange to meet the chairman of Plymouth health authority to discuss health services in Plymouth.

Mrs. Currie: There are no present plans to do so. Ministers do, however, have regular meetings with regional health authority chairmen from whom we receive first-hand accounts of current developments within their regions.

Nurses Pay Review Body Report

84. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, when he expects to receive the report of the nurses pay review board.

Mr. Newton: The nurses' pay review body is expected to make its report to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in the spring.

Dental Treatment

85. **Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he takes to monitor the effect of National Health Service charges for dental treatment on dental health; and if he will make regular reports on this to the House.

Mrs. Currie: I refer the hon. Member to my reply earlier today to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley).

London Ambulance Service

87. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make an official visit to the headquarters of the London ambulance service.

Mrs. Currie: We have no plans to do so. My noble Friend, who has particular responsibility for the London ambulance service, visited the headquarters in October 1987.

103. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many staff have been employed by the London ambulance service for each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The number of whole-time equivalent ambulance men and women in post in each year, as at March, was as follows:

Year (March)	*Whole-time equivalent*
1979	2,017·0
1980	1,950·0
1981	2,148·0
1982	2,131·0
1983	2,063·0
1984	2,079·0
1985	2,099·0
1986	2,037·0
1987	2,248·5

We welcome the continued increase in the number of ambulance personnel since March 1986.

Benefits

88. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average number of days taken to process a social security claim in *(a)* the London region and *(b)* other regions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The table records, by region and for the four-week period to 15 December 1987, average clearance times for claims to supplementary benefit, sickness benefit (including invalidity benefit), maternity benefit and retirement pension. I regret that claims for other social security benefits are not recorded by region.

Date (15 December 1987)	*Supplementary benefit*	*Sickness benefit*	*Maternity benefit*	*Retirement pension*
London North	7·1	13·4	17·7	24·7
London South	6·6	12·5	19·0	24·6
North Eastern	4·7	7·6	11·9	19·8
Midlands	5·7	8·8	12·4	20·7
Wales and South West	5·0	7·4	13·2	21·8
North Western	4·5	8·7	12·8	23·0
Scotland	3·9	7·2	10·6	20·9
National	5·4	9·2	14·4	22·0

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will set out in tabular form the number of *(a)* claimants and *(b)* dependants claiming each of the mean-tested benefits for which his Department is responsible; and if he will provide comparable data for 1979.

Mr. Portillo: The readily available information for successful claimants is set out in the tables.

Income-related benefit recipients and their dependants Great Britain: 1986

Thousands

Date	*Benefit*	*Number of recipients*	*Number of dependants*
February 1986	Supplementary Benefit	4,938	3,353
April 1986	Family Income Supplement	200	530
Autumn 1986	Standard Housing Benefit	3,730	n/a
1986	Recipients getting one or more income-related benefit	[1]8,500	n/a

n/a Figures not available.

[1] This figures reflects an adjustment for the overlap between the benefits (ie: people receiving two or more of the above benefits).

Income-related benefit recipients and their dependants Great Britain: 1979

Thousands

Date	*Benefit*	*Number of recipients*	*Number of dependants*
November 1979	Supplementary Benefit	2,855	1,516
April 1979	Family Income Supplement	77	214
1979-80	Rate Rebate[1]	3,065	n/a
1979	Recipients getting one or more income-related benefit	[2]5,900	n/a

n/a Figures not available.

[1] Housing benefit was not introduced until 1983. It replaced the former DOE rate rebate, rent allowance and rent rebate schemes. Most recipients of a rent allowance or rent rebate would also have received a rate rebate. Figures are not available for the small number of people who received rent allowance or rent rebate only.

[2] This figures reflects an adjustment for the overlap between the benefits (ie: people receiving two or more of the above benefits).

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people in the Seaham and Peterlee area are in receipt of *(a)* attendance allowance, *(b)* industrial disablement benefit, *(c)* industrial death benefit, *(d)* invalid care allowance, *(e)* invalidity benefit, *(f)* mobility allowance, *(g)* retirement pension, *(h)* severe disablement allowance, (i) supplementary pension, *(j)* war pensions and *(k)* widows' benefits; and what were the numbers for each of the last five years.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that some of this information is not available or not available in the form requested.

The table sets out for the periods requested the numbers of people in receipt of industrial disablement benefit, invalidity benefit (including sickness benefit), severe disablement benefit and supplementary benefit in the areas served by the Department's offices at Peterlee and Seaham. No local records are kept for industrial death benefit and no separate records are kept for beneficiaries of sickness and invalidity benefit. In some instances local records before 1985 are not available because they have been destroyed.

Also no records are kept, by area, of the numbers in receipt of attendance allowance, invalid care allowance, mobility allowance, retirement pension, war pension and widows' benefit because these benefits are administered at the Department's central offices.

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Peterlee						
Industrial Disablement Benefit	2,416 (Dec)	2,470 (Dec)	2,370 (Dec)	2,252 (Dec)	2,197 (Dec)	2,143 (Jan)
Invalidity Benefit (including sickness benefit)	..	..	7,090 (Jan)	7,051 (Jan)	7,886 (Jan)	7,834 (Jan)
Severe Disablement Allowance[1]	..	..	276 (Jan)	370 (Jan)	363 (Jan)	359 (Jan)
Supplementary Pensions	..	1,295 (July)	1,241 (July)	1,236 (July)	1,237 (July)	[2]
Seaham						
Industrial Disablement Benefit	..	1,095 (April)	1,008 (April)	1,162 (April)	926 (April)	824 (Jan)
Invalidity Benefit (including sickness benefit)	1,489 (April)	1,621 (April)	1,696 (April)	1,852 (April)	1,946 (April)	2,051 (April)
Severe Disablement Allowance[1]	..	..	84 (April)	136 (April)	136 (April)	149 (Jan)
Supplementary Pensions	836 (Dec)	962 (Dec)	995 (Dec)	1,019 (Dec)	1,075 (Nov)	[2]

[1] Severe disablement allowance replaced Non-contributory invalidity pensions from 29 November 1984.
[2] Not yet available.
.. Not available.

Doctors (Negligence)

94. **Sir Anthony Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will meet representatives of the General Medical Council to discuss the system of dealing with cases of negligence by doctors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I have no present plans to do so. However, the General Medical Council, which is an independent statutory body, is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of their disciplinary procedures and I await with interest the outcome of that review.

Private Health Services

95. **Mr. Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has on the private health contribution by the private health sector in Germany and France in percentages of their gross domestic product.

Mrs. Currie: The proportion of gross domestic product spent on private health care in Germany and France in 1985 was 1·8 per cent. and 1·7 per cent. respectively.

Keep Warm Keep Well Campaign

96. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the progress to date the Keep Warm Keep Well campaign.

Mr. Scott: To the end of January, there had been approximately 5,000 calls to the "Winter Warmth" freephone line. There has been a strong demand for the campaign booklet, of which 750,000 copies have been printed, from both the general public and from bodies such as community health councils. The Department is continuing to place both national and regional newspaper advertisements on the campaign, and we have provided publicity material to the television and radio organisations.

Pensioners (Investment Income)

97. **Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what changes have taken place in the value of pensioners' incomes from investment *(a)* between 1974 and 1979 and *(b)* from 1979 to date.

Mr. Scott: The average income from investment of a pensioner household *(a)* decreased in real terms by 16 per cent. between 1974 and 1979, an average of 3·4 per cent. a year; and *(b)* increased in real terms by 53 per cent. between 1979 and 1985, an average of 7·3 per cent. a year.

Hospitals Inspectorate

99. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will consider setting up an inspectorate of hospitals to report upon the state and efficiency of hospital establishments, similar in concept to Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools.

Mr. Newton: We will bear my hon. Friend's suggestion in mind.

Disabled People (Discrimination)

100. **Mr. Wall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the number of cases

of discrimination against disabled people which have been referred to his Department in each of the last three years; and what action he has taken.

Mr. Scott: The numbers of complaints of alleged discrimination against disabled people referred to the Department in each of the last three years were as follows:

	Numbers
1985	Two
1986	none
1987	Four

Of those six complaints, in one case there was no evidence of discrimination; in two cases we requested further information from the complainant but received no response; one complaint was resolved in favour of the complainant during the course of our inquiries; and two cases are still outstanding.

Nurses (Pay)

101. **Mr. McCrindle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received on nurses' pay levels for 1988-89; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We have received around 850 representations on nurses' pay levels for 1988-89 in the last two months. The level of pay for nurses is a matter for the independent nurses' pay review body which is expected to make its recommendations on pay levels for 1988-89 to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in the spring.

Young People (Benefit)

102. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received relating to his announcement that young people shall no longer generally be eligible to receive benefit.

Mr. Scott: Up to 2 February we have received a total of 69 letters concerning the Government's proposal to withdraw the general entitlement to income support from 16 and 17-year-olds. Like representations made by hon. Members during the passage through the House of the current Social Security Bill, most of the letters expressed concern about particular groups such as lone parents, the homeless, the disabled and those in education. The representations made will be fully considered when the regulations are framed to exempt certain groups of people from the general provision.

Public Houses (No-smoking Areas)

106. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultations he has had with brewers regarding the installation of no-smoking areas in pubs.

Mrs. Currie: None. The provision of no-smoking areas in bars and restaurants is a matter for the owners. The Government do, however, welcome the extension of non-smoking facilities in public places, since two thirds of the people in this country do not now smoke cigarettes.

Hospital Treatment Costs (Yorkshire)

108. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the most recent figures for the cost of in-patients and out-patients treated at York district hospital; what are the figures for the six similar non-teaching hospitals in the Yorkshire regional health authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: For 1986-87, hospital cost returns submitted to the Department show average costs for in-patients and out-patients treated at York district hospital and the six other hospitals classed as acute with over 300 beds (non-teaching) in the Yorkshire region, as follows:

Hospital	*In-patients*		*Out-patients*	
	Cost per in-patient day £	*Cost per in-patient case* £	*Cost per attendance* £	*Cost per case* £
York District Hospital	82·24	580·63	25·44	112·28
Bradford Royal Infirmary	80·53	519·88	27·24	110·67
Harrogate Hospital	100·80	645·97	29·04	146·51
Huddersfield Royal Infirmary	90·90	544·66	28·14	135·55
Hull Royal Infirmary	86·35	631·81	25·34	95·26
Pinderfields Hospital, Wakefield	91·92	841·06	29·96	148·51
Scunthorpe General	93·00	542·50	22·76	99·60

There are a number of factors which may contribute to variations in costs between one hospital and another. They include variations in the proportion of patients treated in different specialties, the difference in cost of treating certain types of case, in-patient length of stay and numbers and grades of staff employed. 1986-87 cost information by region and for England as a whole is not yet available.

North Staffordshire Health District

109. **Mr. Ashley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will visit the North Staffordshire health district to inspect the new surgical block due to open shortly.

Mrs. Currie: I hope to visit the unit some time this year.

Barnet Health Authority (Nurses)

112. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to tackle the shortage of nurses employed by Barnet health authority.

Mr. Newton: We have announced a range of measures on accommodation, grading structure and training designed to improve recruitment and retention of nurses in the NHS. However, it is for individual health authorities to consider what action to take to deal with local shortages. Should the hon. Member wish to pursue the matter further, he may wish to contact the chairman of the Barnet health authority direct.

Unemployment Benefit Claimants

113. **Mr. Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the number of claimants of unemployment benefit aged 55 to 60 years who receive income from an occupational pension.

Mr. Scott: It is estimated that some 40,000 claimants of unemployment benefit aged between 55 and 60 receive income from an occupational pension.

Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act

115. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will now allocate the necessary resources to enable all local authorities to implement fully the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act.

Mr. Scott: Responsibility for implementing the Act rests with local authorities, which are in the best position to assess local needs and to decide the most appropriate arrangements for meeting them. We do not allocate resources to specific social services, and it is not practicable separately to indentify the total amount spent on services under the Act. However, between 1978-79 and 1986-87, gross current expenditure by local authorities on the personal social services overall increased by over 26 per cent. in real terms.

Performance Indicators

116. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received on the quality of information supplied by his Department's computer-based performance indicator package.

Mrs. Currie: Some comments have been received about the accuracy of individual values in the performance indicator package. The quality of the information in the package is largely determined by the accuracy of the data supplied by health authorities. Every effort is made to refer questions of data accuracy back to authorities.

Abortion (Approved Places)

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the places approved by him under section 1(3) of the Abortion Act 1967.

Mr. Newton: The following places have been approved for period 1 February 1988 to 31 January 1990.

Acland Nuffield Hospital, Oxford
Alexandra Hospital, Cheadle, Cheshire
Alexandra Hospital, Walderslade, Kent
Avenue Clinic, Hove, Sussex
Bath Clinic, Combe Down
Beechwood Private Clinic, Norton, Sheffield
Belvedere Nursing Home, Scarborough
Blackdown Nursing Home, Blackdown, Leamington Spa
Blackheath Hospital, London SE3
Bromhead Nursing Home, Lincoln
BUPA Hospital, Bushey, Watford, Hertfordshire
BUPA Murrayfield Hospital, Thingwall, Wirral, Merseyside
BUPA Hospital, Colney, Norwich
Calthorpe Nursing Home, Edgbaston, Birmingham
Chalybeate Hospital, Southampton, Hampshire
Chatsworth Clinic, New Barnet
Chaucer Hospital, Canterbury
Chesterfield Nuffield Hospital, Bristol
Christchurch Park Hospital, Ipswich, Suffolk
Clare Park Clinic, Farnham, Surrey
Cleveland Nuffield Hospital, Stockton-on-Tees
Cotswold Nuffield Hospital, Cheltenham
Danum Lodge Nursing Home, Doncaster
Dean Park Nursing Home, Bournemouth, Dorset
Duchy Hospital, Treliske, Truro
Duchy House Nuffield Hospital, Harrogate
Evelyn Hospital, Cambridge
Exeter Nuffield Hospital, Exeter
Fairfield Nursing Home, Buckhurst Hill, Essex
Fallodon Private Nursing Home, Leeds
Fitzwilliam Hospital, South Bretton, Peterborough
Foscote Private Hospital, Banbury
Fulford Grange Hospital, Rawdon, Leeds
Garden Hospital, London NW4
Glen Hospital, Bristol
Hampshire Clinic, Basingstoke
Highfield Private Hospital, Rochdale
HRH Princess Christian's Hospital, Windsor, Berkshire
Hull Nuffield Hospital, Hull
Humana Hospital, London NW8
King Edward VII Hospital, Midhurst
Leicester Nuffield Hospital, Leicester
Leigham Private Clinic, London SW16
Marie Stopes Nursing Home, London NW2
Merseyside Nursing Home, Liverpool
Newcastle Nuffield Hospital, Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
New Hall Hospital, Bodeham, Salisbury, Wiltshire
New Victoria Hospital, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey
Park Hospital, Arnold, Nottingham
Parkfield Private Hospital, Rotherham, South Yorkshire
Parkview Clinic, London W5
Plymouth Nuffield Hospital, Derrifold, Plymouth
Portland Hospital for Women and Children, London W1
Raleigh Nursing Home, London SW2
Robert Nursing Home, Kings Norton, Birmingham
Rosslyn Nursing Home, East Twickenham, Middlesex
Royal Masonic Hospital, London W6 0TN
Salop Nuffield Hospital, Shrewsbury SY3 9PD
Sarum Road Private Nursing Home, Winchester, Hampshire
Somerset Nuffield Hospital, Taunton, Somerset
South Bank Hospital, Worcester
South Manchester Private Clinic, Stockport
St Wilfrid's Nursing Home, Bessacarr, Doncaster
Victoria House Nursing Home, Rochester, Kent
Wellesley Hospital, Southend-on-Sea
Wessex Nuffield Hospital, Eastleigh, Hants
Winterbourne Hospital, Dorchester, Dorset
Wistons Nursing Home, Brighton
Woking Nuffield Hospital, Woking
Wye Valley Nuffield Hospital, Hereford
Yorkshire Clinic, Bingley, West Yorkshire

As part of the Deprtment's control of the private sector all these places are subject to unannounced visits of inspection. Those places specialising in abortion are visited more frequently by both medical-nursing and investigative officers. In the course of these visits, the operation of approved places is observed closely with regard to the conditions of approval under which they are required to operate, the facilities and equipment provided, medical and nursing practice and administrative and financial arrangements.

Mersey RHA

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the level of Government spending on the National Health Service in the Mersey region, expressed per household, in 1979 and in each year since then at *(a)* current prices, *(b)* 1979 prices and *(c)* 1987 prices.

Mrs. Currie: Following are figures for the Mersey region:

Total expenditure on hospital and community health services[1]—per household

	In cash terms £	*At 1979-80 prices* £	*At 1987-88 prices* £
1979-80	363	363	632
1980-81	463	391	680
1981-82	510	391	681
1982-83	544	389	677
1983-84	564	386	674
1984-85	599	392	682
1985-86	624	386	672
1986-87	667	399	695

[1] Includes revenue and capital expenditure on hospital, community health, ambulance, blood transfusion and other services.

Sources:

1. Annual accounts of the regional health authority and district (formerly area) health authorities comprising the Mersey region.

2. Mid-year estimates of numbers of households (counties of Cheshire and Merseyside) — 1979, 1980, 1981, 1983 and 1986 (Department of Environment). Data specifically for the other years in the table is not available: the latest available figure was used.

Notes:

i. The figures have been expressed at 1979-80 and 1987-88 prices by the use of the gross domestic product deflator.

ii. Expenditure on family practitioner services is excluded: such expenditure is accounted for by family practitioner committees (FPCs) and cannot strictly be attributed to particular regions. However, prior to 1 April 1985 many of the district (formerly area) health authorities within the region had an associated FPC and those authorities' total expenditure figures for the years before that date include elements relating to FPCs' administrative expenses which are not separately identifiable.

iii. Expenditure by the special health authorities and other bodies providing central services to the National Health Service and expenditure met centrally by the Department is also excluded.

Cervical Cancer

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in England and Wales have died from cervical cancer in the last five years for which figures are available, expressed per thousand women.

Mrs. Currie: The table shows the number of deaths with underlying cause of death as malignant neoplasm of cervix uteri, and the rate per thousand women for England and Wales for the years 1982 to 1986.

Number of deaths with underlying cause as malignant neoplasm of cervix uteri (ICD(9) 180) and rate per 1,000 women, all ages. England and Wales 1982-86

Year	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Number of deaths	1,932	1,959	1,899	1,957	2,004
Rate per 1,000 women	0·076	0·077	0·074	0·076	0·078

[1] International Classification of Diseases 9th revision.

Ophthalmic Services

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultations his Department had with representatives of ophthalmologists and opticians, or any other medical advisory sources, before proposing the ending of free sight testing.

Mr. Newton: We undertook a lengthy consultation on primary care, in which ophthalmic, optical and other interested bodies took part. Our subsequent decisions, including the proposal to restrict NHS sight tests to particular groups, reflected our judgment in the light of that consultation about the most appropriate use of resources to support our plans for the further development of primary care as a whole.

NHS (Expenditure Losses)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the loss consequent on National Health Service payments to doctors whose time is lost due to lack of nurses and support staff.

Mr. Newton: There would be some loss to the National Health Service if a doctor were unable to perform his scheduled duties due to the lack of nurses and support staff. A number of initiatives are already in hand aimed at improving the recruitment and retention of nursing and support staff.

Health Care (Costs)

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will issue guidance to all regional health authorities to have regard to the total cost of care on the basis of differing dependency levels when setting the level of their grant to local authorities.

Mr. Newton: We have no plans to issue further guidance, but the funding of community care will be considered in the context of Sir Roy Griffiths' review.

Current guidance to health and local authorities on the transfer of resources with patients moving out of hospital and into personal social services care is set out in HC(83)6 (LAC(83)5).

Community Care

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he now expects to receive the Griffiths report on community care; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden) and the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) on 18 January at columns *583-84*.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many hospitals have closed since 1979 due to the provision of community care for the mentally handicapped for each year since 1979; and what has been the use made of the sites.

Mrs. Currie *(holding answer 1 December 1987]:* No large hospital for mentally handicapped people has closed. About 45 National Health Service hospital units, hostels and holiday homes have closed mainly since 1984. Changes of use for the sites so far include new facilities for mentally handicapped people in the community, a general medical practice, private hospitals, nursing homes and homes for elderly people; educational and training establishments; residential development by private developers and housing associations; and a nature reserve.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many beds there were in hospitals in the Leicestershire district health authority on 1 January in each of the years 1978 to 1988 inclusive.

Mrs. Currie: The information available centrally is the average daily number of available beds. These are shown in the table. In Leicestershire health authority the number of in-patient cases treated per available bed rose from 14·4 to 19·9 between 1978 and 1986.

Number of available beds by hospital, Leicestershire District Health Authority at 31 December 1978 to 1986

Hospital	Average daily number of available beds								
	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Leicester General Hospital	714	672	691	730	740	784	910	913	914
Fielding Palmer Cottage Hospital	15	4	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
Market Harborough and District Hospital	27	20	26	26	26	26	25	25	24
Melton and District Hospital	46	46	47	47	42	47	47	46	47
Rutland Memorial Hospital	36	36	36	35	34	34	32	34	32
St. Mary's Hospital	117	117	115	112	108	105	105	101	98
The Towers Hospital	597	568	539	527	542	527	474	477	450
St. Luke's Hospital	52	52	52	52	52	52	51	52	52
Framland Hospital	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	37

Hospital	Average daily number of available beds 1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Catmose Vale Hospital	44	44	44	44	44	42	42	38	42
Ashby-de-la-Zouch and District Hospital	28	28	28	28	27	28	29	29	25
Loughborough General Hospital	76	76	73	70	76	71	71	70	74
Groby Road Hospital	241	24[illegible]	235	243	243	243	221	175	180
Markfield Hospital	188	162	133	119	102	2	—	—	—
Zachary Merton Home	79	84	84	83	83	84	45	—	—
Ellen Towle Memorial Home	19	19	19	19	15	19	14	—	—
Glenfrith Hospital-Leicester Frith	785	773	385	347	308	297	288	279	278
Hastings House	78	77	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Glengate Hospital	—	—	56	56	55	54	54	49	48
Mount Sorrell Hospital	—	—	89	89	88	87	86	79	78
Stretton Hall Hospital	—	—	153	141	136	128	125	122	122
Kibworth Hall Hospital	—	—	34	34	34	33	33	32	32
Stoneygate Hospital	—	—	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Billesdon Hostel	—	—	18	2	—	—	—	—	—
Regent Hospital	—	—	75	74	74	74	72	72	72
Glenfield Community Hospital	168	168	168	168	168	168	167	167	168
Montrose Court	16	16	16	16	20	24	30	32	32
Gorse Hill Hospital	—	—	—	48	96	96	96	96	96
Glenfield General Hospital	—	—	—	—	—	—	22	163	192
The Leicester Royal Infirmary	518	677	802	819	830	830	805	803	795
Fielding Johnson Hospital	52	49	53	54	52	53	54	54	53
Hinckley and District Hospital	34	36	37	31	35	37	37	36	33
Bosworth Park Infirmary	124	124	121	114	121	118	115	117	118
Higham Grange Rehabilitation Centre	36	37	37	36	37	37	36	36	37
Leicester Royal Infirmary Maternity Hospital	177	178	178	178	178	178	178	178	178
Westcotes Hospital	8	15	20	23	23	21	10	—	—
Roundhill Maternity Home	30	30	30	30	30	30	28	30	30
Carlton Hayes Hospital	700	693	692	692	671	685	631	598	565
Hinckley Sunnyside Hospital	38	38	38	37	38	38	38	38	38
Blaby Hospital	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	18	19
Hinckley Cottages	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	9	9
TOTAL	5,101	5,140	5,221	5,221	5,225	5,149	5,070	5,045	5,001

Social Service Staff (Assaults)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to how many cases of assault on local authority social service staff during the course of their duties were recorded in 1987.

Mr. Newton: I regret that information about assaults on social services staff is not collected centrally.

Underfunding (Contingency Plans)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what instructions his Department has given to regional health authorities to prepare contingency plans for possible underfunding by his Department of 1988-89 pay awards.

Mr. Newton: None. We have simply reminded regional health authorities of the general need for authorities to balance their income and expenditure, and to plan flexibly in recognition of the possible need to meet some pay and price pressures in the course of the year.

Skoal Bandits

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans his Department has for banning Skoal Bandits; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The sale of tobacco products, including Skoal Bandits, to under-16s was made illegal under the Protection of Children (Tobacco) Act 1986 and measures to control the product further, including a health warning on the label and advertising material, have been under review. The Government will take any additional steps that appear necessary in the interests of public health.

Drugs (Hospitals)

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services by what percentage the cost of drugs to hospitals as recorded in the hospital and community health services prices index has risen in each year since 1980.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is given in the table.

Percentage year-on-year increase in the drugs element of the Health Service Price Index from 1980-81 to 1986-87

Year	Percentage change over previous year
1981-82	−3·3
1982-83	10·4
1983-84	4·8
1984-85	5·0
1985-86	6·0
1986-87	4·7

Bacteria Testing

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what discussions he is having with manufacturers of meat and fish products into the case for bacteria testing; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The food industry is well aware of its responsibilities in law to sell only food which is fit for human consumption. End product testing is not an effective or efficient means of ensuring food safety: absolute assurance could come only from examination of every end product item. Much more reliance is placed on

quality assurance through hygienic production using sound ingredients: manufacturers and enforcement agencies therefore undertake random sampling.

Anonymised Blood Testing

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the cost in a full year of a programme of anonymised screening for HIV infection of a proportion of routine blood samples taken for other purposes in hospitals throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Newton: If anonymised screening programmes for HIV antibody were carried out, the factors determining the cost would include *(a)* the size and geographical location of the sample, *(b)* any preselection of samples from certain age and sex groups and types of patients, *(c)* the amount of data to be collected and recorded on factors that may be relevant to HIV transmission, *(d)* whether attempts are made to eliminate duplicate samples, *(e)* whether patients have an option to take part and *(f)* the analysis performed with the data so collected.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the annual costs of the anonymised blood testing programmes carried out for measuring the prevalence of measles antibody, immunity to poliomyelitis; rubella, diphtheria and tetanus and the levels of antibody to influenza virus; how often such testing programmes are repeated; and what use is made of the statistical and epidemiological data produced.

Mr. Newton: Not all the information sought is available, and that which is available could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Alice Fuller

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the current arrangements for the treatment of Mrs. Alice Fuller of 39 New Place square, Bermondsey, London SE16, pursuant to the letter to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey from his Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State dated 30 November 1987 and in the absence of any response from the chairman of the Disablement Services Authority.

Mr. Scott: I understand that since the hon. Member wrote to my hon. Friend, his constituent has made two visits to the Roehampton disablement services centre, on 10 December 1987 and 19 January 1988, and a further appointment has been made for 16 February 1988. I also understand that both the hon. Member's letters about his constituent have been acknowledged by officials of the Disablement Services Authority, and that the chairman of the authority will write to him shortly.

Limb Fitting Centre, Roehampton

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average time it takes, from the date that a plaster cast is taken, for the limb fitting centre at Roehampton to make a socket for an artificial limb.

Mr. Scott: This is a matter for the Disablement Services Authority, to which the hon. Member should address his question.

Pharmacies

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will supply figures for the number of pharmacies in each family practitioner committee area in England and Wales for each year since 1978 to the latest date for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie: The information for England is as follows. The information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Family practitioner committee	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
England									
Avon	178	176	178	176	174	173	174	176	180
Barking and Havering	71	70	70	71	72	73	77	81	86
Barnet	73	74	74	79	83	90	92	92	91
Barnsley	44	44	43	43	43	43	43	43	45
Bedfordshire	69	68	69	69	73	74	77	83	87
Berkshire	103	104	104	107	109	112	113	118	124
Birmingham	191	191	192	192	199	211	219	245	249
Bolton	48	48	48	49	48	50	52	52	54
Bradford	100	98	96	96	96	99	101	103	105
Brent and Harrow	120	123	125	132	136	140	141	142	144
Bromley	51	51	52	54	53	53	57	60	63
Buckinghamshire	87	88	86	89	89	91	93	97	102
Bury	30	29	28	29	30	31	31	30	29
Calderdale	43	43	41	42	41	43	45	46	47
Cambridgeshire	78	76	77	78	81	81	83	86	88
Camden and Islington	113	111	113	119	122	130	134	142	140
Cheshire	158	158	158	158	162	161	163	169	173
City and East London	158	159	158	163	170	172	180	183	189
Cleveland	84	84	85	85	86	84	84	83	85
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	88	87	87	86	86	87	86	88	87
Coventry	58	57	59	63	64	66	73	77	81
Croydon	63	63	66	66	67	67	71	73	78
Cumbria	101	100	100	98	98	99	100	99	97
Derbyshire	150	152	152	154	155	153	155	161	163
Devon	213	211	209	207	205	202	199	209	213
Doncaster	52	52	51	51	50	49	49	49	50
Dorset	140	136	136	132	134	134	134	135	142
Dudley	48	48	46	46	45	46	47	50	54

Family practitioner committee	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Durham	111	110	109	107	108	108	106	108	108
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	161	164	167	171	181	183	186	194	197
East Sussex	154	149	150	149	153	153	157	157	158
Enfield and Haringey	100	99	99	103	107	106	110	113	118
Essex	219	223	228	232	241	244	250	264	280
Gateshead	43	41	44	43	40	40	42	44	46
Gloucestershire	78	78	78	79	81	82	82	84	87
Greenwich and Bexley	86	86	89	89	90	93	93	96	103
Hampshire	247	241	238	246	252	257	261	263	273
Hereford and Worcester	85	86	83	85	84	86	87	94	100
Hertfordshire	174	175	175	184	188	196	205	211	221
Hillingdon	57	55	62	60	62	62	64	65	65
Humberside	150	148	147	148	147	149	148	148	153
Isle of Wight	32	31	31	31	32	31	32	32	30
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	181	185	179	179	181	196	199	209	204
Kent	250	253	251	251	252	252	250	253	264
Kingston and Richmond	71	73	74	74	76	76	76	79	81
Kirklees	64	62	61	63	61	63	64	65	68
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	156	160	162	168	174	176	184	188	201
Lancashire	304	300	296	295	293	293	289	301	304
Leeds	166	163	158	159	157	158	158	161	169
Leicestershire	150	149	151	155	159	165	174	186	188
Lincolnshire	71	70	72	72	73	73	72	73	73
Liverpool	135	129	130	127	129	132	132	133	133
Manchester	107	104	103	102	101	101	104	113	114
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	133	133	135	143	149	155	155	159	158
Newcastle upon Tyne	63	64	65	64	64	67	68	68	68
Norfolk	92	92	94	97	96	97	98	98	102
Northamptonshire	68	70	71	74	76	79	80	85	93
North Tyneside	47	46	46	46	44	44	43	43	43
Northumberland	60	60	60	59	59	57	58	59	65
North Yorkshire	118	115	114	113	114	113	114	115	114
Nottinghamshire	148	149	149	153	163	166	169	173	179
Oldham	38	39	37	36	34	35	39	40	40
Oxfordshire	69	71	72	72	73	74	77	82	78
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	88	88	88	91	99	102	108	114	119
Rochdale	35	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
Rotherham	38	38	36	34	33	33	33	34	34
St. Helens and Knowsley	63	62	62	63	61	60	60	61	66
Salford	52	52	52	50	48	49	50	52	51
Salop	58	58	58	59	60	62	61	64	65
Sandwell	60	60	57	58	59	60	65	68	74
Sefton	59	57	55	57	57	57	57	57	56
Sheffield	101	100	101	99	98	97	97	102	105
Solihull	28	29	29	29	28	30	30	33	36
Somerset	71	69	68	67	70	71	71	73	77
South Tyneside	33	31	31	32	32	32	31	31	32
Staffordshire	149	147	148	149	151	152	155	160	166
Stockport	69	69	67	66	66	65	65	65	67
Suffolk	81	81	80	79	81	81	82	84	85
Sunderland	57	57	46	56	57	55	54	55	56
Surrey	191	191	190	194	198	203	210	211	216
Tameside	39	38	36	37	38	38	39	39	42
Trafford	49	49	46	47	47	47	47	47	53
Wakefield	45	43	41	41	41	43	46	50	50
Walsall	45	47	47	47	50	52	52	58	58
Warwickshire	62	63	62	64	64	66	67	74	78
West Sussex	125	124	123	124	125	126	128	128	131
Wigan	60	59	59	59	59	58	59	60	63
Wiltshire	71	72	72	72	72	73	75	75	76
Wirral	89	88	89	87	87	87	85	89	90
Wolverhampton	43	43	44	46	45	48	47	53	59

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will state the number of pharmacies for 100,000 population in England and Wales for each year since 1978 for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie: The information is as follows:

Number of pharmacies per 100,000 population

Year	Number
1978	19·09
1979	19·00
1980	18·92
1981	19·09
1982	19·34
1983	19·58
1984	19·84
1985	20·38
1986	20·89

McColl Report

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on progress in implementation of the McColl report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: My predecessor made a detailed statement to the House on 10 March 1987 at columns *149-51* setting out the Government's response to the McColl report on the artificial limb and appliance services.

Accordingly, a new special health authority, the Disablement Services Authority, was created on 1 July 1987 to take over from the Department the responsibility for these services. The authority is charged with running the existing services; developing and improving them in the light of the McColl report and of other initiatives; and planning, in co-ordination with the regional health authorities, the integration of the services into those of the NHS on 1 April 1991.

If hon. Members wish to inquire about the work of the authority, I am sure that its chairman the noble Lord Holderness will be pleased to answer their questions.

Nurses

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many nurses were employed by the Leicestershire district health authority on 1 January for each of the years 1978 to 1988 inclusive.

Mrs. Currie: Such information as is available is shown in the table. Staff-in-post figures are collected on 30 September of each year. The figures for 30 September 1986 are the latest available to this level of detail. Because of the 1982 National Health Service reorganisation, figures on a consistent basis are not held centrally for the years prior to 1982.

National Health Service nursing and midwifery staff in post at 30 September[1] Leicestershire district health authority

	Whole-time equivalents[2]
1982	6,180
1983	6,060
1984	6,020
1985	6,290
1986	6,350

Source: Department of Health and Social Services annual census of National Health Service non-medical manpower.

[1] Includes agency staff.

[2] Figures are independently rounded to the nearest 10 whole-time equivalents.

Special Payments

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will explain the procedures used to calculate special payments to pensioner couples *(a)* in receipt of one pension and *(b)* in receipt of two separate pensions.

Mr. Scott: Where only one member of a couple has retired and is drawing a pension the standard loss in weekly benefit over the two years affected by the error in the retail price index will be £7·85, whether or not an addition to pension for the spouse is paid. The £8 special payment made on the couple's single instrument of payment will compensate for this in full. If, on the other hand, both have retired their pensions will be paid separately and a special payment will be made on each.

National Health Service Consultants

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what evidence he has of consultants in the National Health Service *(a)* indulging in restrictive practices and *(b)* devoting a disproportionate amount of duty hours to activities not directly related to their clinical functions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 18 December 1987]:* The evidence we have comes from National Health Service managers who report that a minority of consultants may not be meeting fully the letter or spirit of their contractual obligations. It is for National Health Service managers to pursue such problems with the individuals concerned.

Nursing Staff (Merseyside)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the numbers of nursing staff in *(a)* the Mersey region and *(b)* the Liverpool district health authority, in each of the years 1980-81 to 1986-87.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 11 January 1988]:* Because of the 1982 NHS reorganisation, staff-in-post figures prior to 1982 are not consistent with those for 1982 onwards:

Such information as is available is shown in the table.

NHS Nursing and Midwifery staff in post[1] at 30 September

	Whole time equivalent[2]	
	Mersey RHA	*Liverpool RHA*
1982	22,450	5,390
1983	22,310	5,210
1984	21,850	5,050
1985	22,150	5,070
1986	22,330	5,210

Source: DHSS Annual censur of NHS non-medical manpower

[1] Includes agency staff.

[2] Figures independently rounded to nearest ten (10) whole time equivalents.

Agency Nurses (Mersey)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the number and the cost of agency nurses employed by each of the district health authorities in the Mersey region in each of the last five years.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 11 January 1988]:* The table shows expenditure on agency nursing staff in each of the 10 district health authorities in the Mersey region for the last five years. Information on the total number of agency nurses employed in each year which relates to the table is not available centrally.

District health authority	Year 1982-83 £	1983-84 £	1984-85 £	1985-86 £	1986-87 £
Chester	—	—	—	—	—
Crewe	—	—	1,050	4,257	33,314
Halton	—	4,031	10,156	38,345	112,017
Macclesfield	1,489	65	10,011	6,540	50,063
Warrington	—	—	—	—	—
Liverpool	67,407	115,959	415,912	426,854	551,626
St. Helens and Knowsley	—	—	—	—	—
South Sefton (Merseyside)	9,974	—	—	—	401
Wirral	—	—	—	—	—

National Insurance

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will update the answer of 29 January 1987, *Official Report*, column *376*, to estimate the revenue effect of the national insurance contribution ceiling for employees being abolished, for 1988-89.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 26 January 1988]:* It is estimated that if the upper earnings limit for employees' class 1 national insurance contributions were abolished in 1988-89, but retained for the contracted-out rebate, the additional contribution yield for the full year would be £1,390 million.

Health Care

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportions of gross domestic product each member of the European Community devoted to health care in each of the years 1983 to 1986 inclusive.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 28 January 1988]:* The information available (to 1985 only) is set out in the table. It covers total health expenditure from both public and private sources.

EEC countries	Percentage of GDP spent on health 1983	1984	1985
Belgium	7·2	7·2	7·2
Denmark	6·6	6·3	6·2
France	8·1	8·4	8·4
Germany	8·0	8·1	8·2
Greece	4·2	4·0	4·2
Ireland	8·0	8·0	8·0
Italy	6·7	6·6	6·7
Netherlands	8·6	8·3	8·3
Portugal	5·4	5·5	5·7
Spain	6·3	6·0	6·0
United Kingdom	6·2	6·2	6·1

Source: OECD 1987.

Note: Luxembourg is excluded from the table because of reported inconsistencies in the national health accounts.

Single Payments

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if all claimants who have made applications for items such as non-essential furniture since August 1986 will be identified by his Department so that decisions on such claims can be reviewed in the light of CSB 241/87.

Mr. Portillo *[holding reply 29 January 1988]:* We have considered carefully the commissioners' decision in CSB 241/1987 and its possible impact on past claims for furniture and household equipment. The effect of the commissioners' decision is to give some claimants access to a discretionary payment for an exceptional need under regulation 30 of the Single Payments Regulations. However, we believe that, under the stringent conditions which apply for a payment under that regulation, relatively few claimants who had previously been denied a payment would now be entitled to one. To identify those claimants would be a major task, costly to mount, disruptive to local offices, and disproportionate to the amount of extra benefit likely to be payable. We have decided, therefore, that it would not be appropriate to conduct a search for such cases, although individual requests for review will be dealt with in the normal way.

NHS Management Board

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the current membership of the National Health Service Management Board; if he will give an indication of their financial, commercial or managerial background; and if he will define the role of the management board in the overall running of the service.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 1 February 1988]:* The NHS Management Board was established within the Department towards the end of 1983 to give leadership to the management of the hospital and community health services, to control performance and to achieve consistency and drive over the long term. The board has a continuing programme of work on management matters relating to the hospital and community health services. The board is made up of individuals who have held a wide range of senior positions in government, the private sector or the NHS. The members are:

The Right Hon. Tony Newton MP, Minister for Health, Chairman.

Sir Roy Griffiths, Deputy Chairman (Part-time) and adviser to the Government on NHS management. Managing Director and Deputy Chairman of J. Sainsbury PLC.

Mr. Len Peach, Chief Executive and Personnel Director. On secondment from IBM (UK) where he was Director of Personnel and corporate affairs. A past President of the Institute of Personnel Management.

Sir Donald Acheson, Chief Medical Officer. Former Chairman of Southampton and South West Hampshire Health Authority.

Mr. Tom Critchley, Director of Procurement and Distribution. Has held a number of high level purchasing posts in industry and ran his own management consultancy from 1980-86. A past president of the Institute of Purchasing and Supply.

Mr. Michael Fairey, Director of Planning and Information Technology. Seconded from North East Thames Regional Health Authority where he had been Regional Administrator. Chairman of Regional Administrators from 1982-84.

Mr. Graham Hart, Director of Operations. A Civil Servant with experience in a wide variety of posts in DHSS concerned with health services. A member of the Central Policy Review Staff from 1982-83.

Mr. John James, Director of Health Authority Finance. A Civil Servant with experience in DHSS posts concerned with health finance, planning, personnel and policy and also in the Treasury. Currently serves as a non-executive Director on the Board of Laing Homes Ltd.

Mr. Anthony Merifield, Director of Health Authority Liaison. A Civil Servant with experience in DHSS posts concerned with health service operations and management.

Mr. Ian Mills, Director of Financial Management. On a three year secondment from Price Waterhouse where he is a senior partner and was director of central government services. A Fellow of the English Institute of Chartered Accountants and a member of the English Institute of Management Consultants.

Mr. Duncan Nichol, Non-Executive Director. Regional General Manager, Mersey. A past president of the Institute of Health Services Management and chairman of the Education Committee of King Edward's Hospital Fund.

Mrs. Anne Poole, Chief Nursing Officer. Has been Chief Nursing Officer at both district authority and Area Health Authority level. Also has experience as nurse member of Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth Area Health Authority.

Mr. Peter Wormald, Director of Operations (Personnel). A Civil Servant with experience in a post concerned with health service policy and planning and now leads the Department's Health Authority Personnel Group.

In addition, Mr. Idris Pearce, a senior partner in Richard Ellis and Vice President of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors acts as property adviser to the Board.

NHS (Staff Statistics)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list by district health authority regions *(a)* the current nursing staff establishment, *(b)* the number in post at the latest available date, and *(c)* the number who have left the service of the National Health Service in the past year.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 2 February 1988]:* The number of nursing and midwifery staff in post in each district health authority at 30 September 1986 is given in the table.

Detailed information about nurse establishments and nurses leaving the NHS is not available centrally but some such information will, however, become available later this year as a result of the introduction of improvements in National Health Service information systems.

NHS Nursing and Midwifery Staff[1] in Post by Regional Health Authority at 30 September 1986

whole-time equivalent[3]

Region	*Nursing and Midwifery*
Northern	27,350
Yorkshire	30,200
Trent	37,120
East Anglia	15,410
North West Thames	27,310
North East Thames	32,940
South East Thames	29,510
South West Thames	23,730
Wessex	22,940
Oxford	16,860
South Western	26,930
West Midlands	42,350
Mersey	22,250
North Western	37,840
London Post-Graduate Special Health Authorities	4,520
England	397,240

NHS nursing and midwifery staff[1] in post by district health authority at 30 September 1986

	Whole-time equivalent[3]
Northern Regional Health Authority	
Total	27,350
Hartlepool	800
North Tees	1,270
South Tees	2,580
East Cumbria	1,560
South Cumbria	1,140
West Cumbria	1,190
Darlington	1,190
Durham	1,160
North West Durham	730
South West Durham	1,600
Northumberland	3,180
Gateshead	1,450
Newcastle	4,920
North Tyneside	970
South Tyneside	950
Sunderland	2,590
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority	
Total	30,200
Hull	2,570
East Yorks	1,700
Grimsby	1,390
Scunthorpe	1,130
Northallerton	530
York	2,360
Scarborough	850
Harrogate	1,130
Bradford	2,770
Airedale	1,390
Calderdale	1,550
Huddersfield	2,020
Dewsbury	1,030
Leeds Western	3,320
Leeds Eastern	3,130
Wakefield	2,130
Pontefract	1,100
Trent regional health authority	
Total	37,120
North Derbyshire	2,130
Southern Derbyshire	3,850
Leicestershire	6,350
North Lincolnshire	2,320
South Lincolnshire	2,020
Bassetlaw	690
Central Nottinghamshire	2,190
Nottingham	5,340
Barnsley	1,610
Doncaster	2,430
Rotherham	1,770
Sheffield	6,330
East Anglia regional health authority	
Total	15,410
Cambridge	2,490
Peterborough	1,600
West Suffolk	1,620
East Suffolk	2,610
Norwich	3,780
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	1,390

	Whole-time equivalent[1]
West Norfolk and Wisbech	1,160
Huntingdon	720
North West Thames regional health authority	
Total	27,310
North Bedfordshire	1,450
South Bedfordshire	1,900
North Hertfordshire	1,000
East Hertfordshire	990
North West Hertfordshire	2,140
South West Hertfordshire	1,160
Barnet	2,700
Harrow	1,270
Hillingdon	1,980
Hounslow and Spelthorne	1,830
Ealing	1,790
Brent	1,990
Paddington and North Kensington	1,960
Riverside	4,040
North East Thames Regional Health Authority	
Total	32,940
Basildon and Thurrock	2,270
Mid Essex	1,920
North East Essex	2,940
West Essex	1,570
Southend	1,920
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	3,290
Hampstead	2,040
Bloomsbury	3,150
Islington	1,470
City and Hackney	2,480
Newham	1,080
Tower Hamlets	2,200
Enfield	1,400
Haringey	1,310
Redbridge	1,460
Waltham Forest	2,350
South East Thames Regional Health Authority	
Total	29,510
Brighton	2,230
Eastbourne	1,670
Hastings	1,260
South East Kent	1,570
Canterbury and Thanet	2,540
Dartford and Gravesham	1,930
Maidstone	1,480
Medway	1,610
Tunbridge Wells	1,970
Bexley	1,550
Greenwich	1,910
Bromley	2,070
West Lambeth	2,380
Camberwell	1,940
Lewisham and North Southwark	3,380
South West Thames Regional Health Authority	
Total	23,730
North West Surrey	1,660
West Surrey and North East Hants	1,660
South West Surrey	1,200
Mid Surrey	1,890
East Surrey	1,750
Chichester	1,390
Mid Downs	1,760
Worthing	1,430
Croydon	2,440
Kingston and Esher	1,560
Richmond and Twickenham and Roehampton	1,280
Wandsworth	2,860
Merton and Sutton	2,750
Wessex Regional Health Authority	
Total	22,940
East Dorset	3,040
West Dorset	1,920
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	3,650
Southampton and South West Hampshire	4,050
Winchester	1,270
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	1,680
Salisbury	1,420
Swindon	1,730
Bath	3,100
Isle of Wight	1,070
Oxford Regional Health Authority	
Total	16,860
East Berkshire	2,150
West Berkshire	2,930
Aylesbury Vale	1,690
Wycombe	1,320
Milton Keynes	720
Kettering	1,480
Northampton	2,410
Oxfordshire	4,090
South Western regional health authority	
Total	26,930
Bristol and Weston	3,270
Frenchay	2,640
Southmead	2,110
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	2,880
Exeter	3,470
North Devon	980
Plymouth	2,950
Torbay	1,590
Cheltenham and District	1,290
Gloucester	2,410
Somerset	3,270
West Midlands regional health authority	
Total	42,350
Bromsgrove and Redditch	1,210
Herefordshire	1,240
Kidderminster and District	1,290
Worcester and District	1,760
Shropshire	2,810
Mid Staffordshire	1,790
North Staffordshire	4,130
South East Staffordshire	1,890
Rugby	460
North Warwickshire	1,370
South Warwickshire	1,920
Central Birmingham	2,770
East Birmingham	1,390
North Birmingham	1,440
South Birmingham	2,520
West Birmingham	2,570
Coventry	2,710
Dudley	2,080
Sandwell	1,560
Solihull	1,140
Walsall	1,920
Wolverhampton	2,280
Mersey regional health authority	
Total	22,250
Chester	1,740
Crewe	1,790
Halton	590
Macclesfield	1,630
Warrington	2,470
Liverpool	5,150
St. Helens and Knowsley	2,600
Southport and Formby	1,200
South Sefton	2,210
Wirral	2,780
North Western regional health authority	
Total	37,840
Lancaster	2,240

	Whole-time equivalent[3]
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	2,490
Preston	2,540
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	2,780
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	2,660
West Lancashire	980
Chorley and South Ribble	630
Bolton	1,910
Bury	1,090
North Manchester	2,370
Central Manchester	2,060
South Manchester	3,030
Oldham	1,540
Rochdale	1,210
Salford	3,330
Stockport	2,200
Tameside and Glossop	1,380
Trafford	1,220
Wigan	2,050

Source: DHSS Annual census of National Health Service non-medical manpower.

Notes:

1. Figures include qualified nurses and midwives, learners and unqualified staff but exclude agency staff.
2. Regional totals include Regional Headquarters and units staff.
3. Figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents.

Lancashire County Council (Grants)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what grants have been allocated by his Department to Lancashire county council for 1988-89; what grants were made in 1987-88; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* Central Government grant support for Lancashire county council's expenditure in areas which are my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services responsibility is provided mainly via unhypothecated rate support grant paid by the Department of the Environment. Grants allocated to Lancashire county council by this Department in the two years consist of:

1. An indicative allocation for 1988-89 of £204,800 under the Social Services Training Support Programme. 1988-89 is the first year for which grant aid will be available from this source and the indicative allocation will be confirmed later on receipt of a specific bid from the authority.
2. A grant of £17,386 in 1987-88 for expenditure on secure accommodation for children. Applications for grants totalling £45,614 in 1988-89 are currently under consideration.

Lancashire county council will also benefit from funding through the joint financing arrangements but payment is made by the appropriate district health authorities. Information about what the authority will receive in 1987-88 and 1988-89 is not held centrally and my hon. Friend may like to make inquiries of the chairman of North Western RHA.

NHS Spending (London)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the percentage change in *(a)* revenue expenditure and *(b)* capital expenditure on hospital and community health services as deflated by the gross domestic product deflator for (i) the Greater London district health authorities in total and (ii) the inner London district health authorities in total, between 1981-82 and 1986-87.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* The 1982 reorganisation of the National Health Service resulted in significant boundary changes and changes of management responsibility. Figures for expenditure in inner London are not available prior to 1982-83. The table shows the real-terms growth in inner London between 1982-83 and 1986-87, and in Greater London between 1981-82 and 1986-87 and between 1982-83 and 1986-87.

Percentage real terms growth in gross expenditure as measured by the gross domestic product deflator

	Greater London		Inner London	
	1981-82 to 1986-87	1982-83 to 1986-87	1981-82 to 1986-87	1982-83 to 1986-87
Revenue	0·0	0·5	n.a.	0·3
Capital	30·8	35·5	n.a.	29·7

Notes:

1. Figures are based on total gross expenditure (revenue and capital) from the summarised income and expenditure accounts of area, district and special health authorities.
2. Greater and Inner London have been defined as comprising the following health authorities:

i. Inner London health authorities

1982-83 to 1986-87

Hammersmith and Fulham (Riverside from 1985-86)
Victoria
Paddington
Hampstead
Bloomsbury
Islington
City and Hackney
Newham
Tower Hamlets
West Lambeth
Camberwell
Lewisham and North Southwark
Wandsworth
Special Health Authorities for the London Postgraduate Teaching Hospitals

ii. Greater London Health Authorities

1982-83 to 1986-87

Inner London Health Authorities listed at 2(i) above

Barnet
Harrow
Brent
Hounslow and Spelthorne
Ealing
Hillingdon
Barking, Havering and Brentwood
Enfield
Haringey
Redbridge
Waltham Forest
Bexley
Greenwich
Bromley
Croydon
Kingston and Esher
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton
Sutton and Merton

1981-82

Barnet
Brent and Harrow
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow
Hillingdon
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster
Barking and Havering
Camden and Islington

City and East London
Enfield and Haringey
Redbridge and Waltham Forest
Greenwich and Bexley
Bromley
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham
Croydon
Kingston and Richmond
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth
Boards of Governors for the London Postgraduate Teaching Hospitals

Health Authority Funding

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the amount of funding by his Department administered by Trent regional health authority to Bassetlaw district health authority in each year from 1980 to 1987.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 1 February 1988]:* The information requested is set out as follows from 1982 when Bassetlaw district health authority was created.

Financial Year	*Amount*[1] *(£000's)*
1. Revenue Allocation	
1982-83	10,627
1983-84	11,333
1984-85	12,589
1985-86A	13,709
1986-87	14,977
1987-88	16,027
2. Capital Allocations	
1982-83	1,729
1983-84	1,889
1984-85	758
1985-86	374
1986-87	1,701
1987-88	3,200

[1] *Source:* Trent Regional Health Authority.

Thames Health Regions

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will express the sums of money allocated to the four Thames health regions from the £100 million extra moneys allocated to meet 1987-88 shortfall announced on 16 December 1987 excluding the moneys allocated *(a)* for AIDS, *(b)* for storm damage, *(c)* for the reduction of waiting lists and *(d)* any other specially allocated moneys.

Mr. Newton *[pursuant to his reply, 18 January 1958, c. 581-82]:* I regret that two of the figures in my earlier reply were misstated. The correct information is as follows:

	£ Million
North West Thames	4·7
North East Thames	6·0
South East Thames	5·3
South West Thames	4·3

D and C Operations

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has concerning the total number of D and C operations performed in England and Wales in each of the last 25 years for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie *[pursuant to her reply, 2 February 1988, c. 591]:* The estimated number of D and C (dilettage and curettage of the uterus) operations performed in National Health Service hospitals in England and Wales from 1966 (the first year for which figures are readily available) to 1985 (the latest year for which information is held centrally) is given in the following table:

Year	*Estimated numbers*
1966	112,050
1967	100,260
1968	125,050
1969	118,920
1970	121,800
1971	132,900
1972	132,620
1973	129,880
1974	125,970
1975	104,940
1976	118,400
1977	127,580
1978	122,600
1979	115,140
1980	115,890
1981	114,700
1982	107,980
1983	112,490
1984	109,450
1985	112,790

British Association of Social Workers

91. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he intends to meet the British Association of Social Workers to discuss the current situation in social service departments and concern about the repercussions in social service departments arising from the introduction of the social fund.

Mr. Scott: Officials of the Department met the British Association of Social Workers to discuss, inter alia, the social fund on 15 July 1986 and 19 March 1987.

NHS (Royal Commission Report)

92. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make it his policy to review the hitherto unimplemented recommendations of the 1979 report of the Royal Commission on the National Health Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) earlier today.

Telephones for the Deaf

93. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a further statement on the future provision of telephone exchanges for the deaf.

Mr. Scott: We are continuing to liaise with the other Government Departments and organisations concerned with a view to assisting the telephone exchange for the deaf, run by the Royal National Institute for the Deaf. We expect to be able to announce our decision shortly.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 10 February 1988

HOME DEPARTMENT

Ministerial Visit

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost to public funds of the recent visit by his Minister of State to the sub-continent of India.

Mr. Renton: The cost to the public funds for travel and subsistence expenses of my recent visit to the sub-continent of India was £10,600.

Residence Applications

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to be able to reach a decision on the applicants United Kingdom residence to which his letter and 106257/8(S) of 27 November 1987 to the hon. Member for Woking refers; and if he will allow the individuals concerned to leave the United Kingdom and re-enter again on a temporary basis until this case is determined.

Mr. Renton: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 9 February.

Breath Tests

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to *(a)* the age of drivers stopped and asked to take a breathalyser test and *(b)* the age of those failing such a test.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Information on all those required to provide a roadside screening breath test is published annually in Home Office statistical bulletins, the latest issue, No. 24/87, giving figures for 1986. The bulletin does not include information by age of driver, because these details are not collected centrally. However, information on the ages of those found guilty of driving and so on with excess alcohol is published in table 15 of "Offences Relating to Motor Vehicles, England and Wales, 1986, Supplementary Tables", and of those breath-tested after accidents involving personal injury in table 36 of "Road Accidents, Great Britain, 1986", copies of both of which are in the Library.

Risley Remand Centre (Suicide Attempts)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the period of detention at Risley remand centre of the six Iranians and one Iraqi who entered the United Kingdom at Liverpool without authorisation in December 1987; to which nation these people were deported; whether any of them had any form of medical examination while they were at Risley remand centre; what was the nature of the suicide attempts that they made on 4 January; and whether any other suicide attempts were made by these men while they were at Risley remand centre.

Mr. Renton: These stowaways were detained at Risley remand centre from 22 December 1987 to 15 January 1988 following refusal of entry. All of them were medically examined there and held in the hospital wing. On 4 January, two of the men scratched themselves on the stomach and chest with a plastic knife causing superficial injuries. No other attempts to injure themselves were made. The men flew to Greece on 15 January under arrangements made by the immigration service and agreed with the men and the Greek authorities.

Senior Police Officers (Meeting)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the purpose of the meeting at the Royal hotel, Scarborough, in May 1986 which was attended by Sir Lawrence Byford, Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Mr. Phillip Myers, Inspector of Constabulary for the North West and Northern Ireland, Mr. Colin Sampson, chief constable of West Yorkshire, and Mr. James Anderton, chief constable of Greater Manchester; and for what purpose Sir John Hermon, Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary visited this hotel whilst the meeting was taking place.

Mr. Hurd: The meeting was arranged by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary to discuss allegations about the conduct of the then deputy chief constable of Greater Manchester which had been brought to the attention of Mr. Anderton.

The meeting took place on 19 May 1986. I understand that Sir John Hermon was in Northern Ireland throughout that day and that he had no prior knowledge of the meeting.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Church Schools

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement regarding the Government's policy towards Church of England secondary schools.

Mr. Dunn: I value the work done by Church of England schools within the maintained sector.

Fee Remission

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what would be the extra cost involved of full fee remission for all home students, in respect of part-time degree courses in *(a)* universities, *(b)* polytechnics and other colleges and *(c)* the Open University.

Mr. Jackson: The extra cost of full remission of part-time students' fees would have been £14·14 million for the universities in the academic year 1985-86 and £8·85 million for the Open University in 1986. The information is not available for polytechnics and other colleges.

City of London Polytechnic

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals have been made to close down the department of metallurgy and metals engineering at the City of London polytechnic and for what reason; what steps are planned to safeguard the position of existing students in the event of such a closure; and when a decision is likely to be taken.

Mr. Jackson: The court of governors of City of London polytechnic decided at its meeting on 20 January to cease recruitment to all metallurgy courses. I understand that the reason for the decision was the need to contain the polytechnic's expenditure within the funds expected to be available to meet it. The polytechnic has assured all existing students that they will be enabled to complete their courses under arrangements to be made with Thames polytechnic.

Education Reform

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met representatives of the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education; and whether he discussed with them his proposals for further education colleges included in the Education Reform Bill.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend will be meeting representatives of the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education on 24 February. He expects to discuss with them then issues relating to the Education Reform Bill.

Universities Funding Council

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to establish the membership of the Universities Funding Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend will announce the membership of the Universities Funding Council in due course.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received concerning his proposals for devolving the control of further education colleges from local education authorities to college governing bodies.

Mr. Jackson: 361 responses have been received to the consultation paper, "Maintained Further Education: Financing, Governance and Law", from a wide range of colleges, local education authorities, educational and other organisations, and individuals.

Medical Students

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to increase the extra week's allowance given to medical students to the same weekly rate as the basic maintenance grant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: No. The rates of grant payable for extra weeks of attendance apply equally to all eligible students, and reflect the fact that the main rates of grant include provision for some items (like books and equipment) which is related to a full year's expenditure.

Inner London Education Authority

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will indicate in respect of his policy to require reductions in the net expenditure of the Inner London education authority for the financial year 1988-89, the approximate percentage reduction he expects under each of *(a)* staff, *(b)* premises, *(c)* transport, *(d)* supplies and services, *(e)* transfer payments, *(f)* finance and debt charges and *(g)* other expenses;

(2) over which academic terms in the financial year 1988-89 he expects the Inner London education authority to implement his required reduction in expenditure; and if he will indicate the percentage reduction of expenditure this indicates for the respective terms.

Mrs. Rumbold: Subject to the House's approval, the Secretary of State intends to prescribe a maximum precept for the ILEA for 1988-89 of 81·8p, enabling the authority to raise £985 million. The ILEA will need to make substantial reductions to manage its expenditure within this level of precept income. It is for the ILEA to determine how best to achieve these reductions.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will tabulate in the *Official Report* the net expenditure of the Inner London education authority for each of the financial years 1983-84 to that determined for 1988-89, in current values, together with the authorised precept in pence per pound on inner London local authorities, in both actual and current values, indicating which were subject to maximum rate limits, together with the approximate percentage increase or reduction in net real expenditure compared to the previous financial year, and the overall reduction in percentage of real terms from 1983-84 to 1988.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information available is set out in the following table. The ILEA has been subject to precept limitation since 1985-86.

	Total expenditure[1]			*Authorised precept*	
	Cash	*[2]1987-88 real terms*		*Cash*	*[2]1987-88 real terms*
	£ million	*£ million*	*Percentage change year on year*	*p*	*p*
1983-84	855	1,018	—	77·00	91·66
1984-85	897	1,023	+0·5	80·00	91·17
1985-86	[3]887	954	−6·7	77·25	83·08
1986-87	[4]905	943	−1·2	77·25	80·53
1987-88	[5]1,015	1,015	+7·6	79·73	79·73
1988-89	[6]970	928	−8·6	[7]81·80	78·28
Percentage change between 1983-84 and 1988-89			−8·8		

[1]These figures are consistent with the definition of "total expenditure" used for block grant purposes. They exclude the capitalisation of repairs and contributions from special funds.
[2]The cash figures have been repriced to 1987-88 real terms using the gross domestic product (market prices) deflator.
[3]The figure for 1985-86 includes £31·4 million of additional income arising from an adjustment in the calculation of pooling contributions.
[4]Revenue expenditure recorded in ILEA's published statement of accounts for 1986-87 before adjustment for capitalised repairs and including expenditure met by contributions from special funds was £970 million.
[5]ILEA's budgeted revenue spending as recorded in its published estimates before adjustment for capitalised repairs was £1,025 million.
[6]The figure given is the re-determined expenditure level for the ILEA in 1988-89. The precept maximum of 81·8p (see note 7) would enable the ILEA to raise £985 million on the latest available information.
[7]Subject to approval by the House of the draft Precept Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Inner London Education Authority) Order 1988 laid before the House on 29 January.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what inquiries or reports into the administration of educational standards in the Inner London education authority he has asked Her Majesty's inspectorate of education to undertake, or has received from it since 1979; and with what result.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The last comprehensive HMI report on educational provision in ILEA was made public in 1980. Since then, HMI has continued to inspect on a wide basis and has reported to the holder of my office accordingly; all institutional reports and surveys have been published and are available in the Library of the House.

Primary and Secondary Schools (London)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the primary or secondary schools in the London boroughs of Islington, Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Southwark and Lambeth to which he, or other Ministers in his Department, have paid an official visit subsequent to his taking up office as Secretary of State for Education and Science.

Mr. Dunn: Since May 1986 my right hon. Friend has visited Notre Dame Roman Catholic girls' school in Southwark. My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold) has visited St. Luke's Church of England school in Lambeth, Mulberry girls' school in Tower Hamlets and Alleyn's school, which is an independent school, in Southwark and my hon. Friend, the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) has visited Islington sixth form centre.

Ideal Home Exhibition

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the estimated total cost of the hire of a stand by his Department at the Ideal Home Exhibition, broken down by *(a)* full cost of officials and inspectors from his Department staffing the stand, *(b)* hire of stand, *(c)* publicity and publications and *(d)* all other costs.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The cost of hiring the Department of Education and Science stand is a matter of commercial confidentiality between the Department and the organisers. The stand will be manned by volunteers from the Department and Her Majesty's inspectorate, who will receive time off in lieu for work outside their normal conditioned hours; the extra cost to the Department will be confined to travel and subsistence for some of Her Majesty's inspectorate.

The cost of publications will depend upon their take-up rate during the exhibition; all publications will be supplied from the Department's existing stocks. No publicity costs have been incurred. A 12-screen video wall will be hired at a cost of £25,730. This will be used to display examples of good practice in schools. Other costs of furnishing the stand (furniture, electricity, cleaning and so on) will be in the order of £3,000.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science between what dates he intends to hire a stand at the Ideal Home Exhibition; for what purpose; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My Department will be taking a stand at this year's Ideal Home Exhibition throughout the period when the exhibition is open, that is from 8 March to 4 April inclusive. The main purposes of the display are:
i. to inform members of the public about the changes in the composition of school governing bodies following the passage of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986; and to interest parents visiting the exhibition in becoming parent governors of their child's school.
ii. to explain the new examinations (GCSE, AS-levels and CPVE) to parents and prospective employers.
iii. to explain the thinking behind the proposed national curriculum.

Relevant publications about these subjects and other education matters of interest to the public will be available on the stand. It will also show examples of best practice in education and will enable visitors to ask questions about particular aspects of their own or their children's education.

SCOTLAND

Hospitals (Lanarkshire)

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will name the hospitals in the Lanarkshire health board area, giving details of the type of hospital and the numbers of *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses at each hospital.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

Whole-time equivalent doctors and nursing staff in NHS hospitals
Lanarkshire Health Board

Hospital	*Type of hospital*[1]	*Doctors*[2]	*Nursing staff*[3]			
		WTE	*Qualified*	*In training*	*Unqualified*	*Total*
Alexander	Type of hospital subject to change[4]	—	8·0	—	—	8·0
Bellefield	Mental handicap unit (adult and children)	0·9	28·4	—	48·9	77·3
Bellshill Maternity	Non-teaching, non-GP, maternity unit	25·0	143·8	86·0	80·1	309·9

Hospital	Type of hospital[3]	Doctors[2] WTE	Nursing staff[1] Qualified	In training	Unqualified	Total
Birkwood	Mental handicap unit (adult)	1·4	44·8	—	101·9	146·7
Cleland	Geriatric unit including assessment unit	4·9	74·3	—	80·1	154·4
Coathill	Day hospital	1·2	103·6	—	64·1	167·7
Hairmyres	Mixed specialist hospital without maternity unit	62·2	330·4	150·0	102·7	583·1
Hartwood	Mental hospital, non-teaching	23·7	474·6	131·0	249·0	854·6
Kello, Biggar	GP hospital	1·1	12·3	—	6·8	19·1
Kirklands	Mental handicap unit (adult)	1·4	75·3	5·0	87·6	167·9
Lady Home	GP hospital	—	10·1	—	5·2	15·3
Law	Mixed specialist hospital without maternity unit	91·6	426·3	231·0	110·2	767·5
Lockhart	Miscellaneous type of hospital	0·1	18·9	—	9·5	28·4
Monklands	Mixed specialist hospital without maternity unit	120·8	440·7	156·0	137·1	733·8
Motherwell Maternity	Maternity unit, non-teaching, non-GP	0·3	23·9	—	5·0	28·9
Roadmeetings	Long-stay geriatric unit	1·0	36·4	—	49·6	86·0
Stonehouse	Mixed specialist hospital without maternity unit	34·8	180·6	50·0	53·8	284·4
Strathclyde	Long-stay geriatric unit	0·3	46·0	—	24·9	70·9
Udston	Long-stay geriatric unit	0·4	19·6	—	10·2	29·8
Victoria Cottage	GP hospital with long-stay cases	0·7	10·6	—	5·0	15·6
Wester Moffat	Long-stay geriatric unit	0·2	25·6	—	20·1	45·7
William Smellie	Maternity unit, non-teaching, non-GP	8·7	74·9	—	18·5	93·4
Wishaw	Long-stay geriatric unit	0·1	31·0	—	17·9	48·9

[1] In post at 31 March 1987 (excluding teaching staff).
[2] Average over the financial year 1986-87.
[3] As shown in Scottish Health Service Costs.
[4] Used for young chronic sick specialty in 1986-87.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list his overseas visits since June 1987.

Mr. Rifkind: I visited in my official capacity the United States of America between 9 and 16 October 1987 and Japan between 17 and 21 October 1987.

National Health Service (Review)

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he proposes to hold as part of the review of the National Health Service in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend will consider carefully any submissions put to him.

Veterinary Inspectors

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when representatives of his Department last met the British Veterinary Association to discuss the work of local veterinary inspectors; what matters were discussed; and when he anticipates a further meeting taking place.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No such meetings have taken place and none is planned. However, my officials are closely following the discussions which are taking place between the British Veterinary Association and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received against proposals to put work done by local veterinary inspectors out to tender.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Letters have been received from two hon. Members following approaches made to them by the north of Scotland division of the British Veterinary Association and an individual practitioner.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total cost to his Department's Department of Agriculture of paying fees to local veterinary inspectors in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Fees and other expenses due to local veterinary inspectors in Scotland, as elsewhere in Great Britain, are borne by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, not by my Department. However, I am advised that the sums involved in the years for which information is available were as follows:

Year	Fees[1] £	Travel and subsistence £
1981-82	1,317,894	81,694
1982-83	1,342,120	121,175
1983-84	1,461,200	126,825
1984-85	1,560,455	125,825
1985-86	1,341,155	133,219
1986-87	1,574,692	136,189

[1] Including earnings related National Insurance contributions.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many local veterinary inspectors are currently retained by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries in Scotland; and how many there were in 1985, 1980 and 1975.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The responsibility for appointing local veterinary inspectors in Great Britain rests with the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, acting jointly. The number of local veterinary inspectors currently retained in Scotland is 508. This compares with 510 and 429 in 1985 and 1980 respectively. Comparable information for 1975 is not available.

Brucellosis

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of brucellosis in human beings were recorded in Scotland in 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980 and 1985.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Brucellosis is not a notifiable disease and figures for 1960 and 1965 are not available centrally. The Communicable Diseases (Scotland) Unit has supplied the following data for the later years:

Year	*Number of cases of brucellosis*
1970	347
1975	116
1980	79
1985	5

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Stalker-Sampson Investigations

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his statement of 25 January, *Official Report*, columns *21-23*, when he was first informed by the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland of the Director's decision to give directions not to institute any criminal proceedings relating to the Stalker-Sampson investigations.

The Attorney-General: Thursday 21 January 1988.

Ministerial Statement

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Attorney-General who was informed of his intention to make a statement in the House on 25 January prior to that date; and when.

The Attorney-General: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

Ministerial Communications

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Attorney-General what communications there were between his Office and the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North on 24 January either directly or on behalf of his Office and what communications there were within the previous seven days.

The Attorney-General: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

WALES

Health and Personal Social Services

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table setting out for 1987-88 and 1988-89 the estimated number of *(a)* families and *(b)* persons in each health region or equivalent, and in Wales as a whole, showing net average expenditure on health and personal social services per family and per person in each year, and distinguishing between expenditure on the National Health Service and on the personal social services.

Mr. Grist: The information is not readily available in the form requested. For Wales as a whole net estimated outturn in 1987-88 and net planned expenditure in 1988-89 per person and per family of four are as follows:

Population (thousand)	*Net expenditure per year*		
	Health and Personal Social Services £	*National Health Service* £	*Personal Social Services* £
1987-88 2,814:			
Per head	445	391	54
Per family of 4	1,780	1,564	216
1988-89 2,817:			
Per head	472	416·5	55·5
Per family of 4	1,888	1,666	222

The expenditure figures used are constistent with the information given in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1988-89 to 1990-91" (Cm. 288-II) and include net current and capital spending.

The population estimates quoted are the most recently published ones based on a 1985 projection by the Office of Population Census and Surveys.

Teacher Training

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the figures for recruitment to teacher training courses in 1987; what were the figures for 1986 in *(a)* the University of Wales and *(b)* the local authority/voluntary sector; and whether recruitment targets were achieved.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Details of teacher training students recruited in 1986 and 1987 are as follows:

Recruitment to Initial Teacher Training in Wales

	1986-87	*Target*	*1987-88*	*Target*
Public Sector				
BEd Primary	410	525	509	525
BEd Secondary	58	100	77	85
PGCE Primary	146	135	148	135
PGCE Secondary	89	105	109	120
Total	703	865	843	865
University Sector				
Primary	124	141	160	160
Secondary	451	545	468	545
Total	575	686	628	705

Recruitment to courses in the public sector increased by 20 per cent. and to courses in the University of Wales by 9 per cent.

ENERGY

Mining Equipment

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what has been the contribution of heavy duty longwall mining equipment to the improvements in the productivity of British Coal for the years 1985-86 and 1986-87;

(2) what information he has into how many British coal faces utilise heavy duty mining equipment, and as to when all faces will be so equipped.

Mr. Michael Spicer: These are matters for British Coal, and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Coal (International Trade)

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give his estimate of the growth of the international trade in coal by the end of the century.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Department does not undertake such estimates. However, a widely known projection of international coal trade in the OECD area is that published by the International Energy Agency (IEA) in "Coal Information 1987". This projects that total hard coal imports by OECD countries in 2000 will be 65 per cent. higher than the level in 1985.

Coal Industry (Policy)

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will review the Government's energy policy, in the light of the conclusions of the *Financial Times* international coal report, a copy of which has been sent to him, about the potential number of coal-importing power stations likely to be built over the next 10 years and their capacity to absorb all the additional tonnage now planned, as well as the slack to be taken up in over capacity at existing mines.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No.

Nuclear Experiments

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will *(a)* list all occasions since 1 January 1973 when notifications of planned nuclear experiments have been made to the European Commission under European treaty article 34 and *(b)* place copies of such notifications in the Library.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No experiments have been carried out at United Kingdom nuclear power stations which required to be notified under article 34 of the Euratom treaty.

Radiation

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will undertake to revise all statements made to the House by Ministers in his Department since May 1979 on safe levels of radiation exposure, in the light of *(a)* new dose limits recommended by the International Commission on Radiological Protection and *(b)* the new exposure standards set by the National Radiological Protection Board.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Occupational exposure to radiation is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. Reference was made to the current advice on dose limitation provided by national and international bodies in the answers I gave the hon. Member for Newcastle Upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 22 January 1988 at column *886* and 1 February 1988 at columns *474-75*.

Nuclear Exports

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will *(a)* list all occasions since 1 January 1973 that notifications of planned nuclear exports have been made to the European Commission under the European treaty article 103 and *(b)* place copies of such notifications in the Library.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The hon. Member may have in mind commercial contracts for the export of nuclear materials. I am advised that these contracts do not fall within the scope of article 103 of the Euratom treaty. Particulars of individual consignments and destinations are of course commercially confidential to the parties involved.

Nuclear Installations (Fixed Assets)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what valuation was put on the fixed assets at Sellafield, Capenhurst and Springfields when transferred from the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority to British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. ownership in 1971; and whether the initial investment cost in these facilities is included as a proportion of the unit cost of nuclear-generated electricity by his Department.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The net book values of the fixed assets to which the hon. Member refers were:

	£ million
Sellafield (Windscale and Calder Hall)	8·29
Capenhurst	6·98
Springfields	4·31

The value of these facilities is reflected in BNF's charges to its customers and, as such, is included in the unit cost of nuclear-generated electricity.

British Nuclear Fuels plc (Exhibition)

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the work of British Nuclear Fuels plc to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for an exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 29 February to 4 March inclusive.

International Atomic Energy Agency

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the level of financial contributions made by member states of the International Atomic Energy Agency for its safeguards system.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The costs of the International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards system are met from the agency's regular budget. A total of $45 million has been allocated for safeguards in the 1988 budget of $137 million to which member states will contribute in accordance with their assessed contributions.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if Her Majesty's Government will increase its contributions to the International Atomic Energy Agency in support of the expanded role now played by the agency's operational safety review team.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The costs of the International Atomic Energy Agency's operational safety review teams are met from the agency's regular budget. The regular

budget for 1988, to which the United Kingdom will contribute in accordance with her assessed contribution, allows for increased activity by these teams.

EMPLOYMENT

Small Businesses

79. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many small businesses have been established in the northern region since 1983.

Mr. Cope: The best estimate available of the number of small businesses is from VAT information. In the three years 1984 to 1986, there were an estimated 20,100 new VAT registrations in the northern region.

MSC (Employment Schemes)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any proposals to increase the range of aids available under the Manpower Services Commission's special aids to employment scheme.

Mr. Lee: The aim of the special aids to employment scheme is to supply any tools or equipment that are needed to overcome the effects of any disability in the employment field. Consequently, there is no limit to the range of aids that can be considered under the scheme.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any proposals to publicise more widely the aids currently available under the Manpower Services Commission's special aids to employment scheme.

Mr. Lee: The special aids to employment scheme is already publicised widely by the Disablement Advisory Service and staff at jobcentres, through the code of good practice on the employment and disabled people, videos, leaflets, liaison with employers and voluntary organisations, and direct contact with individual people with disabilities. There are no plans to publicise individual items available under the scheme, but examples are quoted in leaflets.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment is made of the suitability of aids issued under the special aids to employment scheme for the needs of the recipients.

Mr. Lee: The aim is to provide the most cost-effective suitable device which a person with a disability needs to do the job. Assessment of the appropriate aid for the purpose is made by staff of the Disablement Advisory Service in consultation with individual worker, the employer, the manufacturer, and technical and medical guidance and support as necessary.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many aids provided under the Manpower Services Commission's special aids to employment scheme in the last five years were issued to people categorised as *(a)* deaf without speech, *(b)* deaf with speech and *(c)* hard of hearing.

Mr. Lee: The figures showing the number of aids issued under the special aids to employment scheme to the three categories of people with hearing impairment are only readily available for the latest two and a half years (April 1985 to October 1987):

	Numbers
(a) Deaf without speech	97
(b) Deaf with speech	248
(c) Hard of hearing	347

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the average length of time between receipt of an application for equipment under the Manpower Services Commission's special aids to employment scheme and the date the equipment was delivered.

Mr. Lee: There are no figures available on the average length of time between receipt of the application for equipment under the special aids to employment scheme and the date the equipment was obtained. Typically, the period can vary from a few days to several weeks depending on the complexity of the case and the availability of the equipment.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what has been (i) the numerical, and (ii) the percentage, loss or gain in *(a)* manufacturing industry, *(b)* service industries and *(c)* the public service from 1979 to 1987 in (i) the United Kingdom, (ii) West Germany, (iii) the United States of America and (iv) Japan;

(2) what has been the total increase or decrease in jobs in *(a)* manufacturing industry, *(b)* service industries and *(c)* the total economy from 1979 to 1987 in (i) the United Kingdom, (ii) West Germany, (iii) Japan and (iv) the United States of America.

Mr. Lee: There are no figures for job losses or job gains, and estimates are not available for all the dates, areas and categories specified. The available information is as follows:

Numerical changes in the levels of civilian employment[1]

	Manufacturing Industries	*Service Industries*	*Totals in Civilian Employment*
Great Britain			
1979-1985	−1,783,000	1,119,000	−919,000
1979-1987	−1,954,000	1,856,000	−432,000
West Germany			
1979-1985	−793,000	627,000	−505,000
Japan			
1979-1985	1,200,000	3,210,000	3,280,000
United States of America			
1979-1985	−1,579,000	9,370,000	8,326,000

Percentage changes in the levels of civilian employment[1]

	Manufacturing Industries	*Service Industries*	*Totals in Civilian Employment*
Great Britain			
1979-1985	−25	8	−4
1979-1987	−27	13	−2
West Germany			
1979-1985	−9	5	−2

	Manufacturing Industries	Service Industries	Totals in Civilian Employment
Japan			
1979-1985	9	11	6
United States of America			
1979-1985	−7	15	8

[1] Civilian employment is the sum of employees in employment and the self employed in Great Britain. In West Germany, Japan and the United States of America the figures include unpaid family workers.

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of those available for work in Derbyshire were unemployed in each of the years 1983 to 1987; and what was the number of advertised job vacancies for each of those years.

Mr. Lee: The table shows the annual average number of unemployed claimants expressed as a percentage of employees in employment plus the unemployed. Estimates of self-employment, also part of the working population, are not regularly produced for counties. Also included are the annual average number of unfilled job vacancies registered at jobcentres, in the county of Derbyshire for each year from 1983 to 1987. Total numbers of advertised job vacancies are not available but it is estimated that nationally about a third of vacancies are notified to jobcentres.

County of Derbyshire

Year	Unemployed claimants[1] (per cent.)	Unfilled vacancies[2]
1983	12·4	1,512
1984	12·7	1,493
1985	12·7	1,663
1986	12·8	2,049
1987	12·0	2,363

[1] The numbers are affected by changes in the coverage of the count.
[2] The number of unfilled vacancies for 1983 is an average of 9 months, as the figures are only available from April 1983.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many self-employed people there were in (i) the Northwich travel-to-work area, (ii) the Runcorn travel-to-work area and (iii) the Chester travel-to-work area in each of the last five years; and what those figures represented as a percentage of the working population.

Mr. Lee: The only source of information on the self-employed resident in travel-to-work area (TTWAs) is the decennial census of population. Information from the 1981 census of population for the relevant TTWAs is as shown in the table:

	Self-employed Number	as percentage of economically active
Northwich	5,237	9·1
Widnes and Runcorn	3,115	4·9
Wirral and Chester	17,084	7·0

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has as to how many visitors stayed overnight in *(a)* the Northwich travel-to-work area, *(b)* the Runcorn travel-to-work area and *(c)* the Chester travel-to-work area in each of the last five years; how much they spent; and how many jobs they provided.

Mr. Lee: Data on the number and expenditure of overnight visits to the travel to work areas specified are not available. However, data on the number of overnight visits to Cheshire by overseas visitors and their associated expenditure are:

	Visits (000s)	Spending (£ millions)
1982	172	20
1983	183	23
1984	211	27
1985	198	31
1986	204	38

The latest available data on employment in tourism related industries in Cheshire relates to September 1984 when there were an estimated 21,800 employees in employment. Equivalent data for specified travel-to-work areas are as follows:

	Number
Northwich	2,600
Widnes & Runcorn	3,200
Wirral & Chester	12,800

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have taken advantage of the job training scheme child care payment systems in *(a)* the Northwich travel-to-work area, *(b)* the Chester travel-to-work area and *(c)* the Runcorn travel-to-work area.

Mr. Cope: There are no trainees receiving child care payments in the three areas concerned. The facility for such payments is being piloted in 10 areas nationally, none of which fall within the boundaries of Cheshire.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, what is the current level of *(a)* youth, *(b)* long-term and *(c)* all unemployment in (i) the Northwich travel-to-work area, (ii) the Chester travel-to-work area and (iii) the Runcorn travel-to-work area; what have been the figures at the same date in each of the last five years; and what each figure represents as a percentage of those available for work.

Mr. Lee: The following information is available from the Library. Table *(a)* shows the number of unemployed claimants aged under 18, table *(b)* shows the number of unemployed claimants unemployed for over one year, and table *(c)* shows the total number of unemployed claimants at October of each of the last five years, (the most recent available figures are for October 1987) in the Northwich, Wirral and Chester and Widnes and Runcorn travel-to-work areas, together with these numbers as a percentage of employees in employment plus the unemployed. Comparisons over the period are slightly affected by the change in the method of compiling the figures in March 1986.

Travel to work area	October 1983	Per cent.	October 1984	Per cent.	October 1985	Per cent.	October 1986	Per cent.	October 1987	Per cent.
Table (a)—Unemployed Claimants aged under 18										
Northwich	478	1·0	485	1·0	461	1·0	344	0·7	258	0·6
Wirral and Chester	2,763	1·3	2,527	1·2	2,374	1·2	2,114	1·1	1,530	0·8
Widnes and Runcorn	1,057	1·8	1,008	1·7	805	1·4	717	1·3	614	1·1
Table (b)—Claimants unemployed over one year										
Northwich	2,254	4·9	2,514	5·3	2,493	5·3	2,467	5·3	2,027	4·4
Wirral and Chester	15,703	7·6	17,007	8·3	17,848	8·8	17,650	8·8	15,421	7·7
Widnes and Runcorn	4,865	8·3	5,503	9·3	5,659	9·9	5,487	9·8	4,637	8·3
Table (c)—Total unemployed Claimants										
Northwich	6,262	13·5	6,434	13·6	6,563	13·8	6,016	12·9	5,116	11·0
Wirral and Chester	37,083	18·0	38,637	18·9	39,368	19·5	37,875	18·9	33,365	16·6
Widnes and Runcorn	11,389	19·3	11,703	19·8	11,584	20·3	11,335	20·2	9,668	17·2

School Leavers

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of school leavers went directly into full-time employment in *(a)* the Northwich travel-to-work area, *(b)* the Chester travel-to-work area and *(c)* the Runcorn travel-to-work area, in each of the past five years.

Mr. Lee: I regret that the information requested is not available for the relevant travel-to-work areas.

Confectionery and Biscuits

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are his estimates of the prospects for further employment in the confectionery and biscuit industry in the north of England, in the event of the removal of value added tax from products currently charged at the standard rate.

Mr. Lee: I am not in a position to make such estimates.

Mental Illness

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many of those registered as unemployed in England and Wales in each of the last five years had previous primary diagnoses of *(a)* mental illness and *(b)* schizophrenia psychoses; and how many had been registered as unemployed for (i) three to six months, (ii) six months to one year, (iii) one to three years and (iv) over three years.

Mr. Lee: I regret that this information is not available.

Occupational Health Services

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has responded to the consultative document produced by the Health and Safety Commission regarding occupational health services and ratification of International Labour Organisation convention 161 adopted in June 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: I invited the Health and Safety Commission to give its views on whether the Government should ratify ILO convention 161 on occupational health services. The commission issued a consultative document and, in the light of the comments received, has recently submitted its advice which I am currently considering.

Hourly Earnings

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has for each year since 1975 as to the figures for average hourly earnings of industrial workers in *(a)* Belgium, *(b)* Britain, *(c)* Germany, *(d)* France, *(e)* Holland, *(f)* Sweden, *(g)* the United State of America and *(h)* Italy.

Mr. Lee: The table sets out the available information published by the International Labour Office for average hourly wage of employees in manufacturing industry.

Average Hourly Wages of Employees in Manufacturing Industry[1]

	Belgium (Francs)[2]	United Kingdom (£)[2][6]	Federal Republic of Germany (Deutschmarks)[3]	France (Francs)[3]	Netherlands (Guilders)[3]	Sweden (Kronor)[3]	United States of America ($)	Italy (Lira)[4]
1975	144·32	1·399	9·69	11·99	9·95	. .	4·83	1,794
1976	159·68	1·559	10·35	13·87	10·77	27·31	5·22	2,133
1977	174·59	1·687	11·14	15·61	11·83	29·51	5·68	2,673
1978	184·44	1·949	11·73	17·49	12·49	33·03	6·17	3,244
1979	199·61	2·275	12·36	19·56	13·05	36·01	6·70	3,849
1980	217·88	2·664	13·18	22·72	13·77	39·63	7·27	4,684
1981	243·08	2·934	13·92	26·14	14·56	43·18	7·99	5,742
1982	256·80	3·197	14·64	29·75	15·60	45·67	8·49	6,693
1983	270·33	3·436	15·14	33·56	15·93	48·45	8·83	7,712
1984	281·78	3·677	15·49	35·67	16·16	53·98	9·19	8,539
1985	293·81	3·971	16·20	37·75	16·58	58·58	9·53	. .
1986	295·30	4·268	16·80	39·29	. .	. .	9·73	. .

Source: International Labour Office 'Year Book of Labour Statistics 1986'
'Bulletin of Labour Statistics 1987-8'

Notes:
[1]Average gross earnings per hour of men and women of all ages (except salaried employees) unless otherwise indicated. See notes for each country. Figures relate to annual averages unless otherwise indicated.
[2]October of each year.
[3]Includes family allowance paid directly by employer.
[4]Includes value of payments in kind.
[5]Second quarter of each year. Adults only. Including holiday and sick leave payments and the value of payments in kind.
[6]Full time male manual workers on adult rates of pay—includes quarrying after 1983 and all adults prior to 1980.
. . Not available.
Italics Change in coverage of series.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

British Industry Committee

78. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance he proposes to give to the British Industry Committee on South Africa in its efforts to get British companies to invest in social projects in South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: We have kept in close touch from the outset with the British Industry Committee on South Africa about its scheme to invest in social projects in South Africa. We also maintain contact with the major British companies already involved in such projects, which we welcome. The Government have committed funds totalling £21 million for the five years beginning in April 1987 to our own major development programme for black people in South Africa.

Helsinki Final Act

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the recent progress of Romania in fulfilling the Helsinki Final Act.

Mr. Mellor: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) on 13 January, at columns *185-89*.

Romania's performance has not improved over the last six months. The presidency of the European Community made representations to the Romanian authorities on 3 February in Bucharest on behalf of the Twelve, drawing attention to the need for Romania to respect its CSCE commitments.

BBC Overseas Service

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will indicate in real terms the grant payable to the BBC overseas service over the last five years.

Mr. Mellor: The total grants-in-aid of the BBC external services in the last five years for broadcasting and monitoring were as follows:

	Total £ million	*Real increase on previous year percentage*
1982-83	70·9	5
1983-84	77·6	5
1984-85	81·1	0
1985-86	90·0	5
1986-87	98·8	7

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if any representations have been made to Her Majesty's Government or to the United Kingdom ambassador in Washington from the member states of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty concerning breaches of non-proliferation treaty article 1 on the prohibition of assistance in making nuclear weapon devices.

Mr. Mellor: We have received no such representations.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is aware of any breaches of article VI of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Mellor: No.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if any member state Government party to the non-proliferation treaty has ever made it known to the depository states that they intend to consider withdrawing from the treaty; and if he will list the signatories to the treaty at the most recent practicable date.

Mr. Mellor: We have received no suggestions that any party to the non-proliferation treaty wishes to withdraw. I have placed copies of the latest list of signatories to the treaty in the Library.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what initiatives his Department will take to ensure the extension and strengthening of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty at the 1995 renewal conference of the treaty.

Mr. Mellor: We are strongly committed to the non-proliferation treaty. It is, however, too soon to consider initiatives for renewing the treaty in 1995.

International Atomic Energy Agency

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will request Her Majesty's Government's ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency board of directors to forward a report to his Department on the agency's director-general's latest safeguards implementation report and oral commentary; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Mellor: We receive International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards implementation reports on an annual basis. The reports and the Director-General's oral commentary are confidential to board members.

However, a summary and the main conclusions of the 1986 safeguards implementation report (the latest available) are given in paragraphs 34 and 391 to 437 of the International Atomic Energy Agency's annual report for 1986. I am arranging for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will instruct Her Majesty's Government's permanent ambassador to the United Nations permanent disarmament conference to initiate negotiations under the amendment procedure of the 1963 partial test ban treaty to enforce the finalisation of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

Mr. Mellor: No.

Nuclear Materials (Security)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if any representative from the nuclear authorities in the United Kingdom has been invited to the meeting of nuclear experts convened by the DG. 17 energy directorate of the European Commission on 15 February; and if he will set out the assistance the United Kingdom intends to offer to the Energy Commission inquiry looking into nuclear materials security in the European Economic Community.

Mr. Mellor: Yes. The possibility of any United Kingdom assistance being supplied will be considered in the light of the outcome of the meeting.

Nuclear Materials (Oversight)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's evaluation of the adequacy of chapters 7 and 10 of the European treaty on ensuring oversight of nuclear materials and technology management within and without the EEC.

Mr. Mellor: We are satisfied that chapters VII and X of the Euratom treaty adequately cater for the safeguarding of nuclear material both inside the Community and in trade between Community and third countries. These chapters do not address the question of technology management.

Nuclear Safeguards

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information his Department currently possesses on the inquiries to be undertaken, respectively, by *(a)* the Euratom safeguards directorate and *(b)* the commission of inquiry of the European Parliament appointed on 20 January to investigate the adequacy of the implementations of nuclear safeguards to nuclear facilities within the EEC member states.

Mr. Mellor: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the allegations involving a German firm, Transnuklear, and the Belgian nuclear centre at Mol. Following those allegations, Euratom officials, working with officials from the International Atomic Energy Agency, carried out exhaustive checks and found no evidence that any nuclear material of significance has been diverted and no evidence of any breach of safeguards.

The European Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry which was appointed on 20 January to investigate activities at Mol is to report within four months from that date.

Armoured Personnel Carriers (Turkey)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assurances have been sought from the Turkish Government on the proposed uses of the 40 Shorts SS50 armoured personnel carriers which its Interior Ministry has contracted to buy for their gendarmerie; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: None. Turkey is a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation ally with which we enjoy excellent bilateral relations.

Nuclear Materials (Khartoum)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will instruct Her Majesty's ambassador to Sudan to inquire of the Sudanese Prime Minister if he will make available to Her Majesty's Government any information he possesses concerning the allegations of a black market in weapons grade nuclear materials in Khartoum made public initially on 30 October 1987.

Mr. Mellor: Her Majesty's embassy in Khartoum is in touch with the appropriate Sudanese governmental authorities. There is still no evidence to confirm the allegation of a black market in weapons grade nuclear material in Sudan.

Annette Heunis and Terry Tsle

Mr. Ashby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from Her Majesty's ambassador in South Africa about the case of Annette Heunis and Terry Tsle, who have fled to Bophuthatswana to escape the attempts by the South African police to stop their mixed race relationship.

Mrs. Chalker: None. The case has received extensive coverage in the British press. As the House knows, Her Majesty's Government believe that individuals should be free to live where they wish.

Hong Kong

Sir Peter Blaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Hong Kong Government White Paper on representative government will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Hong Kong Government White Paper on the development of representative government was published in Hong Kong earlier today. Copies of the White Paper were placed in the Library of the House today. The paper covers a range of issues connected with the development of representative government. The main decisions are that

(a) ten directly elected members will be introduced into the Legislative Council in 1991;

(b) in 1988 the number of appointed members in the Council will be reduced from 22 to 20, and the number of members elected by functional constituencies will increase from 12 to 14. In 1991 the present geographically-based electoral college system of election will be abolished, but the urban and regional councils will each continue to elect one member to the Council;

(c) links between the urban district boards and the urban council will be strengthened;

(d) the Governor will continue to be the president of the Legislative Council for the immediate future.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Coal Waste (Disposal)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with British Coal regarding its proposals to dispose of increased amounts of coal waste and slurry off Dawdon; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 9 February 1988.

Dairy Inspections

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the average *(a)* cost of a dairy inspection, *(b)* duration of a visit for a dairy inspection and *(c)* number of visits each inspector carried out per day, for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The information is not available in the form requested. However, the charge of £90 reflects the total cost of enforcing the milk and dairies regulations, and the salary and travelling costs of the dairy husbandry staff who carry out farm visits (including follow-up visits which are not chargeable) account for approximately half of this sum.

The duration of routine dairy husbandry visits varies and it is not possible to provide a meaningful average.

Dairy husbandry advisers achieve between three and four visits per day, but this is an average. In practice they aim to devote complete days to farm visiting (during which they normally cover five farms) after which between one third and one half of a day is required for writing up the results and preparing for the next block of visits.

Chemical Trials

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the scope and purpose of all chemical trials currently being conducted on United Kingdom farms.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* The agricultural and horticultural industries use a wide range of chemicals, most notably as fertilisers, pesticides, fungicides, veterinary medicines, disinfectants and cleaning agents. My Department has statutory responsibilities for testing or monitoring in a number of these areas. We also have a research and development programme to support this work and to explore was of minimising chemical usage. This includes studying the effects of chemicals in crops and food, on the environment and on wild life. Most trials involved are carried out in laboratories or at experimental research stations, though some do take place on farms with the agreement of the farmer concerned and subject to the necessary supervision. Farm trials are also undertaken to assess commercial viability, though the majority of these are conducted by chemical companies and subject to any licensing conditions. In the case of pesticides, this involves authorisation by the granting of an experimental permit under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986. For veterinary medicines, companies or individuals may apply for an animal test certificate under the Medicines Act 1968. But in order to protect commercial confidentiality, section 118 of the Act prohibits the disclosure of information relating to such applications.

Centrally held information on the R and D programme does not readily allow the identification of projects which include farm trials and details of these and the many pesticide permits could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Rainfall (West Yorkshire)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his Department first received from the Meteorological Office rainfall figures for the period 2 to 7 May 1986, in relation to west Yorkshire; when this information was transmitted to his Department's regional offices in west Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* First information on rainfall across Britain during the period in question was provided immediately, by telephone—see my reply of 29 January at column *421*. This was used to identify areas most likely to be affected by fallout; later, this function was replaced by the use of results of surveys of actual deposition and of monitoring, which made it clear that north Wales, Cumbria and south-west Scotland were the areas of significant deposition. Subsequent to these surveys, preliminary rainfall maps (based on radar data and covering the whole country on 3-4 May) were received by my Leeds regional office at the end of June 1986 from the local meteorological office.

DEFENCE

Air-Sea Search and Rescue

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many mountain rescue associations have submitted comments to his Department on the future of air-sea search and rescue services.

Mr. Freeman: Since 1 January 1987, seven mountain rescue organisations have submitted comments to this Department on the future of search and rescue services. A number of other organisations associated with mountaineering have also done so.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Moray, *Official Report*, 26 January, column *183*, he will list in the *Official Report* the names of those organisations and individuals who have made representations to retain air-sea search and rescue services as a function of the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Freeman: Representations to retain search and rescue services as a military function have been made by, or on behalf of, the following organisations:

Brecon Mountain Rescue Team
British Mountaineering Council
Cockermouth Mountain Rescue Team
Hinckley Mountaineering Club
Llanberis Mountain Rescue Team
Lomond Mountaineering Club
Mountaineering Council of Scotland
Mountain Rescue Committee
Mountain Rescue Committee of Scotland
Moray District Council
National Organisation for Outdoor Education

(Scotland)
National Union of Seamen
Pembrokeshire Conservative and Unionist Association (St. Davids branch)
Ramblers' Association, East Yorkshire and Derwent Area
Scottish Mountaineers' Club
Swaledale Fell Rescue Organisation
Tweed Valley Mountain Rescue Team
Wick Community Council

It is not the practice to list the names of private individuals who have made representations to this Department.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list in the *Official Report* the total number of representations he has received about the future of air-sea search and rescue services.

Mr. Freeman: Apart from parliamentary questions, some 60 inquiries or representations about the future of air-sea search and rescue services have been received by this Department since 1 January 1987.

Trident (Contracts)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the contracts awarded to United Kingdom companies for work on the United States Trident strategic weapon system programme, giving in each case the name of the company, the nature of the work, the value of the contract and the duration of the contract.

Mr. Sainsbury: Up to the end of September 1987, 395 contracts had been awarded to 59 United Kingdom firms out of a total of 1,007 requests for quotation received from the seven major United States primes involved with the United States Trident II programme. The total value of these contracts is $78 million. Many of the contracts are for initial quantities for the full-scale engineering development phase, with the potential for follow-on production orders. It is not the practice to give details of individual contracts.

Exercise Teamwork 88

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if a rehearsal amphibious landing in the United Kingdom is planned for Exercise Teamwork 88; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: No rehearsal amphibious landing is planned to take place in the United Kingdom as a part of Exercise Teamwork 88, which will be a major NATO maritime exercise held later this year in the Atlantic and Norwegian sea areas.

Trident

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if the re-entry vehicle bus for the Trident system is being purchased in the United States of America;

(2) whether the re-entry vehicles for the Trident system are being purchased in the United States; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: As has frequently been stated, the Trident D5 missile — which includes the post boost vehicle (or bus) — will be purchased from the United States. The warheads will be developed and manufactured in this country, and will be assembled in the United Kingdom into re-entry vehicles of which some parts will have been purchased from the United States.

Departmental Staff Duties

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his departmental staff are employed full-time on nuclear arms control and disarmament research.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Responsibility within the Ministry of Defence for nuclear arms control matters falls initially on the defence arms control unit. Within this unit, two people are engaged full time on nuclear arms control. A great many others, in various parts of the Ministry, contribute to relevant research and to the formulation of policy as an important part of their duties.

British Nuclear Fuels plc

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on how many occasions in each of the years 1979 to the present day he met the chairman of British Nuclear Fuels to discuss nuclear materials provisions in support of the United Kingdom nuclear deterrent;

(2) when he last paid a visit to *(a)* British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. Sellafield, *(b)* British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. Capenhurst and *(c)* British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. Chapel Cross.

Mr. Sainsbury: Since my right hon. Friend was appointed to his current office in January 1986, he has not met the chairman of British Nuclear Fuels plc officially nor has he visited the company's sites at Sellafield, Capenhurst and Chapel Cross.

Tritium

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has had any discussions with his counterpart in the United States of America over the provision of tritium to the United States of America from Chapel Cross.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend has had frequent meetings with the United States Secretary for Defence; the details of their discussions are confidential.

Cabinet Defence Committee—UKAEA (Minutes)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will arrange for a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet Defence Committee and the chairman of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, of 2 August 1957, recently released under the 30-year rule, to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Freeman: If the hon. Member is referring to a specific document that has already been released for open inspection under the 30-year rule, he may ask the Library to request a copy direct from the Public Record Office at Kew.

Nuclear Accidents

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department has made any evaluation of the implications of the radiation contamination of clean-up workers following the 21 January 1968 accident involving a nuclear weapon-carrying B-52 US air force bomber at the US air force base at Thule, Greenland, for emergency procedures at all Royal Air Force bases used by nuclear capable aircraft.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The alleged contamination of personnel involved in the clean-up operation after the

Thule accident in 1968 is a matter for the US and Danish authorities. However, the accident was studied in detail by the Ministry of Defence, and all pertinent lessons are now reflected in our nuclear weapon accident contingency plans, the details of which remain classified.

30-Year Rule

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will initiate a review of all the statements and parliamentary answers made by Ministers in his Department to the House to assess if formal revision is necessitated by new information contained in official papers on defence matters released on 11 January under the 30-year rule; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: To enable me to reply perhaps the hon. Member would specify which statements contained in official papers on defence matters released on 11 January under the 30-year rule would in his opinion necessitate review or revision of parliamentary answers made by MOD Ministers.

TRANSPORT

British Rail

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will detail the changes in the investment criteria applied by Her Majesty's Government to British Rail for *(a)* passenger and *(b)* freight traffic since the Transport Act 1962; and what future changes he envisages.

Mr. David Mitchell: Changes since 1962 could be ascertained only at disproportionate cost. The Government's current views on criteria for railway investment will be set out in their response to the Transport Committee's report on the financing of rail services.

London Regional Transport

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of *(a)* the amount of central Government funding to London Regional Transport and *(b)* the amount of public funding from all sources that was (i) requested by London Regional Transport, or where appropriate the Greater London council and (ii) provided for the last 10 years.

Mr. David Mitchell: It is not possible to attribute subsidy between ratepayers and taxpayers prior to 1985-86, since much of the latter's contribution was by means of rate support grant and transport supplementary grant to the GLC, which, as block grants, were not hypothecated. The figures for grant provided are as follows:

	1977	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
Exchequer	118	114·2	147·5	195·6	216·2	312·5	339·2	317	111	101·4	82·1
Ratepayers									212	193·6	156·9

I have no information about the amount of grant requested prior to 1985-86, but since then the total grant has been in excess of need and surpluses have been carried forward each year.

Traffic Accidents (Radiation)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of the number of traffic accidents in which either workers or employees were exposed to significant levels of radiation for each year since 1975.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Studies carried out by the National Radiological Protection Board show that since 1975 no employees or workers have been exposed to significant levels of radiation in traffic accidents.

Light Dues

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has about the level of charges equivalent to light dues levied by different European countries.

Mr. David Mitchell: Within the EC, light dues are charged in Greece, the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom. I have no information about the level or scope of the charges in Greece, but the Republic of Ireland operates a similar system to that in the United Kingdom, although the rates of charge may vary from time to time. I understand that in the Netherlands there is a Government levy on port dues which is applied to meeting the costs of navigational aids outside the ports. Elsewhere in Europe, I understand that in Sweden light dues are levied on vessels arriving from abroad, and that in Norway part of the costs of lights is met through port charges. Of the membership of the International Association of Lighthouse Authorities, which is a worldwide organisation, about 45 per cent. of member countries rely solely on port or light dues, and about 38 per cent. rely on general taxation or subsidy or a mixture of public finance and dues.

Road Safety

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has about the relative safety for different types of road user on *(a)* all roads, *(b)* trunk roads and *(c)* motorways.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information requested is available only for English roads:

Accident involvement rates for drivers/riders of different vehicle types: England : 1986
Per 100 million vehicle kilometers

	Motorways	*Trunk roads*	*All roads*
Car drivers	26·1	78·8	122·8
Pedal cyclists	N/A	1,156·5	631·5
Motor cyclists	167·2	697·4	1,011·9
Light goods vehicle drivers	22·1	69·6	100·9
Heavy goods vehicle drivers	23.2	61·2	67·1

	Motorways	Trunk roads	All roads
All drivers/riders of motor vehicles	26·1	85·2	137·9

The involvement rates *relative* to the involvement rate of car drivers are given in the table.

Relative accident involvement rates for drivers/riders of different vehicle types: England: 1986

(car drivers = 1)

	Motorways	Trunk roads	All roads
Car drivers	1·00	1·00	1.00
Pedal cyclists	N/A	14·67	5·14
Motor cyclists	6·40	8·85	8·24
Light goods vehicle drivers	0·84	0·88	0·82
Heavy goods vehicle drivers	0·89	0·78	0·55
All drivers/riders of motor vehicles	1·00	1·08	1·12

Casualty rates for drivers/riders of different vehicle types: England: 1986

Per 100 million driver kilometres

	Motorways	Trunk roads	All roads
Car drivers	10·9	31·5	38·4
Pedal cyclists	N/A	1,121	605
Motor cycle riders	148	636	908
Light goods vehicle drivers	9·6	22·7	24·2
Heavy goods vehicle drivers	7·1	14·1	12·3
All drivers/riders of motor vehicles	10·8	36·1	51·8

Relative casualty rates, for drivers/riders of different vehicle types: England: 1986

(car drivers = 1)

	Motorways	Trunk roads	All roads
Car drivers	1·00	1·00	1·00
Pedal cyclists	N/A	35·6	15·8
Motor cycle riders	13·5	20·2	23·6
Light goods vehicle drivers	0·88	0·72	0·63
Heavy goods vehicle drivers	0·65	0·45	0·32
All drivers/riders of motor vehicles	0·99	1·15	1·35

Roads (Repair and Maintenance)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which road repair and maintenance schemes originated by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* local authorities are now privately managed; and what plans he has to extend management privatisation of road projects.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Private agents manage repair and maintenance on our behalf in the following areas:

1. South Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, and the West Midlands (motorways only).
2. West Yorkshire (motorways and part of the trunk roads).

I am not aware of arrangements for private management of maintenance of local authority roads.

We have no plans at present to extend private management of trunk road maintenance. We shall keep the possibility under review.

Aircraft (Near-Miss Incidents)

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will discuss with Civil Aviation Authority making the maximum information available to the public regarding the near-miss involving a British Airways plane and a Bulgarian aircraft.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on Monday 8 February.

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ascertain from the Civil Aviation Authority whether lack of command of the English language has been a contributing factor in near-miss incidents.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I will ask the chairman of the CAA to write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ascertain from the Civil Aviation Authority whether the near-miss involving a British Airways plane and a Bulgarian aircraft was in any way contributed to by defective air traffic control equipment.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on Monday 8 February. This is a matter which will be considered by the investigation being conducted by the chief inspector of accidents.

Railways Inspectorate

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the duties of the Railways Inspectorate.

Mr. David Mitchell: The principal duties of the Railway Inspectorate are to assist and advise the Secretary of State in the exercise of his jurisdiction under the railway regulatory Acts. This includes the inspection and approval of new and altered railway works, including level crossings, safety rules and regulations, and the reporting and investigation of accidents. In addition, the inspectorate applies the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work Etc. Act 1974 to the operational parts* of the railways in Great Britain under an agency agreement between the Department and the Health and Safety Commission, and inspects railway works and investigates accidents in Northern Ireland, Hong Kong and Singapore under separate agency agreements. Full details of the Secretary of State's jurisdiction under the railway Acts, and details of the agency agreement with the HSC, are given in appendix 11 of the Department's report on the safety record of the railways in Great Britain during 1986, a copy of which is in the Library.

Railways (Safety)

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the availability of finance is one of the criteria adopted by the Railways Inspectorate in determining its policy towards safety measures on railways.

Mr. David Mitchell: Both British Rail and London Regional Transport have a statutory duty to provide or secure the provision of rail services and in so doing to have due regard to efficiency, economy and safety of operation. In considering proposals affecting safety the Railway Inspectorate bears these requirements in mind.

Heavy Vehicles

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he intends to take to encourage the use of air suspensions on heavy vehicles to reduce the harmful effects on roads and bridges.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are circulating proposals to increase the permitted weight on each axle of a triaxle of a semi-trailer from 7·5 tonnes to 8 tonnes provided that air suspensions or other equivalent fluid suspensions are fitted. This will allow more flexibility in load distribution and reduce the likelihood of overloading axles. The maximum weight of articulated vehicles remains at 38 tonnes.

Night Flying

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has reached decisions about future night-flying restrictions at Heathrow and Gatwick airports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: On 6 November last year I published proposals for future night restrictions at the two airports. I set out then my objective—to improve the night noise climate around the airports without imposing unnecessary restrictions on the airline industry.

I am very aware that many people living near the airports feel strongly about night flying. I have considered their views very carefully. My predecessors accepted that some night disturbance was unavoidable. They framed night restrictions designed to phase out the noisiest aircraft. This phasing out has now been achieved and those living near the airports have benefited—at no small cost to the airlines. I now have the opportunity to build on those achievements with further improvements in the night noise climate.

The challenge is to ensure that the benefits of modern aviation technology are enjoyed not only by those who fly, but by those on the ground. I believe that we can do that by giving airlines an incentive to replace their older, noisier aircraft by modern quieter ones. There is a balance to be struck. These modern aircraft are expensive. But because they make so much less noise than their predecessors, particularly on take-off, they can be used at night with much less disturbance. And because night movements can make a lot of difference to the economics of operating expensive new aircraft, they become more attractive to airlines. They will be used by day, much more than at night, and so will help to improve the daytime noise climate.

I am determined that at Gatwick night noise disturbance should be reduced over the next five years. I therefore intend to reduce sharply flights by noisier, older aircraft, while increasing those by quieter aircraft — allowing a very small increase year by year in the total number of flights. I am thus adopting the preferred option in the consultation paper.

At Heathrow there is less demand for night flights than at Gatwick. The present quotas are not fully used, and I can achieve my objectives by limiting the further growth of night movements by keeping them to about their present level, as proposed in the consultation paper. There are very few planned departures in the middle of the night at Heathrow: in future I shall require that these should be modern, quieter aircraft. Take-offs by older, noisier aircraft will not be allowed in the small hours except for a small quota for those planned to take off earlier which are unavoidably delayed. This should achieve a considerable improvement in the noise climate during this most sensitive period.

I know that many people near Gatwick remain to be convinced that more flights, even by modern aircraft, can mean less disturbance from noise. I assure them that we shall monitor the noise climate, and the noise of individual aircraft, to ensure that the benefits of quieter aircraft are realised in reduced disturbance. I am prepared to consider whether additional monitoring is necessary, to verify the reduced effects on local populations of night flights by quieter aircraft. It is important that people should have confidence in the monitoring, and I therefore intend to conduct it more openly, by inviting the airport consultative committees to nominate representatives of local people to sit with representatives of the airline industry on an advisory committee to consider all aspects of monitoring.

The consultation paper proposed a regime for night flights extending over five years. However, if after two years (that is after the summer season 1989) it is apparent that disturbance from night flights at Gatwick is getting worse, rather than lessening as our research leads us to expect, we shall revise the quotas accordingly. Thus we shall, in effect, be putting the onus on the airline industry to prove their case in the meantime. At Heathrow, because the quotas are being cut, the level of disturbance will in any case be less than it otherwise would have been.

In response to suggestions made during the consultation, I shall make some small adjustments to the consequential changes which we proposed.

The main points of the new restrictions are described in a paper I have placed in the Library. Copies will be sent to hon. Members who were involved in the recent consultations.

Channel Tunnel (Rail Infrastructure)

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will indicate the investment criteria applied by Her Majesty's Government to British Rail, and information available to him on criteria applied by the French Government to SNCF, in relation to rail infrastructure connected to or associated with the Channel tunnel.

Mr. David Mitchell: So far as Channel tunnel related investment is concerned, it is our understanding that the French Government, like Her Majesty's Government, expect the investments of their railways to show a proper commercial rate of return.

Motor Vehicles (Safety)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the manufacturers of motor vehicles with a view to improving vehicle safety and safety of other road users; what steps he is taking to secure wider adoption of safer vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We attach high importance to safety-conscious vehicle design and maintenance. We regularly meet vehicle manufacturers and the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders to discuss the

implications of new technology, new vehicle standards, vehicle defects and appropriate corrective action including recalls.

The Transport and Road Research Laboratory has been in the forefront in fostering safer vehicle design. Current ideas and developments include the pedestrian-friendly car, which could save pedestrian casualties caused by unsympathetic vehicle fronts, increased use of rear seat belts and child restraints, improved fire prevention, a softened steering wheel which could prevent facial injuries, and increased fitment of such braking features as antilock.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Tax Changes

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much on average those earning over £50,000 a year have gained, on an annual basis, from tax changes over the past eight years.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply which I gave to the hon. Members for Worsley (Mr. Lewis), for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) and for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 14 January 1988, at columns *389-90*.

Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether, pursuant to the reply of 25 January, *Official Report*, columns *82-84*, concerning the Government's borrowing requirements, he will publish in the *Official Report* particulars of the difference between Government revenues and disbursements for *(a)* central Government, *(b)* local government and *(c)* other public bodies in the current financial year, excluding borrowing.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* The difference between the Government's receipts and expenditure is their borrowing requirement. Details of the borrowing requirements of central Government, the local authorities and the public corporations are published in "Financial Statistics", tables 3.4, 4.4 and 5.4 respectively.

Government Data Network

Mr. Soley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidelines currently apply to limitations on the exchange of information between Government Departments; and in what way this will be affected by the proposed introduction of a Government data network.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* Any transfer of date between Departments requires the authorisation of the Department that owns the data. This requirement will continue if the proposed GDN is introduced.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, pursuant to his answer of 12 November, *Official Report*, column *277*, he is yet in a position to announce the outcome of the tendering process for the Government data network.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* No. Memoranda of agreement were agreed by Departments and the bidding consortia on 11 January. Tenders will be invited shortly.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Data Processing Industry

12. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the level of output in the data processing industry in 1986 and in 1980; and what was the level of exports in the industry in the same period.

Mr. Alan Clark: Respondents to the Department's computing services inquiry reported sales of £1·6 billion in 1986, including £114 million exports. In 1980, respondents reported £500 million sales and £34 million exports.

Management Education

15. **Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to encourage the spread of management education.

54. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how he intends to advance his proposals on management education outlined in the recent White Paper.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: As set out in the White Paper, "DTI—department for Enterprise," (Cmnd. 278), DTI, along with other Government Departments and the Manpower Services Commission, is represented on the industry-led Council for Management Education and Development (the Charter Group initiative). The council's objective is to encourage the spread of management education and good management practice. Its work will include formulating a code of good practice and helping to develop a framework for management education and training at all levels. I am greatly encouraged by the progress which the council has made so far.

Letter Monopoly (Breaches)

16. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many prosecutions have been initiated by his Department relating to the breaking of the letter monopoly of the Post Office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: None. It is the responsibility of the Post Office to decide what action should be taken if it believes that its letter monopoly is being infringed.

Printing Industry

19. **Mr. John Townend:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the level of output in the printing industry in 1986 and 1987.

Mr. Atkins: The index of production for the United Kingdom printing and publishing industries was 105·6 in 1986 and 116·3 in the first three quarters of 1987 based on 1980 = 100.

Space Research

20. **Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his policy on the science and technology of space research; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I remain wholly committed to a programme of scientific research in space and in particular to the European Space Agency's Horizon 2000

programme. This programme has received a 20 per cent. real terms increase in funding over the last three years and I am satisfied that the present level of planned funding will enable the objects of Horizon 2000 to be met satisfactorily.

Space can be a spur to new advances in technology by British industry. It can sometimes be a profitable area of economic activity, for example in the field of communications. I am satisfied that the current level of Government expenditure of some £120 million per annum is justified and I will continue to seek to use it in ways which are potentially beneficial for industry. However, I do not consider that a case has been established for any increase. I have today confirmed to the European Space Agency that Britain will not be extending its involvement in ESA by taking part in the optional programmes on the Ariane V launcher or the Columbus space station as presently proposed.

Earth observation from space, however, could have significant potential. It involves the processing of remote sensing data from satellites and its supply to end-users for a range of applications. Data from the European Space Agency's first remote sensing satellite, to which the United Kingdom is contributing, will start to be transmitted by the early 1990s. To process this data I have decided to provide funds, estimated at £4 million per annum over five years, to set up an earth observation data centre as part of the national remote sensing complex at the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnborough.

At present there is little agreement, either among manufacturing companies or users, on a preferred strategy for future earth observation operations, but I will continue to consider the various options open to us.

Investment Capital

22. **Mr. George:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his estimate of the amount of capital raised for new investment on the stock market in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Maude: New money raised on the stock exchange in the year to January 1988, net of redemptions, was £16·7 billion.

Manufacturing Industry

24. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the increase in United Kingdom producer prices and manufactured import prices in the latest year for which data are available.

Mr. Alan Clark: United Kingdom output producer prices for manufacturing increased by 3·8 per cent. and manufactured import prices by 4·2 per cent. between 1986 and 1987.

52. **Mr. Clay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his latest estimate for the balance of trade in manufactured goods for the current year and 1989.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Autumn Statement forecast that there would be a deficit in trade in manufactures of £9 billion in 1988. A new forecast will be published at the time of the Budget.

70. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the increase in manufactured imports and manufactured exports between 1979 and 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: Between the years 1979 and 1987 imports of manufactures, on a balance of payments basis, increased in value by £39·8 billion (141 per cent.) to reach £68·1 billion while exports rose by £29·9 billion (96 per cent.) to £60·8 billion. The corresponding increase by volume was 62 per cent. for imports of manufactures and 25 per cent. for exports.

76. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the latest estimate of the deficit on manufactured trade in 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: For the year 1987 the deficit in trade in manufactures was provisionally estimated to be £7·3 billion.

Computer-aided Design

25. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what support his Department is providing for computer-aided design.

Mr. Butcher: My Department offers support for the promotion of computer-aided design by the provision of information and advice, and through specific initiatives, to schools, higher education institutions and industry.

Electronics Industry

26. **Mr. Forth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the level of output in the electronic capital goods sector in 1986 and in 1980; and what was the level of exports in the industry over the same period.

Mr. Alan Clark: United Kingdom manufacturers' sales of radio and electronic capital goods amounted to £3 billion in 1986 and £1·6 billion in 1980. The industry's exports came to £1·2 billion in 1986 and £500 million in 1980.

40. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the level of output in the consumer electronic sector in 1986 and in 1980; and what was the level of exports in the sector in the same period.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available information is shown in the table:

Consumer electronics sector[1]

£ million

	1980	*1986*
United Kingdom manufacturers' sale	551	989
Exports	134	448

Note:
[1] Activity Heading 3434 of the Standard Industrial Classification (1980).

Commercial Vehicles

27. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has on total unit sales of British-produced commercial vehicles in the home market in 1987 and 1986.

Mr. Atkins: Sales to the home market of United Kingdom-built commercial vehicles increased from 175,843 units in 1986 to 193,553 in 1987.

Association of British Chambers of Commerce

28. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met the officers of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry met the national council of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce last week. A wide variety of topics were discussed.

Consumers' Association

29. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he next expects to meet representatives of the Consumers' Association; and what subjects he proposes to discuss.

Mr. Butcher: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs visited the Consumers' Association on 25 January and discussed a number of topics relevant to consumers. I have no specific plans for a further visit, but I shall be arranging to meet representatives of consumer bodies, including the Consumers' Association, in the near future.

Textile Industry

30. **Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has on the growth of productivity and change in profitability in the textile industry since 1980.

Mr. Atkins: Between 1980 and the three quarters of 1987, productivity rose by 44 per cent. Profitability of large textile companies has also increased strongly over the period, according to their published accounts.

Austin Rover

31. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has on sales of individual models made by Austin Rover in 1987 and 1986.

Mr. Atkins: During 1987 Austin Rover sold a total of 296,784 cars in the United Kingdom against 293,240 in 1986. The model breakdown was as follows.

	1987	*1986*
Mini	15,873	16,154
Metro	108,223	109,351
Maestro	43,815	51,406
Montego	56,238	62,658
Rover 200	50,254	45,197
Rover 800	20,200	4,307
Total	296,784	293,240

Preliminary figures indicate that total worldwide sales by Austin Rover increased in 1987 to over 435,500 against 411,023 in 1986.

73. **Mr. Madel:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to return the Austin Rover Group to the private sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: It remains the aim of both the Rover Group board and the Government to return Austin Rover and Land Rover to full private ownership. The group's chairman has spoken publicly of his belief that privatisation can be achieved in the lifetime of this Parliament, and work continues within the company to review the options towards that general objective.

Aerospace Industry

32. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster by how much turnover in the aerospace industry has increased in the last 10 years; and by how much exports in the industry have increased over the same period.

Mr. Alan Clark: Aerospace industry sales increased from £2·2 billion in 1977 to £7·6 billion in 1986. In the same period, exports increased from £900 million to £4·3 billion.

Regional Aid

33. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a further statement on the criteria for obtaining regional selective assistance.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have nothing to add to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry's replies of 19 January, at columns *671-75*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) and to the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and 26 January, at column *149*, to the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams).

35. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received on the regional policy aspects of his Department's recent White Paper.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Since the publication of the DTI White Paper on 12 January we have received several representations on aspects of regional policy which refer, amongst other things, to the changes we have made.

51. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what timetable he envisages for the assessment of eligibility for regional selective assistance.

Mr. Atkins: For offers of regional selective assistance made by my Department in 1987 the average period between receipt of application and date of offer was eight weeks. I am actively considering ways in which the processing time can be kept to a minimum in future — particularly for small applications — consistent with meeting the objectives of the scheme.

Questions about the administration of regional selective assistance in Scotland should be addressed to the Secretary of State for Scotland.

64. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received on his statement on the future of regional policy, and how he proposes to respond to these.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Since the publication of the DTI White Paper on 12 January we have received several representations on aspects of regional policy which refer, amongst other things, to the changes we have made. We will consider the views expressed very carefully.

66. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what advice will be available to businesses to enable them to acquire regional selective assistance.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The regional selective assistance scheme is described in the Department's booklet, "The Regional Initiative: Guide to Regional Selective Assistance," which also gives contact points for further inquiries. Officials are available to give further advice to potential applicants as and when it is requested.

68. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the implications of the White Paper "DTI the Department for Enterprise" for the west midlands region.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The west midlands has a strong tradition of entrepreneurship and business enterprise and I have every expectation that the region's businesses will make extensive use of the consultancy initiatives and of the other elements of the enterprise initiative. Regional selective assistance remains available within the west midlands intermediate area. The DTI is establishing new offices in Stoke-on-Trent, Telford, Coventry and Hereford in order to get nearer to the business community. I am sure that the enterprise initiatives will make a very worthwhile contribution to the region's prosperity.

74. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received concerning the future funding of regional aid and the consequences of any changes in regional funds from the European regional development fund.

Mr. Atkins: I have received a number of representations about the European Community's current review of its structural funds, including the European regional development fund. The Government consider that the highlands and islands of Scotland should continue to be eligible for the fund. We have made representations to the Commission accordingly.

Turkish Yarn

34. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what evidence he has received of trade disruption to United Kingdom industry arising from the importing of Turkish acrylic yarn.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have nothing to add to the reply I have sent to the hon. Member following his priority written question put down for answer on 1 February.

53. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has received any representations regarding the recent agreement reached with Turkey on the import into the United Kingdom of acrylic yarn.

Mr. Alan Clark: Yes, I have received a number of representations about the recent agreement with Turkish textile exporters.

I met representatives of the Confederation of British Wool Textiles, who are concerned about the acrylic yarn imports.

North Peckham Task Force

36. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement concerning expenditure of Government funds by the North Peckham task force.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Since the Government's North Peckham task force was set up in 1986, some £4·2 million of Government funds have been committed for task force projects benefiting the residents of the area. Of this, about £1·2 million has come from funds available to task forces and £3 million from other Government programmes.

Competition Policy

37. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has for strengthening competition policy and acting against restrictive practices.

Mr. Maude: Proposals for strengthening competition policy were announced in last month's White Paper "DTI —the department for Enterprise" (Cm 278).

British Telecom (Magnetic Tapes)

38. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has had discussions with British Telecom regarding the proposed sale of magnetic tapes containing telephone directory and other information to third parties.

Mr. Butcher: No. This is a matter for British Telecom. It would be for the Director General of Telecommunications to consider any representations about such a proposed sale.

New Businesses (Retired People)

39. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will take steps to encourage retired people with business or professional experience to use their experience for the benefit of new businesses.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am actively seeking semi or newly retired people to serve as enterprise counsellors to conduct business reviews for small and medium-sized firms under the consultancy elements of the new enterprise initiative. A national recruitment campaign has already attracted many applicants, and I expect that 200 additional enterprise counsellors will be appointed as a result.

European Regional Development Fund

41. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met representatives of the European Community Commission to discuss grants from the European regional development fund.

Mr. Atkins: At the Industry Council on 22 December, which agreed in substance on the proposed RESIDER programme for European regional development funds in certain steel closure areas.

Research and Development

42. **Mr. Irving:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has for strengthening collaborative research and development.

Mr. Butcher: The White Paper, "DTI — the Department for Enterprise," which was placed before the House on 12 January announced important initiatives to strengthen collaborative research, including programmes on information technology and superconductivity. On 3 February my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science announced five programmes in the LINK initiative. These programmes have a total Government contribution of £42

million over five years. One of the principal aims of LINK is to strengthen collaboration between the science base and industry.

59. **Mr. Stott:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what measures he is taking to evaluate the effectiveness of spending on civil research and development in the United Kingdom; and what are the results.

Mr. Butcher: It is primarily for the market to evaluate research and development activity in the private sector.

As far as my Department's programmes of support for R and D are concerned, we undertake regular reviews of their effectiveness and, in particular, their value for money. Where such reviews show that some adjustment to our approach is justified we take appropriate measures to achieve this.

Leyland Trucks

43. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has on the profitability of the former Leyland Trucks since its merger with DAF.

Mr. Atkins: I understand that DAF BV has not yet published its audited results for the year ended 31 December 1987. However, the chairman of DAF's board of management recently confirmed that Leyland DAF had made a significant contribution to the DAF group's 1987 profit of £18 million.

Departmental Confidential Hot Line

44. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will introduce a confidential hot line at his Department for informants on suspected insider dealing and other breaches of the Financial Services Act.

Mr. Maude: It is already open to members of the public to contact my Department, anonymously or otherwise, about alleged contraventions of the Company Securities (Insider Dealing) Act 1985. Any such approaches are treated in confidence if the informant so wishes. The main provisions regarding breaches under the Financial Services Act 1986 are not yet in force. When that Act is fully implemented, responsibility for its enforcement will be shared between my Department and the Securities and Investments Board. My Department will shortly be discussing the practical implications of this with the Securities and Investments Board.

Japanese Manufacturers

45. **Mr. Heddle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many Japanese manufacturers are established in the United Kingdom; and what percentage of total Japanese investment in western Europe this represents.

Mr. Atkins: The Department of Trade and Industry is aware of 75 Japanese companies in the United Kingdom that are either manufacturing or have announced plans to do so. This represents about 30 per cent. of all Japanese manufacturing plants in western Europe.

Car Sales

46. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has on new car sales in 1987; and what was the importers' share of the market in 1987 and in 1986.

Mr. Atkins: There were 2,013,693 new car sales in 1987. The importers' share of the market was 51½ per cent. in 1987 and 56 per cent. in 1986.

Single European Market

47. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he will take to ensure that inner cities benefit from the single European market from 1992.

Mr. Atkins: Completion of the single market will create opportunities and challenges for all sectors of the economy by ensuring unimpeded access to a market of 320 million people. Our policies reflect the need to equip inner-city firms to compete for that business.

65. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how he will encourage small firms to take advantage of the 1992 single European market.

Mr. Alan Clark: The national awareness campaign which we are preparing is intended to ensure that all companies in Britain, large and small, are fully aware of the opportunities and challenges of the single European market. Under the enterprise initiative (launched on 13 January) financial assistane is available to firms of fewer than 500 employees for consultancy support to help them improve their competitive performance.

67. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to prepare British companies for the competition of the single European market in 1992.

Mr. Alan Clark: We are determined to ensure that British business is given every chance to take advantage of the new opportunities which will come from creating a single Community market. We will shortly announce the details of a major awareness campaign to reach companies throughout the country.

Assisted Areas

48. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what timetable he envisages for carrying out a review of the assisted areas map.

Mr. Atkins: The White Paper, "DTI—the department for Enterprise", (Cm. 278), indicated that the Government have no intention at present of reviewing the assisted areas map.

Television Advertising

49. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his Department's budget for television advertising in the current year.

Mr. Butcher: Currently planned expenditure by DTI on television advertising is £5·3 million in this financial year.

Japan (Trade Deficit)

50. **Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the level of trade deficit with an inward flow of capital from Japan in 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: The United Kingdom trade deficit with Japan in 1987 totalled £3,968 million, on an OTS basis, exports and imports reaching £1,495 million and £5,463 million respectively.

The United Kingdom does not compile comprehensive statistics on flows of capital between the United Kingdom and other individual countries.

HOTOL

55. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has received any further proposals from British Aerospace and Rolls-Royce on HOTOL.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have recently received a proposal from Rolls-Royce for a further year's work on the HOTOL propulsion concept. I expect to receive a related proposal from British Aerospace shortly and I will consider them both with care.

Staff Dispersal

56. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to complete his review of the possible relocation out of London of divisions within his Department; and what priority he attaches to achieving such a relocation.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am very committed to ensuring that my Department's divisions are located as cost effectively as possible, bearing in mind the services they provide, the need to recruit and retain staff, and the potential benefit to a receiving region's economy. I hope to announce shortly a decision on the relocation of the Patent Office. I will continue to consider the best location for other parts of my Department.

English Industrial Estates

57. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the future planned expenditure on English Industrial Estates.

Mr. Atkins: In 1987-88 English Estates' planned programme in the assisted areas was increased from £33·5 million to £37 million. As a result of increased levels of asset sales, it is likely to achieve a record programme of £47 million. In 1988-89 it has been asked to plan for a programme £5 million higher than this year's (that is, £42 million). In practice it may exceed this figure and it has been authorised to spend up to £49 million if it can generate the necessary funds from its own resources. The level of the new managed workspace programme for the inner cities has not yet been finalised. It will, however, be additional to the planned expenditure under the existing programme for the assisted areas.

Mergers

58. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of proposed mergers was referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in 1987.

Mr. Maude: Of the 321 mergers and merger proposals which qualified under the Fair Trading Act 1973 for reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in 1987, six, or approximately 2 per cent., were subsequently referred to the commission.

Companies (Grants)

60. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if his Department maintains an approved list of companies for the purposes of grants towards management, financial, organisational and other consultancies.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Under the enterprise initiative consultancy schemes, which currently cover marketing, design, quality and manufacturing systems, the selection and deployment of consultants is a matter for the scheme contractors who operate on behalf of the DTI. Similar arrangements will be made for the new consultancy initiatives on business planning and financial and information systems to be introduced in April.

Inner Cities

61. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on progress on departmental co-operation and initiatives to tackle inner-city problems.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Government Departments are continuing to work together with business, local councils, voluntary organisations and local residents in the inner cities through a range of programmes and initiatives to bring about inner-city renewal. Government Departments co-operate through the urban programme and inner-city task forces to support projets which encourage enterprise and development and improve the environment. The Government effort is also co-ordinated by the five city action teams which promote joint initiatives and provide a local point of contact for companies and others wishing to be involved in inner-city renewal.

72. **Mr. Hanley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what contribution the private sector is making to his Department's inner-cities initiative.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The private sector is making a tremendous contribution to the success of our policies for the inner cities. within my own Department's inner-cities initiative we have:

—support from six clearing banks for task force development funds
—secondments, including the secondment of the task force leader in Spitalfields by TSB England and Wales plc
—backing by over 150 individual firms for the scheme of enterprise advice and training—"Headstart in the Inner Cities" which the Industrial Society is running for my Department and MSC
—the setting up, by "Investors in Industry plc", of a £10 million investment fund for growing businesses in inner-city areas
—involvement through Business in the Community with which we are collaborating in four task force areas on a neighbourhood partnership programme.

These are only a few examples. There are many other individual cases in which the private sector is involving itself in task force projects. I greatly welcome the work currently being taken forward by the CBI to develop still more ways in which industry and commerce can commit itself to the economic future of our cities.

Steel Industry

62. **Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the weekly output of United Kingdom-made steel in November 1987; and what has been the trend in the weekly rate since 1980.

Mr. Atkins: In November 1987 the weekly average of United Kingdom crude steel production was 370,000 tonnes. The information on steel output is published

monthly in "BSC/BISPA Steel Industry Statistics" and the "CSO Monthly digest of statistics", copies of which are in the Library of the House.

EC (Trade Barriers)

63. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his policy on the removal of trade barriers within the European Community.

Mr. Alan Clark: We and other member states are committed to taking all the steps necessary to complete the single market of the Community by 31 December 1992. Completing this market of 320 million people will open up major opportunities for business. We are determined to ensure that British business is given every chance to make the most of them.

EC (Insurance Market)

69. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been made in attempts to achieve agreement in the European Community on removing national barriers to free trade in insurance.

Mr. Maude: At the Internal Market Council on 18 December agreement was reached, by qualified majority, on the main elements of the non-life insurance services directive. This is a welcome step forward in opening up the Common Market to free trade in insurance, and we hope that it will now be possible to move quickly to formal adoption of the directive.

Managed Workshops

71. **Mr. Goodlad:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals he has on the provision of managed workshops.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have asked English Estates to establish a new programme for the provision of managed workspace, primarily in inner-city locations and with considerable private sector involvement. The level of the new programme has yet to be finalised, but it will be additional to the planned expenditure under the corporation's existing programme for the assisted areas.

Financial Institutions

75. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the implications of the recent White Paper on his Department for its responsibility for regulating the City financial institutions.

Mr. Maude: Paragraphs 2.27 to 2.33 of the White Paper explain the work being done to increase confidence in the working of markets by achieving a fair level of protection for the individual customer and investor. The Financial Services Act 1986 establishes a new regulatory structure which will provide a comprehensive system of investor protection which will retain the flexibility to respond to developments in rapidly changing markets.

Canning Town Glassworks

77. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what action he proposes to take in regard to the closure of the Canning Town Glassworks at Swinton in view of the reassurances previously offered by Guinness plc. to the hon. Member for Wentworth.

Mr. Atkins: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman shortly.

Support for Innovation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what support for innovation will be provided by his Department outside development areas after 1 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The White Paper "DTI—the department for Enterprise" (Cm 278) sets out in chapter 8 "Innovation, using Technology" the support for innovation available throughout Great Britain. This support covers collaborative research, technology transfer, small firms and start-ups, exceptional projects, space and other research programmes. Support for collaborative research is described in more detail in the "Research and Technology Initiative" booklet, and I am sending the hon. Member a copy.

Balance of Trade

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has about the latest figures for the balance of trade on a per capita basis between the United Kingdom and the United States of America; and what information he has as to the per capita balance of trade between the United States of America and Canada, Sweden, Japan, West Germany and Brazil.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is in the table.

United States of America balance of trade per capita
January to October 1987

United States $

	(A)	(B)
United Kingdom	−10	−50
Canada	−40	−370
Sweden	[1] −10	[1] −290
Japan	−200	−390
F R Germany	−50	−200
Brazil	−10	−20

[1] = estimate
(A) balance per head of United States population.
(B) balance per head of trading partner.
Sources: United States Department of Commerce.
OECD.
IMF International Financial Statistics.

Trade Safety

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his policy on the European Community draft directive for general duty to trade safety.

Mr. Butcher: The Consumer Protection Act 1987 introduced a general safety requirement into United Kingdom law on 1 October 1987. We can therefore support in principle the concept of a general safety duty throughout the European Community. When the EC draft directive is communicated, we will approach the discussions with the Commission and member states in a constructive way. But there are a number of potential problems involved in this complex issue which will need careful handling if it is to result in genuine improvements to the protection afforded to consumers.

Child Safety Campaign

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what action the Government are taking as their contribution to the European child safety campaign beginning in April.

Mr. Butcher: The United Kingdom has made clear its willingness to participate in some form of European child safety campaign, provided that it is well thought through and properly targeted. Discussions have been held during 1987 with the Commission and other member states about the form and content of a campaign and we are waiting for revised proposals to come forward from the Commission. No decision has been taken on the launch of the campaign, and any action taken by the United Kingdom Government will need to be considered in the light of the Commission's proposals. My Department has already announced the start of a series of consumer safety awareness campaigns to be run over the next three years. Child safety will feature prominently among the target areas.

Heavy Duty Mining Equipment

Mr. Stott: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what was the United Kingdom share of the following markets for heavy duty mining supports for the period 1981 to 1986: North America, Western Europe (excluding the United Kingdom and West Germany), Africa, the far east and Australia;

(2) what was the United Kingdom share of the following markets for heavy duty mining shearers for the period 1981 to 1985: North America, Western Europe (excluding the United Kingdom and West Germany), Africa, the far east and Australia;

(3) what was the United Kingdom share of the following markets for heavy duty mining face conveyors for the period 1981 to 1985: North America, Western Europe (excluding the United Kingdom and West Germany), Africa, the far east and Australia.

Mr. Atkins: The information is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Stott: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what was the total value in 1987 of exports of British-produced heavy duty longwall mining equipment;

(2) what was the total value in 1987 of exports of home-produced mining equipment, excluding heavy duty longwall mining equipment.

Mr. Atkins: Information on exports of home-produced mining equipment is not available. However, total exports of mining equipment for 1987 amounted to £86·8 million; this figure may include some re-exported goods.

Source: Overseas Trade Statistics.

Note: Mining equipment defined as Standard Industrial Classification Activity heading 3251.

Guinness plc

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects the inspectors appointed to investigate the affairs of Guinness plc to report.

Mr. Maude: The investigation continued, but I am unable to say when a report will be received.

House of Fraser (Holdings) plc

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects the inspectors appointed to investigate the affairs of House of Fraser (Holdings) plc to report.

Mr. Maude: The investigation continues, but I am unable to say when a report will be received.

Lonrho plc

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to complete his consideration of representations in relation to a possible breach by Lonrho plc of sections 204 to 206 of the Companies Act 1985 in relation to share dealings in House of Fraser plc during the period from the date of the inspector's interim report into share dealings in House of Fraser to the date of its acquisition by Al Fayed Investment and Trust (UK) Limited.

Mr. Maude: These matters are kept under review, but at present no action is considered necessary.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to complete his consideration of representations in relation to a possible breach of section 231 of the Companies Act 1985 by Lonrho plc in relation to its Liechtenstein subsidiaries Blorg and Contango.

Mr. Maude: By letter dated 16 November 1987, my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry informed my hon. Friend that representations in relation to a possible breach of section 231 of the Companies Act 1985 by Lonrho in relation to its Liechtenstein subsidiaries, Blorg and Contango, had been considered and he had decided to take no further action in the matter, the substance of which occurred some 20 years ago.

Electronic Fund Transfers

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to introduce a statutory code of practice to govern electronic fund transfers between banks and customers.

Mr. Butcher: I have no immediate plans to introduce such a code of practice. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer set up a review committee in November 1986 to look into all aspects of banking services law. Developments in electronic funds transfer are an important element in that review. Until the review committee has reported, it would not be appropriate for the Government to form a view on such issues.

Productivity Rates

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has for each year since 1974 about the figures for productivity hourly of industries in *(a)* Belgium, *(b)* Britain, *(c)* Germany, *(d)* France, *(e)* Holland, *(f)* Sweden, *(g)* the United States of America and *(h)* Italy.

Mr. Atkins: The information is in the table.

Output per manhour in manufacturing
1980 = 100

Year	Belgium	United Kingdom	Federal Republic of Germany	France	Netherlands	Sweden	United States of America	Italy
1974	68·1	96·4	80·5	75·6	76·5	87·6	88·5	81·5
1975	71·7	94·5	83·0	77·7	75·4	88·9	92·2	77·9
1976	79·1	98·8	88·8	84·1	83·8	90·3	96·3	84·5
1977	83·5	99·2	92·1	88·7	87·9	88·8	98·6	85·5
1978	89·0	100·8	95·0	93·8	93·9	91·3	99·4	88·1
1979	94·0	101·5	99·6	98·4	98·9	98·4	100·0	94·4
1980	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
1981	107·1	106·5	102·2	104·2	104·2	100·4	102·2	103·4
1982	113·1	111·9	103·7	110·9	107·4	103·4	104·4	105·4
1983	120·6	120·4	109·7	115·7	114·3	111·4	110·4	108·2
1984	124·6	125·7	113·7	120·2	126·5	116·3	116·4	115·1
1985	127·6	129·7	118·7	124·2	131·2	119·4	122·5	116·9
1986	126·7	133·0	121·1	126·8	133·9	122·4	127·0	118·3
1987[1]	128·2	140·8	122·7	129·7	133·2	127·0	130·8	121·9

[1] 1st quarter to 3rd quarter, not seasonally adjusted.
Source: International Monetary Fund.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Dr. Blackburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will take steps to publish lists of compliance cost assessments which Departments prepare, showing the impact of proposed new Government regulation on businesses.

Mr. Maude: Officials in the enterprise and deregulation unit are arranging for a selected list of compliance cost assessments (CCAs) to be published in the Department of Trade and Industry magazine "British Business". In addition, Departments will arrange for lists of CCAs to be published in appropriate publications and press notices.

SOCIAL SERVICES

1991 Census

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the 1991 census information will be made available to community charge officials in England and Wales; whether census officials expect to use the community charge register; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: It would be an offence under section 8(2) of the Census Act 1920 for the Office of Pupulation Censuses and Surveys to pass census information about identified persons or households to community charge officials. The office has no plans to use community charge registers in carrying out the 1991 census.

Health Services

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will conduct an urgent exercise within the European Community to compare the various funding arrangements for hospital and health care services; how private and taxpayer funding contributes to these services and by what proportion; and what personal control and accountability the individual has over the provision of health services.

Mr. Newton: Much of the information referred to by my hon. Friend is already available in published form in this country. In particular, the funding arrangements for state health systems are summarised in "Tables of Social Benefit Systems in the European Communities" a copy of which is in the Library.

We shall of course take appropriate account of this information, supplemented by further inquiries where this seems sensible, in conducting the review announced recently by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Family Practitioner Committee (Leeds)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will reconsider the funding application from the Leeds family practitioner committee for the salary for a general practitioner dealing with the homeless.

Mr. Newton: Yes. We have asked officials to look into ways in which the problems encountered so far in funding can be overcome.

British Paediatrics Association

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the British Paediatrics Association campaign "Making Children a Priority Again", which is to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mrs. Currie: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall during the week commencing 22 February.

Health and Personal Social Services

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table setting out for 1987-88 and 1988-89 the estimated number of *(a)* families and *(b)* persons in each health region or equivalent, and in England as a whole, showing net average expenditure on health and personal social services per family and per person in each year, distinguishing between expenditure on the National Heath Service and on the personal social services.

Mr. Newton: The information is not readily available in the form requested. For England as a whole net expenditure per person and per family of four in 1987-88 and 1988-89 is as follows:

	Population (million)		Net expenditure per year: Health and personal social services £	National health service £	Personal social services £
1987-88	47·380	per head	413	349	64
		per family of four	1,652	1,396	256
1988-89	47·488	per head	436	370	66
		per family of four	1,744	1,480	264

The expenditure figures used in this calculation are taken from table 14.1 in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1988-89 to 1990-91", vol II (Cm 288-II) and include net current and capital spending. The national health service figure is the balance of health and personal social services expenditure after the deduction of health and personal social services spending and includes an element in respect of centrally financed services.

National Health Service Staff

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give details of the total numbers and the total costs of salaries of National Health Service administrative and clerical staff for each of the years 1974, 1979 and 1986.

Mr. Newton: The information is given in the table:

Numbers and costs of salaries of administrative and clerical staff employed in the National Health Service in England

	Number[1] (whole-time equivalent at September)	Cost[3] (in financial year beginning) £ million
1974	82,800	207 (755)
1979	103,000	501 (872)
1986	[2]111,400	903 (941)

[1] Rounded to the nearest hundred.
[2] Including general managers.
[3] Main figures represent true costs in each year. Figures in parentheses alongside represent these costs at 1987-88 money values.

Age Allowance

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the cost of extending the age allowance to all persons over state retirement age; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Andrew Scott: The estimated cost of extending the retirement pension age addition to all pensioners together with a corresponding increase in the pensioner premium in income support would be about £100 million in 1988-89.

Retail Prices Index (Error)

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received from voluntary organisations regarding the error in the retail prices index and the distribution of funds surplus to those required for £8 compensatory payments.

Mr. Scott: We have received more than 20 letters from organisations about the disbursement of funds, mostly registering an interest in applying for funding. We have also been asked if the funds could be used to increase war widows pensions.

Pay Scales

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the pay scales currently in force for *(a)* speech therapists, *(b)* clinical psychologists and *(c)* hospital pharmacists; and what were these pay scales in 1983, 1979 and 1975.

Mr. Newton: The information is as follows:

Speech therapists

	Salary from 1 April 1975		Salary from 1 August 1979		Salary from 1 October 1982 to 31 March 1984	
	Minimum £	Maximum £	Minimum £	Maximum £	Minimum £	Maximum £
Speech therapist	2,142	2,811	3,212	4,048	5,130	6,074
Senior II speech therapist	2,811	3,537	4,048	4,968	6,345	7,468
Senior I speech therapist	3,243	4,005	4,598	5,555	7,468	8,370
Chief IV speech therapist	3,243	4,005	4,598	5,555	7,468	8,370
Chief III speech therapist	3,684	4,641	5,155	6,324	8,370	9,269
Chief II speech therapist	4,179	5,334	5,764	7,166	9,630	10,799
Chief I speech therapist	4,872	6,033	6,606	8,011	10,799	12,108
District senior chief (grade introduced on 1 April 1982)			—	—	11,204	12,561

Speech therapists current salary (from 1 January 1988)
Grades amended from 31 December 1987

Grade	Minimum £	Maximum £	Maximum, plus discretionary increase £
Grade A	8,250	8,903	—
Grade B	8,570	10,777	11,636
Grade C	11,198	14,103	15,233
Grade D	13,058	15,233	16,455
Grade E	15,233	17,777	19,207

Pharmacists

	Salary from 1 June 1975		Salary from 1 August 1979		Salary from 11 September 1982—31 March 1984		Current salary from 1 October 1986 (pay award pending)		Pharmacists who give a commitment to provide an emergency duty service	
	minimum £	maximum £	minimum £	maximum £	minimum £	maximum £	minimum £	maximum £	minimum £	maximum £
Pre-registration student	2,580	—	3,509	—	4,659	—	5,388	—	—	—
Basic Grade Pharmacist	3,078	3,933	4,527	5,592	6,428	8,096	8,232	10,344	9,288	11,400
Staff Pharmacist	4,437	5,697	6,228	7,803	8,910	11,887	10,296	13,680	11,424	14,808
Principal Pharmacist Grade 3	5,844	7,824	7,995	10,458	12,120	16,339	14,016	18,816	15,216	20,016
Grade IV Pharmacist	6,876	7,923	9,275	10,588	15,401	16,994	17,808	19,632	18,720	20,544
Senior Grade IV Pharmacist	—	—	9,891	10,715	16,331	17,925	18,888	20,712	19,800	21,624
Grade V Pharmacist	7,665	8,346	10,263	11,118	16,597	18,191	19,188	21,060	20,124	21,996
Pharmaceutical Officers	7,368	9,270	9,891	12,278	16,331	20,314	18,888	23,472	19,800	23,520

Clinical Psychologists

	Salary from 1 April 1975		Salary from 1 August 1979		Salary from 11 September 1982 to 31 March 1984		Current Salary from 1 April 1987	
	Minimum £	Maximum £	Minimum £	Maximum £	Minimum £	Maximum £	Minimum £	Maximum £
Probationary/Trainee Grade *A	2,277	3,078	3,486	4,527	5,681	6,759	7,825	8,404
Basic Grade	3,183	3,933	4,662	5,592	6,996	8,349	8,681	10,496
Senior Grade	4,437	5,697	6,228	7,803	9,010	11,649	11,164	14,591
Principal Grade	5,844	7,824	7,995	10,458	11,413	16,010	14,389	19,895
Top Grade	7,551	9,198	10,119	12,174	16,090	19,117	20,034	23,978
Top Grade (with *B Greater Responsibility)	7,779	10,386	10,404	13,656	18,285	21,311	22,667	26,624

Notes:
*A Title amended 1 February 1987.
*B Top Grade with plussage prior to 19 March 1982.

Swimming

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how much his Department spent, in each of the last three years for which figures are available, on the promotion of swimming as a form of healthy exercise.

Mrs. Currie: The promotion of swimming is not funded by the Department. The Health Education Authority includes swimming in its promotion of exercise as one aspect of a healthier way of life. It is not possible to quantify the cost of this separately.

Community Treatment Orders

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received about the possible introduction of community treatment orders for the mentally ill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Representations are received from time to time on the question of compulsory treatment in the community. Discussions have been taking place within such organisations as the Mental Health Act Commission, the Royal College of Psychiatrists and MIND. At present, no concrete proposals have been put to the Department.

General Practitioners

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of general practitioners per 10,000 population for *(a)* England, *(b)* the Mersey region, *(c)* the Crewe health district, *(d)* the Chester health district and *(e)* the Halton health district.

Mrs. Currie: The information requested is collected from family practitioner committees which are not necessarily conterminous with health authority boundaries. Figures, as at 1 October 1986, are as follows:

	Number of general practitioners per 10,000 population
England	5·18
Mersey Region	5·14

	Number of general practitioners per 10,000 population
Cheshire FPC (including Crewe, Cheshire and Halton Health Districts)	5·00

Meningitis

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will set out, in a table for each hospital in the North-West Hertfordshire district health authority, the number of cases of meningitis admitted for each month since January 1987.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that the information requested is not available centrally.

Private Health Insurance

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate he has of the proportion of *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales which is not covered, in whole or in part, by private health insurance.

Mrs. Currie: It is estimated that 91 per cent. of the United Kingdom population was without any form of private health insurance in 1986. The latest available estimate for England only is for 1983, when 92 per cent. of the population was without cover. Information for Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Benefits

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many beneficiaries in the Seaham and Peterlee area have more than one pension, benefit or allowance paid from one book.

Mr. Portillo: The number of pensioners receiving a combined payment of retirement pension and supplementary benefit is as follows:

	Number
Seaham	571
Peterlee	1,222

Source: 100 per cent. count of cases in action at 28 July 1987.

I regret that information is not available on the number of claimants receiving any other combination of benefits on one order book.

Abortions

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the monthly figures for the cost of abortions carried out under the auspices of the National Health Service in the current financial year.

Mr. Newton: Information is not available in the exact form requested. However, the estimated cost of abortions carried out under the National Health Service, excluding those performed under agency arrangements with the private sector in each month of the current financial year, based on the number of notifications received in each of those months is as follows:

	£
April 1987	990,000
May 1987	967,000
June 1987	1,049,000
July 1987	1,183,000
August 1987	993,000
September 1987	1,017,000
October 1987	1,062,000
November 1987	1,103,000
December 1987	972,000
January 1988	950,000

Later information is not yet available.

Endometriosis

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what assessment he has made of the adequacy of provision in the National Health Service for the diagnosis and treatment of endometriosis and of the suitability of the practice of same-day discharge of laparoscopy patients.

Mrs. Currie: Specialist advice and treatment for endometriosis are available in gynaecology departments in all health authorities. Following laparoscopy, patients are discharged when assessed as fit for discharge by their gynaecologist.

Health Inspectorate

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to set up a health inspectorate to visit acute services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Not at present, but I will bear my hon. Friend's suggestions in mind.

St. James's Hospital, Portsmouth

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many patients received in-patient care and attended out-patient clinics for mental illness at St. James's hospital, Portsmouth, for the latest two years available.

Mrs. Currie: The table shows the information available centrally on admissions and attendances at St. James's hospital and its subsidiary units. A patient may be readmitted or attend an out-patient clinic a number of times in any year.

	1985	1986
Number of admissions, for mental illness	1,766	1,609
Number of attendances to out-patient clinics conducted by psychiatric medical staff	11,547	10,469

Cot Deaths

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the latest annual number available for sudden infant death syndrome (cot death) for the United Kingdom and for the two previous years; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is the latest annual number available for sudden infant death syndrome (cot death) for Hampshire and for the two previous years.

Mrs. Currie: The information is shown in the table. Data relate to Great Britain rather than the United Kingdom, since comparable data for Northern Ireland are not available. The latest available data year is 1986.

Number of deaths under one year of age with any mention of sudden infant death syndrome (ICD 9 798.0) on the death certificate, Great Britain, and Hampshire 1984-86

Year	Great Britain	Hampshire
[1]1984	1,383	45
[1]1985	1,444	63
[1]1986	1,654	62

[1] Provisional.

Variations to Product Licences

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average length of time taken to deal with applications to variations to product licences in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Information is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The licensing authority is currently examining ways in which better statistical information can be produced, using new technology wherever possible. The time taken to process an application to vary a product licence can be days or months, depending upon the nature of the variation (for example, it may require extensive pharmaceutical or medical consideration) or on the number of applications being dealt with by the licensing authority at any one time.

Atenolol Tablets

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects the following PI Variations submitted by APS Ltd., to be approved: *(a)* Atenolol tablets 50 mg and 100 mg, new source of active ingredient, *(b)* Atenolol tablets 50 mg and 100 mg, new source of active ingredient, *(c)* Atenolol tablets 50 mg and 100 mg, improved assay method and *(d)* Stilboestrol tablets 1 mg and 5 mg.

Mr. Newton: The licensing authority notified APS Ltd. about its PI Variations for Atenolol on 5 February 1988 and about Stilboestrol on 22 December 1987. The outcome of the company's applications is regarded as confidential.

Special Payments

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the formula under which he has calculated the special payment for pensioners and others to adjust for the proper level of inflation.

Mr. Scott: In the main, the maximum loss to retirement pensioners and other groups eligible for £8 special payments is £7·85 over the full two years affected by the error in the retail price index. The benefits in question have been 5p a week less than they would have been during 1987-88, a 53-week benefit year, and 10p a week less than they would have been during 1988-89, a 52-week benefit year. Mobility allowance will have been paid at rates 5p a week less than it would have been in each year, yielding a loss of £5·25; a special payment of £5 will be made on this benefit.

NHS Review

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services with which organisations or individuals he proposes to consult or from which he hopes to obtain views as part of his review of the National Health Service.

Mr. Moore: We should like to hear from any organisation with constructive proposals.

Mental Hospitals (Patients' Money)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he has taken to revise memorandum HM(71)90, published in 1971; and when he will publish the circular which will provide advice to mental hospital administrations on access to, and use of, patients' money.

Mr. Newton: We are considering whether a revised circular is needed at the present time to replace HM(71)90. We know that many hospitals are devising imaginative and useful schemes within the existing guidelines to use patients' money for their personal benefit and with a view to enhancing their quality of life.

Hospitals (Treatment Statistics)

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many hospital in-patients and out-patients were treated in the latest year for which figures are available in each region; how many consultants are employed by each region; and at what annual cost.

Mrs. Currie: The information requested is set out in the tables.

Patients treated NHS hospitals, England 1986
All specialties

	Discharges and deaths	Day cases	New out-patients	Total out-patient attendances
England	6,413,789	1,050,158	8,767,788	37,727,608
Northern	441,095	81,047	602,318	2,564,607
Yorkshire	525,296	81,635	654,945	2,906,164
Trent	592,398	95,092	779,739	3,442,368
East Anglian	253,483	42,022	335,814	1,391,156
North West Thames	419,008	67,766	673,473	2,676,886
North East Thames	530,372	70,304	860,602	3,670,603
South East Thames	495,246	71,323	778,104	3,288,125
South West Thames	347,089	56,449	484,808	2,043,912
Wessex	366,421	63,297	468,549	1,854,115

	Discharges and deaths	Day cases	New out-patients	Total out-patient attendances
Oxford	299,270	39,901	397,586	1,564,003
South Western	417,443	63,375	516,671	2,006,240
West Midlands	673,375	93,403	855,524	3,840,664
Mersey	336,944	79,098	446,162	2,022,898
North Western	624,678	125,564	789,043	3,644,682
SHAs and BGs	91,671	19,882	124,450	811,185

Table 2
Hospital Medical and Dental Consultant staff[1] at 30 September 1986

whole-time equivalents

Region	All Staff	Costs (£'000)
Northern	918	35,669,000
Yorkshire	928	35,196,000
Trent	1,139	41,719,000
East Anglian	544	20,671,000
North West Thames	951	36,462,000
North East Thames	1,260	48,926,000
South East Thames	1,079	41,095,000
South West Thames	804	28,631,000
Wessex	720	27,131,000
Oxford	640	23,359,000
South Western	805	29,651,000
West Midlands	1,384	51,051,000
Mersey	659	25,390,000
North Western	1,204	48,609,000
SHA's	—	12,832,000

[1] Includes permanent paid, honorary and locum staff.

Brook Hospital

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many intensive treatment unit beds are currently closed at the Brook hospital; and for how long these beds have been closed.

Mrs. Currie: As I informed the hon. Member in my reply on 2 February at column *595*, at present two of the eight intensive treatment unit beds at the Brook hospital are closed.

At the beginning of 1986 there was a nursing staff complement of 50 whole-time equivalents (WTEs) for eight intensive treatment unit beds plus six coronary care unit beds. Because of concern about the adequacy of these staffing levels, two of the intensive treatment unit beds were then closed. The nursing complement was also reviewed (using the recommendations of the Cheltenham study report on nurse staffing ratios) and increased to 57 WTEs for the six intensive treatment units plus two coronary care unit beds.

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many beds have been closed either temporarily or permanently over each of the past three years at the Brook hospital and Greenwich district hospital; and how long each closure lasted.

Mrs. Currie: I am sorry that I cannot give the hon. Member the information she seeks which is not held centrally. Details about the availability of beds at the Brook hospital and Greenwich district general hospital should be available from Greenwich health authority, and the hon. Member may wish to contact the district chairman.

Hospices

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list those district health authorities that do not have a hospice for the care of the terminally ill within their boundaries.

Mrs. Currie: The information is not collected centrally by the Department, but information collected by the hospice information service at St. Christopher's hospice indicates that as at November 1987 the following district health authorities had no in-patient hospice unit within their boundaries.

Northern Region
Darlington
Durham[1]
East Cumbria
Gateshead
Hartlepool[1]
North Tees[1]
North Tyneside
Northumberland
North West Durham
South Cumbria
South Tees[1]
South Tyneside[1]
South-West Durham
West Cumbria[1]

Yorkshire Region
Bradford[1]
Dewsbury[1]
East Yorks
Harrogate[1]
Hull[1]
Northallerton
Pontefract[1]
Scunthorpe[1]
Wakefield[1]

Trent Region
Barnsley[1]
Bassetlaw[1]
Central Nottinghamshire[1]
Doncaster[1]
North Derbyshire[1]
Rotherham[1]
South Lincolnshire[1]

East Anglian Region
East Suffolk[1]
Huntingdon
West Norfolk and Wisbech[1]
West Suffolk[1]

North West Thames Region
Barnet[1]
Brent[1]
East Hertfordshire[1]
Harrow
Hounslow and Spelthorne[1]
North Hertfordshire
Riverside[1]
South Bedfordshire[1]

[1]Districts with home care services or a support team for terminal care.

North East Thames Region
Basildon and Thurrock
Bloomsbury[1]
Enfield[1]
Haringey[1]
Islington[1]
Newham
Redbridge[1]
Tower Hamlets[1]
West Essex

South East Thames Region
Bexley[1]
Camberwell[1]
Dartford and Gravesham[1]
Greenwich[1]
Lewisham and North Southwark[1]
Maidstone[1]
South East Kent[1]
Tunbridge Wells[1]

South West Thames Region
Croydon
Mid-Surrey
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton
South West Surrey
Wandsworth

Wessex Region
Basingstoke and North Hampshire[1]
West Dorset[1]
Winchester [1]

Oxford Region
Aylesbury Vale[1]
West Berkshire[1]
Wycombe[1]

South Western Region
Frenchay
Gloucester[1]
North Devon[1]
Southmead

West Midlands Region
Bromsgrove and Redditch
Central Birmingham
Coventry[1]
Dudley[1]
East Birmingham
Kidderminster and District[1]
Mid Staffordshire
North Birmingham
North Warwickshire[1]
Rugby
Sandwell
Shropshire[1]
Walsall
Worcester and District[1]

Mersey Region
Chester[1]
Crewe[1]
Halton
Macclesfield
Southport and Formby[1]

North Western Region
Bolton
Burnley Pendle and Rossendale
Bury[1]
Central Manchester[1]
Chorley and South Ribble[1]
North Manchester
Oldham
Rochdale[1]
South Manchester[1]
Tameside and Glossop
Trafford

[1] Districts with home care services or a support team for terminal care.

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what advice he gives to district health authorities with regard to the provision of hospices for care of the terminally ill.

Mrs. Currie: The guidance given to health authorities by the Department on the planning and provision of terminal care services, including of hospices, is contained in health circular HC(87)4 of February 1987, a copy of which is in the Library.

Infant Feeding

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to publish the report on present day practice in infant feeding from the chief medical officer's committee on medical aspects of food policy.

Mrs. Currie: "Present day practice in infant feeding: third report" is being published today. I warmly welcome this addition to what has become a notable series of scientific reports on feeding British babies and young children. It has been awaited eagerly by paediatricians, midwives, health visitors, and child dieticians. It breaks new ground for the series because it considers the one to five-year-olds as well as infants.

The authors are to be congratulated, particularly for their unequivocal statement that breastfeeding provides the best nutrition for babies. I shall make sure that all their recommendations are studied carefully and I am setting in hand arrangements for disseminating their main messages very widely.

National Health Service

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will detail the increase in the cost of the National Health Service over the years, both in terms of percentage of gross domestic product and of the cost to the average family in constant 1988 prices.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 25 January 1988]:* The information is as follows:

	NHS gross expenditure United Kingdom £ million (1987-88 prices)	*Percentage of GDP*[1]	*Cost per annum per family of four*[2] *£*
1979-80	16,248	4·9	1,157
1979-80	16,531	4·8	1,176
1980-81	18,102	5·3	1,285
1981-82	18,544	5·5	1,316
1982-83	18,852	5·5	1,339
1983-84	19,106	5·4	1,356
1984-85	19,628	5·5	1,391
1985-86	19,602	5·3	1,385
1986-87	20,417	5·4	1,439
1987-88	21,454	n/a	1,508

[1] GDP (E).
[2] Derived from per capita spending × 4.

Trent Regional Health Authority

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many consultants and doctors within the

Trent regional health authority are currently suspended on full pay on disciplinary grounds; and for how long the individual suspensions have been in operation;

(2) if he will obtain from the Trent regional health authority, and publish in the *Official Report*, the cost of the suspension on full pay of three consultants and one associate specialist in the authority, one of whom has been suspended since June 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 29 January 1988]:* Information supplied by Trent regional health authority shows there are four consultants and one associate specialist who have been suspended on full pay since respectively June 1982, April 1985, March 1987, April 1987, and January 1986. The total estimated salary costs of the suspensions to date amount to £455,797.

In the longest case of suspension the Secretary of State confirmed, in February 1986, the health authority's dismissal of a consultant after normal disciplinary and appeals procedures had been followed.

The consultant subsequently took legal action which resulted in a divisional court ruling that the Secretary of State's decision was invalid and that the case should be reconsidered. It is now being reviewed and a decision will be taken as soon as possible.

Because of concern about the length of time taken in such disciplinary cases, a working party including representatives of the Department, the professions and the NHS is currently reviewing the procedures.

NHS (Funding)

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will express *(a)* central Government funding and *(b)* health charges accruing to the National Health Service in 1979 and 1987-88 as a sum per (i) person, (ii) income taxpayer, (iii) household and (iv) average family of four.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 29 January 1988]:* The information is as follows:

	At cash prices			
	Gross expenditure		*Net expenditure*	
	1978-79 £	*1987-88* £ *(estimated)*	*1978-79* £	*1987-88* £ *(estimated)*
(i) Average expenditure per head	142	377	139	363
(ii) Per income taxpayer[1]	308	869	301	836
(iii) Per household[2]	400	998	391	961
(iv) Per family of four[3]	569	1,508	556	1,453
	At 1987-88 prices[4]			
(i) Average expenditure per head	289	377	283	363
(ii) Per income taxpayer[1]	627	869	614	836
(iii) Per household[2]	812	998	795	961
(iv) Per family of four[3]	1,157	1,508	1,132	1,453

Notes:
[1] Number of income taxpayers 1978-79, 25·9 million; 1987-88, 24·7 million (projected)—Inland Revenue.
[2] Number of households 1978-79, 20·0 million; 1987-88, 21·5 million—Department of Environment.
[3] Notional family of four = per capita spending × 4.
[4] Revalued in line with GDP deflator at market prices.
All figures relate to the United Kingdom.

NHS (Waiting Lists)

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what new proposals he has to cut waiting lists for operations within the National Health Service.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 2 February 1988]:* The waiting list fund will be increased from £25 million to £30 million for 1988-89. On 18 December 1987 I wrote to the chairman of regional health authorities setting out our objectives for the waiting list initiative in 1988-89.

We are making the reduction of waiting time our prime objective, giving particular attention to serious or disabling conditions. As a first step, we are asking regions to adopt, as some aleady have, a target-based approach to waiting time.

We also want to see every district develop a local statement of policy on out-patient and in-patient waiting times, particulary for the major specialties and most frequently occurring conditions. Such a statement can flow only from constructive discussion between clinicians and managers and must take into account local services, rates of demand, facilities and resources.

The £30 million waiting list fund will be available for allocation to regions for specific waiting list projects. There is considerable scope for the Health Service to make cost-effective use of external sources of treatment for waiting list patients. For 1988-89 we expect the regional programmes to contain serious and substantial examples of projects making cost-effective use of facilities outside the district, whether they be in the private sector, or armed forces hospitals or in other districts.

Basingstoke and North Hampshire Health Authority

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what have been the numbers of patients, subdivided into convenient categories, waiting for (i) first appointments and (ii) subsequent treatment in the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority district each year since 1974-75, expressed also as a percentage increase or decrease on the previous year and on 1974-75 figures; and what were the average times of waiting.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* The information available is set out in the tables.

Number of patients on in-patient waiting list for Basingstoke and North Hants District Health Authority from 31 March 1976 to 31 March 1987

Year	All cases			All urgent cases			All urgent cases on list for more than one month		
	Number	Per cent. change over previous year	Per cent. change over 1976[2]	Number	Per cent. change over previous year	Per cent. change over 1976[2]	Number	Per cent. change over previous year	Per cent. change over 1976[1]
1976	2,055	0	0	92	0	0	56	0	0
1977	2,259	9·9	9·9	93	1·1	1·1	67	19·6	19·6
1978	2,368	4·8	15·2	116	24·7	26·1	92	37·3	64·3
1979	3,239	36·8	57·6	107	−7·8	16·3	67	−27·2	19·6
1980	3,556	9·8	73·0	136	27·1	47·8	78	16·4	39·3
1981	3,178	−10·6	54·6	98	−27·9	6·5	80	2·6	42·9
1982	3,371	6·1	64·0	64	−34·7	−30·4	47	−41·3	−16·1
1983	3,511	4·2	70·9	103	60·9	12·0	78	66·0	39·3
1984	3,436	−2·1	67·2	112	8·7	21·7	94	20·5	67·9
1985	3,279	−4·6	59·6	132	17·9	43·5	100	6·4	78·6
1986	3,589	9·5	74·6	134	1·5	45·7	106	6·0	89·3
1987	2,411	−32·8	17·3	66	−50·7	−28·3	34	−67·9	−39·3

Year	Non-urgent cases			Non-urgent cases on list for more than one year		
	Number	Per cent. change over previous year	Per cent. change over 1976[2]	Number	Per cent. change over previous year	Per cent. change over 1976[2]
1976	1,963	0	0	588	0	0
1977	2,166	10·3	10·3	301	−48·8	−48·8
1978	2,252	4·0	14·7	470	56·1	−20·1
1979	3,132	39·1	59·6	608	29·4	3·4
1980	3,420	9·2	74·2	751	23·5	27·7
1981	3,080	−9·9	56·9	848	12·9	44·2
1982	3,307	7·4	68·5	837	−1·3	42·3
1983	3,408	3·1	73·6	1,045	24·9	77·7
1984	3,324	−2·5	69·3	1,234	18·1	109·9
1985	3,147	−5·3	60·3	831	−32·7	41·3
1986	3,455	9·8	76·0	920	10·7	56·5
1987	2,345	−32·1	19·5	474	−48·5	−19·4

[1] Percentage change figure based on 1982 as no data shown in 1974.
[2] Percentage change figure shown for 1976 as no data shown for 1974.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) to what extent the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority has benefited from the Government's special £50 million funding of their initiative to reduce waiting lists, in terms of financial support and additional personnel;

(2) how many more patients are likely to be treated by the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority as a result of additional funding through the Government's special funding to reduce waiting lists; and what categories of patients will benefit.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* The Basingstoke and North Hampshire district health authority has been allocated £22,560 from the Wessex regional health authority's £1·4 million allocation from the £25 million waiting list fund for 1987-88. This funding is being used to finance two projects. The appointment of a bed allocation officer in the orthopaedic specialty will have a considerable impact on bed occupancy and throughput in this specialty. The appointment of an additional consultant in opthalmology is expected to enable 200 additional in-patients to be treated by 31 March 1988.

For 1988-89 the waiting list fund has been increased to £30 million. The regional allocations from the fund will be anounced shortly.

Waiting Lists (Leeds)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the number of patients awaiting *(a)* urgent and *(b)* non-urgent treatment in (i) Leeds Eastern health authority and (ii) Leeds Western health authority on the latest available figures; and if he will give the figures for the previous six and 12 months, respectively.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 1 February 1988]:* The requested information is given in the table.

In-patient waiting lists in the following district health authorities

	Urgent	Non-urgent	Total
Leeds Eastern			
31 March 1986	604	5,059	5,663
30 September 1986	493	4,651	5,144
31 March 1987	445	5,619	6,064
Leeds Western			
31 March 1986	587	3,810	4,397
30 September 1986	443	4,033	4,476
31 March 1987	357	4,401	4,758

THE ARTS

"Arts in the Inner Cities"

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts when he intends to publish the report "Arts in the Inner Cities", by Mr. Paul Collard.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* I have considered a survey submitted by Mr. Paul Collard and am placing a copy in the Library, together with a working document by the Arts Council, which I warmly welcome.

The Government do not accept many of the statements or recommendations in Mr. Collard's survey, in particular those elements which over-emphasise central intervention and the role of the public sector. I do not intend to publish it.

The Government believe that the arts can play an important part in helping to revitalise the inner cities, particularly where they have the support of local and private sector interests. Arts bodies do, however, need to present more clearly what they have to offer. I shall be considering how best to assist this over the next few months.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Disabled People

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what retraining facilities he intends to provide for the disabled unemployed in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: Retraining for the disabled unemployed is provided at the 12 training centres operated by the Department of Economic Development and at the Thomas Doran training centre, Dungannon which provides specialised training for the disabled. Where appropriate places are also obtained at specialised training colleges in Great Britain. Rehabilitation-resettlement is provided at the employment rehabilitation centre, Felden, Whiteabbey for those returning to work after an illness or accident. The provision of additional facilities is kept under review.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what further action he intends to take to counteract unemployment among disabled people in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: Disabled people are encouraged to use all the facilities provided through the jobmarket network including the restart and jobclubs schemes. Encouragement is also being given to the employment of disabled persons on Action for Community Employment (ACE) projects. Additional sheltered employment places are being provided with private employers for severely disabled people. Consideration is being given to improvements in the service provided by disablement resettlement officers. Discussions are also taking place with the Northern Ireland Council on Disability to seek further ways of improving employment opportunities for disabled persons.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what training and support facilities are available for the disabled unemployed in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: Training for unemployed disabled people is available on an integrated basis at training centres and on employers' premises through various departmental schemes. Specialised training is also available at the Thomas Doran centre, Dungannon. Home-based training in the use of computers has been introduced on a pilot basis for house-bound disabled people. It is intended to extend this form of training.

Support facilities are available through the disablement resettlement officers based in local jobmarkets.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the unemployment rate for disabled people from 1980 to 1987 inclusive at all social security offices in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: Disabled persons claiming benefit do not have to indicate that they are disabled. The proportion of disabled persons who are unemployed is therefore not known.

Community Services

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the amount allocated to each district council in Northern Ireland for community services in the financial years from 1976-77 to 1986-87 inclusive.

Dr. Mawhinney: The amounts allocated by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland for community services recurrent costs are shown below. Details of amounts to cover capital costs are not readily available.

District Councils	*1976-77*	*1977-78*	*1978-79*	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Antrim	2,223	8,577	25,065	18,750	25,336	27,375	40,500	43,050	43,875	47,250	51,750
Ards	5,219	11,250	12,500	15,000	18,784	19,950	22,500	25,050	28,125	32,250	37,500
Armagh	5,789	7,875	9,000	10,875	12,275	13,125	15,750	17,475	18,000	17,850	18,750
Ballymena	6,942	23,175	25,030	31,575	32,326	37,500	40,500	44,250	55,500	56,625	60,000
Ballymoney	322	2,250	1,500	1,350	874	2,025	7,200	6,150	6,375	6,750	7,500
Banbridge	—	—	—	2,250	4,151	9,900	13,500	16,275	16,875	16,950	17,625
Belfast	65,831	129,975	211,480	262,500	353,839	479,625	546,150	579,000	600,000	624,000	660,000
Carrickfergus	4,040	13,954	20,485	22,980	26,691	30,000	31,800	35,325	39,000	40,500	42,000
Castlereagh	10,812	43,050	52,420	45,055	56,353	61,050	68,250	72,525	76,500	81,000	93,750
Coleraine	4,084	8,520	12,200	14,250	22,148	24,900	27,750	29,475	30,750	33,000	33,750
Cookstown	2,138	5,250	5,250	4,690	4,543	4,500	5,400	5,775	6,000	6,600	6,750
Craigavon	31,630	65,438	111,800	107,250	128,867	138,750	161,250	171,150	176,250	183,750	192,750
Derry	17,306	53,625	78,375	92,250	123,188	106,500	117,000	117,000	120,000	124,500	124,500
Down	7,435	7,782	13,300	12,750	15,726	15,375	17,475	18,975	22,500	31,875	33,750
Dungannon	2,351	4,125	4,900	4,875	5,679	5,700	9,000	9,525	9,750	8,250	8,625
Fermanagh	4,222	8,213	11,250	13,275	21,405	24,000	31,125	34,275	36,000	37,500	40,500

District Councils	1976-77	1977-78	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87
Larne	5,739	11,240	15,100	14,625	19,220	20,400	24,900	25,650	26,250	27,000	21,750
Limavady	750	2,287	4,240	6,675	6,640	10,275	11,625	12,750	15,000	16,500	17,250
Lisburn	8,838	17,243	24,000	22,500	31,016	47,250	56,250	60,975	66,000	66,000	69,000
Magherafelt	—	2,625	2,650	2,625	2,883	2,400	4,125	4,425	4,875	5,100	5,250
Moyle	2,160	3,150	3,750	1,915	2,447	4,425	7,050	8,700	13,125	15,750	15,750
Newry and Mourne	4,643	28,383	45,450	46,500	61,158	64,875	75,375	82,350	86,250	91,500	95,250
Newtownabbey	19,871	29,625	37,200	43,405	45,213	45,000	45,900	48,750	57,750	60,000	57,250
North Down	4,978	14,429	17,000	21,225	25,774	27,225	31,125	34,575	34,500	45,000	50,250
Omagh	5,198	13,425	18,375	18,375	21,842	27,375	36,750	40,050	43,500	52,950	62,250
Strabane	11,512	25,350	39,750	42,370	48,752	49,500	57,750	55,500	58,500	66,750	73,500
Total	234,033	540,816	802,070	879,890	1,117,130	1,299,000	1,506,000	1,599,000	1,691,250	1,795,200	1,897,500

Equal Opportunities

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will consider establishing an equal opportunities unit within the Northern Ireland Council for Disability to be resourced by the Department of Economic Development.

Mr. Viggers: This question is currently under consideration.

Travel to Interview

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what definition is used by the Department of Economic Development of permanent post for the purposes of assessing applications under the travel-to-interview scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: The job must be expected to last for more than one year.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications have been made under the travel-to-interview scheme operated by the Department of Economic Development; how many of these have been rejected on grounds that the posts applied for were not permanent ones; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: From its introduction in October 1986 until the end of December 1987, a total of 1,508 applications were made under the travel-to-interview scheme. Forty-four applications were rejected on the grounds that the posts applied for were not permanent ones.

School Nurse

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list in the *Official Report*, for each year over the last five up to the latest year for which figures are available, the following information with respect to school nurses: *(a)* the total number employed, given as total, whole-time, part-time and whole-time equivalent, *(b)* the establishment figure and *(c)* the number of vacant posts.

Mr. Needham: The information on numbers employed at 31 December each year is set out in the table. Information on establishments and vacant posts is not collected centrally and is not readily available.

Northern Ireland
Total Number of School Nurses 1982-1986

Year	Total	Whole-time	Part-time	Whole-time Equivalent
1982	97	60	37	82·64
1983	96	60	36	81·83
1984	96	60	36	81·49
1985	97	57	40	80·94
1986	92	53	39	76·57

Private Health Insurance

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has of the proportion of the population of Northern Ireland which is not covered, in whole or in part, by private health insurance.

Mr. Needham: This information is not available.

Cars (Imports)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the cars brought into Northern Ireland from the Irish Republic as formal imports in each month in 1987 were recorded as changing ownership within *(a)* one month and *(b)* two months of importation.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

General Practitioner Trainees

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the numbers of *(a)* general practitioner trainees per unit of management, *(b)* general practitioner training practices per population in each health unit of management and *(c)* candidates for the training programme, in each of the past five years.

Mr. Needham: The number of general practitioner trainees per unit of management is not available. The table shows the number of general practitioner trainees per health and social services board area.

	Health and Social Services Board			
Year	Eastern	Northern	Southern	Western
1983	30	12	6	6
1984	22	13	9	7
1985	28	11	8	4
1986	26	[1]10	6	7
1987	26	11	8	4

[1] 1 resigned from Northern board during the year.

The number of general practitioner training practices per population in each health unit of management is not

available. The table shows the number of general practitioner training practices per head of population in each Health and Social Services Board area. The figures for 1987 are not yet available.

	Health and Social Services Board			
Year	*Eastern*	*Northern*	*Southern*	*Western*
1983	1:21,000	1:22,000	1:31,000	1:21,000
1984	1:22,000	1:24,000	1:28,000	1:28,000
1985	1:22,000	1:21,000	1:32,000	1:26,000
1986	1:23,000	1:21,000	1:29,000	1:29,000

Up to 1987 there were two annual intakes to the vocational training scheme, February and August. The numbers applying for each of the past five years are shown in the table. Unsuccessful candidates frequently reapply, thus the numbers given include a substantial degree of double counting.

Year	*February Intake*	*August Intake*
1983	42	58
1984	31	78
1985	38	77
1986	35	105
1987	43	112

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the criteria applied in the selection of general practitioner trainees and their allocation to training practices.

Mr. Needham: Any medical practitioner fully registered with the Central Medical Council may apply for a place on the Northern Ireland vocational training scheme for general practice. Applications are considered by a selection panel and thereafter successful candidates arrange for 12 months' general practice training with an approved general practice trainer.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the allocation of general practitioner trainees to each training practice in each of the past five years.

Mr. Needham: It is not possible to provide this information in the form requested. However, over the past five years the average number of trainees per training practice in each health and social services board area was as follows:

	Number
Eastern Board	4·5
Northern Board	3·1
Southern Board	3·7
Western Board	3·3

Higher Education Students

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the number of higher education students in Northern Ireland, excluding overseas students, who did not receive a full value award in each of the past five years, by granting authority.

Dr. Mawhinney: No figures are available.

Lesser-value Awards

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the amounts of lesser-value awards, by granting authority in each of the past five years in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: The latest available information on the total cost of such awards is as follows:

Granting Authority	*1981-82* £	*1982-83* £	*1983-84* £	*1984-85* £	*1985-86* £
Belfast Education and Library Board	135,465	130,696	110,520	173,600	197,166
North-Eastern Education and Library Board	166,617	184,547	230,191	305,746	331,465
South-Eastern Education and Library Board	82,197	90,027	105,459	117,162	121,280
Southern Education and Library Board	122,361	182,477	109,839	163,630	195,629
Western Education and Library Board	235,411	234,297	218,550	348,824	247,231

ENVIRONMENT

Green Belt

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about his most recent planning guidance in respect of the use of green belt land.

Mr. Waldegrave: To date I have received no representations about planning policy guidance note 2, on green belts, the publication of which I announced on 20 January in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley), at columns 745-46. The new guidance note contains no departure from established green belt policy.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the dispersal of radioactive waste under the sea and the use of sub-duction zones.

Mrs. Ree: The disposal of low and intermediate-level radioactive waste in a repository under the seabed, either with access from a tunnel from the shore or from an offshore structure, are two of the options currently being considered by UK Nirex Ltd. No consideration has been given by Nirex to the use of sub-duction zones for radioactive waste disposal.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy on co-operation with, and provision of information and documentation for, the European Parliament special commission of inquiry on

problems of nuclear waste and materials management and transport in the European Economic Community member states.

Mrs. Roe: I am happy to co-operate with the European Parliamentary committee of inquiry appointed to investigate activities at the Belgian nuclear centre at Mol.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the proportional increase in the volumes of solid nuclear waste arising at Sellafield from the full operation of the site iron exchange plant.

Mrs. Roe: Less than 5 per cent.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what communication he has had with the European Commissioners for Energy and Environmental Affairs over the Commission's internal inquiry over recent problems of handling nuclear waste and its transport in the EEC.

Mrs. Roe: None, but I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy has been consulted by the European Commission about United Kingdom participation at a meeting of nuclear experts.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what proportion the volume of nuclear waste is expected to increase annually over present annual production when the thermal oxide reprocessing plant is commissioned for full operation.

Mrs. Roe: The volumes of untreated high, intermediate and solid low level nuclear wastes arising at Sellafield are expected to increase by 160 per cent. 40 per cent. and 40 per cent. respectively over present annual production when the thermal oxide reprocessing plant is commissioned for full operation.

Boxing

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he intends to take to encourage the British Boxing Board of Control to eliminate unnecessary risk to boxers in fights.

Mr. Ridley: The Government plan no such steps. The safety of those taking part in professional boxing is a matter for the British Boxing Board of Control. British boxing is subject to stringent medical safeguards and the board's medical advisers take full account of the latest medical research.

Staff Dispersal

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many divisions within his Department have been relocated out of London since 1979; what plans he has for further relocation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: Some 20,000 of the 32,000 staff in my Department, including PSA are already located outside London. Approximately 60 posts in the Crown Suppliers were moved from central London to Bootle in 1982. Some 70 posts comprising the Department's eastern regional office are to move from London to Bedford later this year. I am actively looking for other areas of work where relocation would be cost-effective and seek to ensure that, where practicable, appropriate work is carried out in the Department's regional offices.

Planning Appeals

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many planning appeals are being considered at this time; and how long before it takes to resolve such an appeal.

Mr. Waldegrave: On 31 December 1987 there were 12,090 planning appeals being processed in the Department. For those cases decided in December the median handling time from receipt to decision was 22 weeks.

Isle of Wight

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) why the Isle of Wight was omitted from the report "Developing the Rural Economy";

(2) why the Isle of Wight was not included in the areas selected by ECOTEC on behalf of the Development Commission.

Mr. Trippier: The ECOTEC report, "Developing the Rural Economy", was an assessment of the general effectiveness of the Development Commission's economic programmes. Only nine areas were selected for study solely to provide a representative cross-section of the rural areas in which the commission operates and the programmes it has provided. No significance therefore should be attached to the inclusion or omission of any particular area.

Water Supplies

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if refunds of water charges are available to householders who are dissatisfied with the quality and colour of their water supply; and how many disconnections of water supplies have occurred in the last five years where consumers have refused to pay water charges because of poor quality water.

Mrs. Roe: No refunds of water charges are available.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to obtain information on the disconnections of water supplies by *(a)* water authority and *(b)* local authority area.

Mrs. Roe: Information on the number of disconnections for non-payment is collected annually by my Department from each water authority. Latest figures for 1986-87 are as follows. Figures by local authority area are not available centrally.

	Number
North West	457
Northumbrian	300
Severn Trent	1,000
Yorkshire	293
Anglian	2,268
Thames	576
Southern	1,152
Wessex	0
South West	404
England	6,450

Local Authority Services

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on progress with contracting out local authority services by competitive tendering.

Mr. Ridley *[pursuant to his reply, 4 November 1987, c. 735]:* It has come to the Government's attention that a number of authorities are considering setting up companies, under their control, whose main function would be to carry out work which, if the Local Government Bill were enacted in its present form, would fall within a defined activity for the purposes of part I of the Bill. It seems probable that the main, or perhaps the only, purpose of setting up such companies would be to circumvent the Bill's competition provisions.

As the law presently stands, authorities to which section 135 of the Local Government Act 1972 or section 81 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 applies must make standing orders to secure competition for contracts for the supply of goods or materials or for the execution of works, but are not required to do so in relation to contracts for the provision of services. It would therefore be possible, even after enactment of the Bill, for an authority to award to its own company, and without competition, a contract for work which, if carried out by the authority's own employees, would be subject to the competition provisions of part I of the Bill.

Although we are still considering, in the context of the Widdicombe report, the wider aspects of local authority involvement in companies, we have decided that this particular issue calls for immediate action.

We therefore propose to make it unlawful for an authority to enter into a contract with one of its own companies for the carrying out by the company of work which falls within any of the activities which are defined activities for the purposes of clause 2 of the Local Government Bill, unless the authority has taken steps for the purpose of securing competition for that work. This requirement is to have effect from midnight tonight.

An appropriate amendment to the Local Government Bill is being tabled today—its text is as follows.

The authorities to whom the new provision will apply are local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland (as defined in clause 1(2) and (3) of the Bill), police, fire and civil defence, waste disposal and passenger transport authorities and the Inner London education authority. For the purposes of the new provision, a company will be treated as an authority's own company if, as a result of a decision of the authority, either the authority itself, or any member or officer of the authority, or any nominee of the authority is a member of the company or its subsidiary or holding company.

After Clause 32

Insert the following new Clause—

("Local authority companies.

.—(1) A local authority or relevant public body shall not enter into a contract under which a company which is associated with the authority or body is to carry out work falling within a defined activity, unless, before entering into that contract, the authority or body has taken reasonable steps for the purpose of securing competition for the carrying out of that work.

(2) For the purposes of this section a company is associated with a local authority or relevant public body if, by virtue of any decision of the authority or body (including that of any committee or sub-committee thereof in the course of discharging any function conferred upon them by virtue of section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972, or, in relation to Scotland, section 56 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973)—

(a) the authority or body, or

(b) any member or officer of the authority or body, or

(c) any nominee of the authority or body,

is a member either of the company or of another company which, in accordance with section 736 of the Companies Act 1985, is the company's subsidiary or holding company.

(3) In this section—

(a) "defined activity" has the meaning assigned by section 2 above;

(b) "local authority" has the meaning assigned by subsection (2) or, as the case maybe, subsection (3) of section 1 above; and

(c) "relevant public body" means any authority or committee falling within paragraphs (e) to (j) of subsection (1) of section 1 above

(4) This section (and, so far as is relevant for the purposes of the definitions in subsection (3) above, sections 1 and 2 above) shall be deemed to have come into force on 11th February 1988 and, accordingly, has effect in relation to contracts entered into on or after that day.")

Local Authorities (Financial Aid)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to seek to amend the law relating to the powers of a local authority to offer financial assistance to the owner of *(a)* a church or place of religious observance, *(b)* a training centre run by a voluntary organisation, *(c)* health care premises run commercially or by a voluntary body, *(d)* a small shop, *(e)* a restaurant, *(f)* a sports club and *(g)* industrial premises to make the property accessible for disabled people including wheelchair users.

Mr. Chope: No. Local authorities already have powers for these purposes.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 11 February 1988

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Maintenance Payments

Mr. Nicholas Baker: To ask the Attorney-General if he will bring forward proposals to abolish the right of an ex-spouse to no-fault maintenance; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: No. Over the past 14 years the practice has been developed by the courts that conduct is relevant to only a limited number of applications for financial relief. That practice was approved by the Law Commission in 1981 and has statutory authority in section 25 of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973, as amended by section 3 of the Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984.

Pin-ups

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Attorney-General whether he will issue instructions for the removal of all offensive pin-ups in all departmental premises of his office and the Lord Chancellor's Office.

The Attorney-General: There is no need for the Lord Chancellor to issue such an instruction as there is no evidence that this is a problem in his Department. The Department's equal opportunity policy statement makes it clear that displays of pin-ups causing offence may amount to sexual harassment which will not be tolerated and may be the subject of disciplinary proceedings.

There is no offensive pin-up in my own Department.

"Stalker"

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Attorney-General if he has completed consideration of whether to prosecute Mr. John Stalker under the Official Secrets Acts in relation to information in his book "Stalker".

The Attorney-General: I have concluded that a prosecution would not be in conformity with the code for Crown prosecutors issued pursuant to the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Confidential Discussions

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the reply by the hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), Minister of State in his Department, on 18 January *Official Report*, column *495*, what criteria are used to decide whether discussions with foreign affairs departments or Ministers in other states are to be considered as confidential; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We consider all exchanges with foreign Governments to be confidential unless their details are publicised by mutual agreement.

Chile

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 18 November 1987, *Official Report*, column *592*, what assessment he has made of the extent to which the judicial system in Chile conforms with international accords on human rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The answer given to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 18 November did not imply that in our opinion the Chilean judicial system conforms with international accords on human rights. We take every opportunity to make clear to the Chilean Government our view that their judicial system reflects serious shortcomings. We have also made clear our view that they should publish in their official *Gazette* their ratification of the international covenant on civil and political rights, so as to give full effect to that covenant in domestic courts.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply of 18 November 1987, *Official Report*, column *593*, what assessment he has made of the extent to which the forthcoming plebiscite in Chile represents a transition to democracy.

Mr. Mellor: We remain concerned to see an early return to democracy in Chile. The Chilean people themselves will have the chance to decide who will be their future president when they go to the polls in the forthcoming plebiscite. We hope that the campaign and poll will be freely and fairly conducted, with full opposition access to the media.

Disarmament and Development

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government have taken following the adoption at the recent United Nations conference on the relationship between disarmament and development of a final document calling for studies and planning related to a conversion of military industry to civilian production, and consequent action.

Mr. Mellor: We are committed to the search for balanced, equitable and verifiable measures of arms control that maintain the United Kingdom's security. Given the small size of the Government defence industry and in the absence of relevant arms control agreements, we do not believe that a case has been made for consideration of such studies or planning by the Government.

Hong Kong (Animal Welfare)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to prevent the sale by auction by the Hong Kong authorities of illegally imported animal tusks, skins and antlers which have been confiscated.

Mr. Mellor: No. The confiscated animal tusks, skins and antlers being offered for sale by auction by the Hong Kong Government, are listed under appendix II of the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora (CITES), for which trade for commercial purposes is allowed under strict licensing

control. These goods were seized by the Hong Kong Government over the last three years from illegal importers as a result of stringent enforcement action.

The sale is being conducted in accordance with CITES guidelines and with the endorsement of Hong Kong's endangered species advisory committee, a statutory body which advises the Hong Kong Government on all endangered species protection matters. Successful tenderers must obtain appropriate possession licences, or registration in the case of ivory tusks, before they may take possession of the goods.

All species listed in CITES appendix II are not immediately threatened with extinction, but may become so unless trade in such species is strictly regulated through licensing control in order to prevent overexploitation.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide details by animal species of the tusks, skins and antlers seized by the Hong Kong authorities and due for auction on 26 February.

Mr. Mellor: The items due for auction on 26 February consist of:

638 pieces of elephant ivory tusk,
Nine pieces of lynx skin,
Six pieces of wild cat skin,
96 pieces of otter skin,
18 pieces of red deer antler,
250 pieces of alligator-crocodile,
1,708 pieces of monitor lizard skin,
246 pieces of python skin,
239·2 kgs of elephant ivory cut pieces,
81·2 kgs of elephant ivory scraps,
2·9 kgs of wild American ginseng.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

USA (Veto Powers)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the attempts by the United States Administration to gain veto powers in international organisations, in particular the Food and Agriculture Organisation, and the Inter-American Development Bank; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* According to our understanding, the United States Government are not seeking to gain veto powers in either of these organisations.

The agreement establishing the Inter-American Development Bank, however, contains a requirement for a two-thirds majority for all decisions concerning the operations of the concessional fund for special operations. This effectively requires United States consent to such decisions, unless its voting power were to fall below one third. The United Kingdom accepted this, with other provisions of the agreement, when it joined the bank.

PRIME MINISTER

Basingstoke

Q10. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Prime Minister whether she plans to visit Basingstoke in the current year.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.
My right hon. Friend has at present no plans to do so.

East Stow

Q11. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to make an official visit to East Stow.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.
My right hon. Friend has at present no plans to do so.

Thurrock

Q106. **Mr. Janman:** to ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit Thurrock in the near future.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.
My right hon. Friend has at present no plans to do so.

EC (Finance)

Q108. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister what proposals have been submitted by the Commission to the February meeting of the European Council in relation to the financial problems facing the community; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.
During 1987 the Commission published a number of proposals which were considered at the European Council in Copenhagen. It has submitted no new proposals since.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 11 February.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.
My right hon. Friend is in Brussels for a meeting of the European Council.

Trade Unions (Leaders)

Mr. Eadie: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to her reply of 8 February, if she regards leaders of trade unions who meet her in their representative capacity as private individuals.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply of 8 February, at column 46. I have also made clear that my normal practice is not to provide details of the many engagements and meetings I undertake in the course of each day.

Civil Service

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if she will list the studies into the future of the Civil Service currently being undertaken;

(2) if she will list studies into the future of the Civil Service completed in the last 12 months; and if she will place copies of the reports in the Library.

The Prime Minister: The only study into the future of the Civil Service which has been conducted during the last 12 months is the efficiency unit's current study on the next steps in improving management in government, which is still under consideration.

"The Next Steps"

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Prime Minister if she will place in the Library a copy of Sir Robin Ibbs report "The Next Steps".

The Prime Minister: The Government are considering Sir Robin Ibbs' report, together with the question of its publication.

Efficiency Unit

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if she will list all the studies undertaken by her efficiency unit in the past;

(2) if she will list studies currently being undertaken by her efficiency unit.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) on 19 January, at column 598.

Parliamentary Questions

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make it her policy that on occasions when it is only possible to answer parliamenatry questions at disproportionate cost with full replies, a reply is provided containing such information as is compatible with an acceptable cost; and if she will make it the policy of Her Majesty's Government that all Government Departments adopt a similar policy on the provision of information.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 29 October 1987, at column 358, and to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) on 3 February, at column 618.

The decision on whether to give a partial reply to questions involving disproportionate cost is also a matter for the judgment of individual departmental Ministers. I shall continue to deal with such questions in the light of the particular circumstances of each case.

Advertising

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Prime Minister how much the Government have spent on advertising during the last 12 months.

The Prime Minister: Information on publicity costs, including advertising is held centrally only where the expenditure is incurred through the Central Office of Information. All other publicity and information expenditure is a matter for each Department.

Expenditure on advertising by the Central Office of Information on behalf of all Government Departments for the financial year 1986-87 was £104 million inclusive of COI overheads and value added tax.

ENVIRONMENT

Footpaths and Bridleways

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what positive moves he is taking to promote public awareness of their ancient rights of travel on public footpaths and bridleways.

Mrs. Rae: The Countryside Commission has recently published proposals for improving and extending public enjoyment of the countryside, including measures for raising awareness of a variety of recreational activities. My right hon. Friend welcomes this initiative.

Water Authorities

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the chairman of the water authorities; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Ridley: I last met the chairman of the water authorities on 19 January. We discussed many things, including the way ahead to the earliest practicable establishment of the National Rivers Authority, and privatisation.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next plans to meet the Nature Conservancy Council to discuss any threat to sites of special scientific interest arising from commercial interests in England and Wales.

Mrs. Rae: As is well known, Ministers and officials in my Department work closely with the council and my right hon. Friend will be meeting the council on 25 February to discuss a wide range of issues of mutual interest.

Council House Sales

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on the progress in the sales of council houses under the right-to-buy legislation.

Mr. Waldegrave: Up to the end of September 1987, some 654,100 council tenants in England had bought their homes under the right-to-buy legislation. Sales last year were running a little higher than in 1985 and 1986, and are expected to rise further following the substantial increase in applications received.

West Yorkshire Waste Management Joint Committee

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take urgent steps to announce the capital allocation to the West Yorkshire waste management joint committee for 1988-89; if he will publish details of the reasons for the delay in this announcement; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rae: The capital allocations for waste regulation and disposal will, as in previous years, be announced before the end of February.

Homelessness

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the public sector revenue costs of housing homeless families in each of the London boroughs *(a)* by providing them with newly built council dwellings, *(b)* by providing them with council dwellings acquired from the private sector and newly improved for letting and *(c)* by providing them with bed-and-breakfast accommodation; and if he will publish these figures on a comparable basis with those published in his replies to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey of Thursday 21 January, *Official Report*, column *826*.

Mrs. Rae: The information on which my hon. Friend's estimates of the new build and acquisition and renovation costs were based was Londonwide and cannot reliably be

broken down by individual authority area. The information on bed and breakfast costs was derived from CIPFA's publication "Homelessness Statistics, 1986-87 Actuals", copies of which are in the Library. This gives figures of gross expenditure and household days for those authorities which responded to CIPFA's questionnaire.

Fur Farms

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will list those bodies which he will usually consult when considering planning applications for new fur farms over any likely detrimental impact upon the local environment.

Mr. Waldegrave: Decisions on most planning applications are taken by local authorities who will consider each case on its individual merits. Article 15 of the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1977 lists the bodies which authorities are statutorily required to consult before granting planning permission for any particular development. There are no specific consultation requirements for applications for new fur farms. Apart from the statutory requirements, generally it is for local authorities to decide the extent of consultation in particular cases.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the amount and extent of the tipping of toxic waste in the west midlands.

Mrs. Rae: I am advised by the waste disposal authorities that 324,049 tonnes of special waste were disposed of in the West Midlands county area in 1986-87.

Empty Council Houses

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authority dwellings were vacant at the most recent date for which figures are available in *(a)* Vale Royal and *(b)* Chester; how many had been vacant for over six months; and what where the figures represented as a percentage of stock.

Mrs. Rae: The information derived from the authorities' 1987 housing investment programme returns is as follows:

Vacant local authority dwellings at April 1987

	Total vacant	*Percentage of stock*	*Number vacant for more than six months*	*Percentage of stock*
Chester	106	1·3	2	[1]—
Vale Royal	136	1·4	1	[1]—

[1] Less than 0·05 per cent.

Economic League

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department has made use of the services provided by the Economic League since 1979.

Mr. Ridley: No.

Chelsea Football Club

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 20 November 1987, *Official Report*, column *684*, why he has now decided to instigate an independent public inquiry into the proposed development by Chelsea football club at Stamford Bridge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The planning application for this site was notified to my right hon. Friend on 8 January as a departure from the Greater London Development Plan. My right hon. Friend accordingly considered the proposals afresh, in the light of the papers sent by Hammersmith and Fulham council and the further representations he had received. He concluded that the application should be called in for his decision. Arrangements are being made for a public local inquiry to be held as soon as possible.

Housing Corporation

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will now give details of the Housing Corporation's approved development programme for 1988-89.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 3 November that the gross provision for the Housing Corporation in 1988-89 would increase by nearly £50 million to £735 million and that we hoped that the extra public resources would increasingly be augmented by private finance under mixed funding arrangements.

The £737 million programme we have now approved (which takes account of an additional £2 million in forecast capital receipts) includes provision for the first year's expenditure on a £58 million grant programme for new mixed funding schemes. This should allow the corporation to approve schemes providing some 3,300 homes at a total cost of £126 million—over 25 per cent. more than planned for the current year's experimental programme. This new programme will include at least £20 million worth of schemes to help homeless families and especially those in bed and breakfast accommodation.

Provision for the homeless will also be among the priorities for the conventionally funded programme for housing for rent which will be maintained at the same level as 1987-88. And within this programme priority will also be given to reimprovement schemes which, together with increased spending on major repairs, will help bring empty properties back into full use. Another significant area for expansion is the low-cost home ownership programmes under which the corporation should be able to approve nearly one third more new homes than in the current year and which we hope to see expanded further by the introduction of mixed funding wherever possible. In allocating the resources for new rented projects, the percentage of investment in the 81 designated urban stress areas will be maintained, but the guidelines for allocations to rural areas will be revised. Priority will no longer be confined to the designated rural stress areas and schemes will be targeted on smaller and more isolated agricultural settlements with a view to doubling the present level of provision by housing associations in these areas.

The breakdown of the approved development programmes for 1988-89 is as follows:

Housing corporation—approved development programme 1988-89

	£ million
Net allocation (cash limit)	655
Receipts	82
Gross allocation	737
HOUSING FOR RENT	
Conventionally funded projects	
1. Contracted expenditure	371
2. New tenders approved	145
3. New projects approved	63
Mixed funding projects	
4. Committed expenditure	14
5. New projects approved	25
Major repairs	
6. Committed expenditure	28
7. New projects approved	10
Mini HAG	
8. Committed and new projects	3
HOUSING FOR SALE	
Improvement for sale, Leasehold for the elderly, shared ownership and home ownership for tenants of charitable associations	
9. Comitted expenditure	50
10. New projects approved	26
RTB	
11. Mortgages and other expenditure	2

Notes:

1. £7·7 million has been included in Housing for Rent and for Sale to cover the costs of certain projects in Merseyside.
2. The allocation of funds for new conventionally funded rented projects (Block 3) will initiate projects to a total cost of some £510 million to be completed over the next three to four years.
3. The allocation of funds for new mixed funding rented schemes (Block 5) will allow the Corporation to approve schemes requiring a total of £58 million grant.

Property Services Agency and Crown Suppliers

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies and reports have been, and are being undertaken on the operation of the Property Services Agency and the Crown Suppliers from 1979 up to the latest date available.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 29 January 1988]:* The table sets out, on the information available, studies and reports which were made on the operation of the Property Services Agency in each of the years 1979-80 to 1987-88, and the studies still in progress at present. It excludes internal studies and reports (but includes those led by other, central Departments). The first part of the list relates to the Property Services Agency, except for the Crown Suppliers. The second part relates to the Crown Suppliers alone.

Part 1: Property Services Agency (except the Crown Suppliers)

1979-80

Estate Management Case Study (Efficiency Scrutiny)[1]
Energy Conservation on the Government Estate (Efficiency Scrutiny)[1]
Works Transport (Efficiency Scrutiny)[1]
Administration Costs (Efficiency Scrutiny)[1]

1980-81

Repayment System for PSA Services[3]
Custody Guard Service (Efficiency Scrutiny)[1]
Economy in New Building Works for the Armed Services (Efficiency Scrutiny)[14]

1981-82

Report on Fees Paid to Works Consultants (Public Accounts Committee)
Report on Frauds and Irregularities in the PSA (Public Accounts Committee)
Report on Investment Appraisal in Government generally (Public Accounts Committee)[3]

1982-83

Resource Control Reviews—Study of District Works Offices in the Property Services Agency (Efficiency Scrutiny)[1]
Report of the Working Group on Design Costs (Messrs Davis-Sweet and others)[3]
Report on Contracts Functions (Deloitte Haskins and Sells)
Interim Report to the Secretary of State for the Environment on Cases of Fraud and Corruption in the PSA (Wardale-Touche Ross)[6]
Multi Departmental Review of Personnel Work (Efficiency Unit)[2]

1983-84

Final report to the Secretary of State for the Environment on Cases of Fraud and Corruption in the PSA (Wardale/Touche Ross)[3]
Report on Economy Measures in Civil, Defence and Overseas estates (Public Accounts Committee)[6]
Report on Building Maintenance Expenditure in the United Kingdom (Public Accounts Committee)
Report on Systems Control in District Works Offices [in the light of the Wardale Report] (Public Accounts Committee)

1984-85

Report on Main Estimates 1984-85 (Environment Committee)
Report on Building Maintenance (Comptroller ad Auditor-General)
Report on Action Plans in the PSA on the Wardale Report and on Building Maintenance Expenditure (Public Accounts Committee)
Report on Economy Measures in Civil, Defence and Overseas estates (Public Accounts Committee)
Report on Defence Works in the Falkland Islands (Public Accounts Committee)
Multi-Departmental Review of Consultancy, Inspection and Review (CIR) capability in Government Departments (Efficiency Unit, Cabinet Office)[2]
Multi-Departmental Review of the Identification of Internal Talent (Efficiency Unit)[2]

1985-86

Identification and Disposal of Surplus Property (Efficiency Scrutiny)[1]
Report on Main Estimates 1985-86 (Environment Committee)
Multi-Departmental Review of Budgetary Control (HM Treasury)[2]
Report on the Programme for the Provision of Prison Places (Comptroller and Auditor General)
Report on Court Building Programmes (Public Accounts Committee)
Report on Prison Building Programmes (Public Accounts Committee)
Multi-Departmental Review of Office Accommodation (former Management and Personnel Office)[2]
Report on Capital Expenditure Projects (Efficiency Unit, Cabinet Office)[3]
Report on follow up to the Multi-Departmental Review of CIR services (HM Treasury and former Management and Personnel Office)[2]

1986-87

Specialist Professional Advice within PSA (Efficiency Scrutiny)[1]
Report on Commercial Accounts (Deloitte, Haskins and Sells)

Report on Main Estimates 1986-87 (Environment Committee)
Report on Management of the Defence Estate (National Audit Office)
Report on Management of the Civil Estate (National Audit Office)
Report into the Property Services Agency (Environment Committee)
Multi-Departmental Review of Use of Private Enterprise in Government Departments (Efficiency Unit, Cabinet Office)
Report on Internal Audit in Central Government (National Audit Office)[2]
Report of Working Group of Capital Expenditure Projects (HM Treasury)[2]
Report of Working Group on Major Capital Projects (HM Treasury)[2]
Report on further follow up to the Multi-Department Review of CIR services (HM Treasury and former Management and Personnel Office)[2]

1987-88
Report on Control and Management of the Trident Programme (National Audit Office)[7]
Project Management in the PSA (Efficiency Scrutiny)[1 8]
Study on Management of the Civil Estate (National Audit Office)[9]
Study on Management Controls in District Works Offices (National Audit Office)[9]
Study of Commercial Management of HM Dockyards (National Audit Office)[7 9]
Study on the Employment of Works Consultants by Government Departments and Health Authorities (National Audit Office)[9]
Study on National Energy Efficiency (National Audit Office)[9]

Part 2: The Crown Suppliers
1983-84
Report on Supplies Transport Branch (Cranfield Institute of Technology)
PSA Supplies Market Research Consultancy (Farnfield Marketing Consultancy)
Multi Departmental Review of Government Purchasing: Contract and Procurement Procedures (former Management and Personnel Office)[2]

1984-85
Government Car Service and Inter-departmental Despatch Service (Efficiency Scrutiny)[1]

1985-86
Report on the Future of the Crown Suppliers (former Management and Personnel Office)[6]

1986-87
Report on the Future of the Crown Suppliers (Central Unit on Purchasing)[2]
Study into the Feasibility of Privatisation of the Crown Suppliers (Coopers and Lybrand)
Review of the Crown Suppliers (Mr. D. W. Jones)[11]

Notes

1. Efficiency Scrutinies are carried out under the aegis of the Cabinet Office's Efficiency Unit. They include in this list studies formerly known as Rayner Scrutinies.

2. These studies applied to certain other Government Departments as well as to PSA, and were led by the central Department(s) indicated;

3. The Working Group which carried out this study was led by Sir Derek Rayner, then adviser to the Prime Minister on Efficiency.

4. This Scrutiny was undertaken jointly with the Ministry of Defence.

5. This Working Group included Mr. R. O'B Davis, a partner in Coopers and Lybrand, and Mr. C. Sweet a consultant quantity surveyor as well as representatives from HM Treasury and the PSA.

6. The interim and the final reports of the Wardale Enquiry were written by Sir Geoffrey Wardale, formerly Second Permanent Secretary to the Department of the Environment, and Mr. A. G. Herron a partner in Touche Ross.

7. These studies apply also to the Ministry of Defence.

8. This Scrutiny was undertaken jointly with the Central Unit on Purchasing.

9. These studies are currently in progress.

10. These studies apply also to other Departments.

11. Mr. D. W. Jones is a procurement consultant, formerly an executive in Esso Petroleum.

Rateable Antiquities

Mr. Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to publish his consultative document on portable antiquities.

Mr. Moynihan *[pursuant to his reply, Friday 29 January, c. 398]:* My Department and the Welsh Office are today issuing a consultation paper seeking comments on the present arrangements for reporting funds and inviting suggestions for possible changes in the present law or administrative procedures. The paper explains how archaeological knowledge can be lost if finds are not reported. It asks for views on alternative arrangements, including how they might be implemented and enforced.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Pin-ups

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will issue instructions for the removal of all offensive pin-ups in all his departmental premises.

Mr. Hurd: All managers have been advised to ensure that no material which is likely to be found sexually offensive is displayed in the workplace; and to deal promptly with any complaints.

Firearms (Amendment) Bill

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the level of consultation on his Firearms (Amendment) Bill.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Several hon. Members raised this matter during the Second Reading debate in the House on 21 January. Representations have also been received from shooting organisations and members of the public.

Wormwood Scrubs (Annex)

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement as the future of the annex in Wormwood Scrubs.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I assume my hon. Friend is referring to the psychotherapeutic annex, which is often called the hospital annex.

The annex is to continue operating, and there are no plans to change its role or methods of working. During the present preliminary redevelopment phase the annex will be moved from the north end of B hall to the south end above the temporary hospital. We intend that, following other redevelopment work, the annex will be permanently located at the north end of one of the halls, where 36 cells with integral sanitation will be provided with office, meeting room and ancillary facilities for the exclusive use of the annex.

Police (Complaints)

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps police forces take to monitor and analyse the ethnic origin of complaints regarding police behaviour; what is the practice of the Police Complaints Authority in this respect and whether the results of these excercises are made public.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Information about the practices of individual police forces in this regard is not held centrally. The Police Complaints Authority does not itself routinely receive complainants or interview complaints and does not therefore collect statistics of this kind.

Telephone Tapping

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next expects to receive the judicial review on telephone tapping.

Mr. Douglas Hurd: I expect my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to present Lord Justice Lloyd's next annual report to the House in March 1988.

Television Licences

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received concerning the abolition of television licences for pensioners: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Since 1 January this year one petition forwarded by an hon. Member has been received, and four members of the public have written seeking free television licences for pensioners.

Staff Dispersal

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many divisions within his Department have been relocated out of London since 1979; what plans he has for further relocation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: Since 1979 two main units of the Home Office have been moved from London. The computing and pay services division (301 posts) was relocated to Bootle in 1982-83, and the Prison Service south-east regional office (74 posts) to Woking in 1987. The transfer of at least 50 posts from the London Passport Office to Glasgow is planned to start later in the year. For future policy I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General's answer of 18 January to a question from the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), at columns *475-76*.

Game Licences

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for modifying the system of game licences.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None at present.

Mr. Ronald J. Garcia (Visa)

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why the consular section of the British embassy in Manila had not received instructions to issue a visa to Mr. Ronald J. Garcia as of 27 January, despite his having had his appeal against refusal of a visa allowed by the tribunal at Southampton on 6 September 1987; and when such instructions will be issued to the British embassy in Manila.

Mr. Renton: On 30 November a copy of the adjudicator's determination was sent to the British embassy in Manila. In accordance with normal practice where a visit visa is refused and the applicant's appeal is subsequently upheld, but no direction is given by the adjudicator, I would expect Mr. Garcia to be invited for interview to have his case reconsidered in the light of current circumstances. We have been in touch with Manila in the light of the hon. Member's representations and the entry clearance officer will certainly bear in mind the adjudicator's careful determination.

War Crimes (Inquiry)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will specify the powers available to Sir Thomas Hetherington and Mr. William Chalmers to require witnesses to testify in the inquiry on war crimes; and which authority they have to compel the giving of evidence.

Mr. Hurd: They will have no powers to compel witnesses to give evidence. In this respect they will be in the same position as the police and the prosecuting authorities generally are when dealing with alleged offences under the existing criminal law.

Machine Gambling (Counselling)

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a list of organisations with which his Department has contacts which offer a counselling service to people addicted to machine gambling.

Mr. John Patten: In the course of our review of the law on amusement arcades we have had information from the organisations Parents of Young Gamblers and the Gordon House Association, both of which, I understand, offer such a service. We have also been in touch with the probation service: the work of the service can include counselling offenders with problems of addiction. Other organisations in contact with us in the review may offer services of which we are not aware.

Michael Ryan (Guns)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all the automatic and fully automatic guns owned by the late Michael Ryan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable that extensive investigations carried out by the Thames Valley police since the Hungerford shootings into the weapons held by Michael Ryan have not disclosed any substantive evidence that Ryan was ever in possession of automatic or fully automatic weapons. He was lawfully entitled to possess the following self-loading weapons:

Beretta 9 mm pistol
Bernadelli ·22 pistol
CZ OR50 ·32 pistol
Kalashnikov 7·62 mm rifle
Underwood Carbine ·30 rifle

Data Protection

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether codes of practice for police computer systems relating to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984 have yet been published; and whether he will place copies in the Library.

Mr. Hurd: The Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland) have now published codes of practice and copies have been placed in the Library.

Organisations (Infiltration)

Ms. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to make it a criminal offence for any person to infiltrate or join under false pretences a trade union or other organisation for the purpose of supplying confidential information about that organisation to other persons or bodies not authorised to receive such information; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* No.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

COCOM

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the value of exports of COCOM licensed aircraft to the eastern bloc countries for each year from 1980 to 1985.

Mr. Alan Clark: Export licence records are not classified by special goods or by value. It would thus be possible to supply the information only at disproportionate cost.

Racal (Equipment Sales)

Mr. Janner: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to complete his investigations into alleged sales of military or sensitive equipment by Racal to the Palestine Liberation Organisation in 1981: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: An investigation by the Departments concerned into the allegations made just over a week ago is under way. My Department has invited the newspaper concerned and anyone else who may have documents or other relevant information which might help the investigation to make these available. The investigation will be completed as soon as possible.

Rover Group (Positive Vetting)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he will issue a direction to the Rover Group to cease the political vetting of job applicants; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Questions relating to recruitment and personnel are matters for the company.

Crown Copyright

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has any proposals for changing Crown copyright.

Mr. Butcher: The Copyright, Designs and Patents Bill currently in another place will repeal the Copyright Act 1956 and replace it with a fresh statement of the law of copyright. Clause 151 sets out the provisions relating to Crown copyright. The most significant changes to the existing law are that the Crown's entitlement to copyright in works first published by the Crown will be repealed and the indefinite duration of copyright in unpublished Crown copyright works will be limited to 125 years.

Communications Equipment (Licences)

Mr. Janner: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he will now review requirements for the provision of licences for the supply of communications equipment.

Mr. Alan Clark: No.

PLO (Export Licences)

Mr. Janner: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what export licences he has issued for the supply of goods to the Palestine Liberation Organisation, for each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Alan Clark: Records of export licences are classified, where applicable, by applicant or country of destination rather than by end-user or consignee. The Palestine Liberation Organisation has not been so listed.

Regional Aid

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many jobs he expects to be sustained by regional selective assistance in 1988-89; and how many jobs have been sustained by all regional assistance in 1987-88.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The number of jobs created and safeguarded by regional selective assistance in 1988-89 will depend on the number, size and nature of applications which attract assistance.

Sub-Post Offices

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will seek a meeting with the chairman of the Post Office to discuss the proposed reduction in hours and salaries of sub-offices and their staff.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: When I met the chairman of the Post Office in January we discussed the agreement concluded between the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters and the Post Office for the introduction of part-time sub-post offices, if that is the proposal to which the hon. Member's question refers. No one is proposing to reduce the salaries of sub-post office staff.

Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what progress has been made in implementing the Consumer Affairs Council resolution of 1986 on the integration of consumer policies on food;

(2) what progress has been made towards implementing the Consumer Affairs Council resolution of 1986 on the integration of consumer policies on competition.

Mr. Butcher: The European Commission has recently submitted its first report to the Council on the progress made towards better integtration of consumer policy into other common policies including agriculture, competition, and transport, as requested by the Council resolution of 15 December 1986. A copy of the report is available in the Library (document 10541/87 of 14 December 1987). It is a disappointing report recording little progress.

Estate Agents

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire of 16 December 1987, *Official Report*, column *539*, if he will indicate what reviews he has carried out either generally or specifically since the implementation of the Estate Agents Act 1979; if he will publish in the *Official Report* the results of these reviews; whether any review in any form is currently being carried out in respect of sections 5, 18 or 21; whether he has any plans to amend regulation 5 of the Estate Agents (Accounts) Regulations 1981; and whether he has any plans to introduce regulations to give effect to section 22 of the 1975 Act.

Mr. Butcher *[holding answer 10 February 1988]:* This Department has not carried out any overall review of the Act since its implementation. My predecessors have, however, considered whether regulations should be made under sections 16 and 17, section 19 and section 22 of the Act, but have concluded that there was no strong case for doing so. I have no plans to introduce regulations to give effect to section 22 of the Act and no immediate plans to amend regulation 5 of the Estate Agents (Accounts) Regulations 1981. The Director General of Fair Trading has a statutory duty under section 25 of the Act to superintend its working and enforcement, and I have received advice from him on aspects of the working of the Act, including sections 5, 18 and 21. I am awaiting with interest the outcome of proceedings between the Office of Fair Trading and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors with regard to section 18.

Rural Transport Innovation Grant

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he will give details of the number, type, and levels of grant paid under the rural transport innovation grant (Transport Act 1985) in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have been asked to reply.

The administration of the rural transport innovation grant in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

The English equivalent of the grant is the rural transport development fund, which is administered by the Development Commission on behalf of the Department of Transport. The commission has paid 100 grants and has approved a further 14. Seventy grants, averaging about £8,500, have been paid for scheduled services, mainly by minibuses and taxibuses. Additionally, 18 grants have been paid to assist the appointment of county transport advisers, at an annual average of about £6,250 for up to three years, and 12 grants, averaging about £4,000, have been paid towards other miscellaneous projects.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Education Reform

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what statement of policy he has made concerning reductions in educational provision in respect of schools, colleges of further and higher education, careers advice and adult education institutes, respectively, which are currently the responsibility of the Inner London education authority.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend announced on 4 February, at columns 1178-79, the Government's proposals for education in inner London. Under those proposals each inner London council will become the local education authority for its area, responsible as such—subject to any co-operative arrangements between councils—for the provision of the services to which the hon. Member refers.

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has made any calculations on the effect on the rate support grant of the proposed abolition of the Inner London education authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government propose that the Inner London education authority should be wound up and education responsibilities transferred to local borough councils from 1 April 1990. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment proposes to introduce from the same date new arrangements for the finance of local government. Under the provisions of the Local Government Finance Bill, rate support grant will be replaced by a new grant to local authorities, to be known as revenue support grant; rate support grant will not be payable after the financial year 1989-90. The distribution of revenue support grant will take account of the responsibilities of the inner London boroughs for education after 1 April 1990.

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has made any calculations on the effect on the rate support grant of the proposed abolition of the Inner London education authority in relation to the hand over of such functions as may be given to Hackney borough council.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government propose that from 1 April 1990 rate support grant should be replaced by revenue support grant, as part of the reform of local government finance. Authorities' entitlement to revenue support grant will depend on their assessed needs, which will take account of their responsibilities. Following the transfer of education functions from the Inner London education authority, the needs assessment for Hackney borough council will include an assessment of its need to spend on education. Revenue support grant to the borough will take account of that need.

Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he and his officials first made contact with Mr. William Stubbs, education officer of Inner London education authority, as regards the possibilities of his running the funding council for the polytechnics.

Mr. Jackson: Discussions between the Department and persons considered for the post of chief executive to the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council were held in confidence. It would breach that confidence to disclose the dates of such contacts.

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if Mr. William Stubbs, education officer of Inner London education authority, has accepted his offer to head the funding council for the polytechnics.

Mr. Jackson: Mr. Stubbs has agreed to become chief executive designate to the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council.

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects the head of the funding council for the polytechnics to take up his post.

Mr. Jackson: I expect the chairman and chief executive designate to begin the work of preparing for the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council in May.

Pupil Records

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list those organisations which have responded to the consultation paper on the keeping and disclosure of pupil records.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested is as follows:

Avon LEA
Barnet LEA
Bedfordshire LEA
Berkshire LEA
Bradford LEA
Brent LEA
Bromley LEA
Bury LEA
Cheshire LEA
Cornwall LEA
Croyden LEA
Derbyshire LEA
Devon LEA
Dorset LEA
Dudley LEA
Durham LEA
Essex LEA
Gateshead LEA
Haringey LEA
Harrow LEA
Havering LEA
Hounslow LEA
Inner London Education Authority
Isle of Wight LEA
Kent LEA
Kingston-upon-Thames LEA
Kirklees LEA
Knowsley LEA
Lancashire LEA
Leicestershire LEA
Lincolnshire LEA
Merton LEA
Newcastle-upon-Tyne LEA
Norfolk LEA
Northamptonshire LEA
North Tyneside LEA
Northumberland LEA
North Yorkshire LEA
Redbridge LEA
Shropshire LEA
Solihull LEA
Somerset LEA
South Tyneside LEA
Staffordshire LEA
Suffolk LEA
Sunderland LEA
Surrey LEA
Sutton LEA
Tameside LEA
Trafford LEA
Wakefield LEA
Warwickshire LEA
Wiltshire LEA
West Sussex LEA

Universities Central Council on Admissions
Association of Workers for Maladjusted Children
ILEA Divisional Parents Committee
British Chamber of Commerce
College of Preceptors
Girls' Schools' Association
Professional Association of Teachers
Oxford Certificate of Educational Achievement
Independent Schools Joint Council
National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations
Community Rights Project
Polytechnic Central Admissions System
Inner London Education Authority
National Union of Teachers
National Association of Head Teachers
Association of County Councils
Special Educational Needs—National Advisory Service
Department of Health and Social Security
Trade Union Congress
Commission for Racial Equality
Children's Legal Centre
Advisory Centre for Education
Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association
Education Otherwise
National Union of Students
Secondary Heads Association
Methodist Church Division of Education and Youth
Voluntary Council for Handicapped Children
National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Dr Barnardo's
Free Church Federal Council
Her Majesty's Inspectorate
National Association of Social Workers in Education

In addition, responses have been received from school staff and governors, local councillors and other interested individuals.

Pilgrim Upper School, Bedford

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give his reasons for approving the closure of Pilgrim upper school, Bedford; what criteria he used in reaching his decision; how many representations he has received from parents opposing the closure; if he will reconsider his decision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend's decision to approve the proposal by the Bedfordshire LEA to cease to maintain the Pilgrim and John Howard upper schools and to establish a new upper school on the John Howard site was taken after careful consideration and on the balance of all the relevant facts and arguments, including the views of objectors. The criteria underlying my right hon. Friend's decisions on proposals of this kind are set out in detail in the Department's circular 3/87.

A total of 2,066 statutory objections to the proposals were submitted to the authority, together with 527 non-statutory objections and a petition signed by 300. The authority also received a number of representations in support of the proposals, together with a petition signed by 3,286. My right hon. Friend has no power to change his decision.

Teachers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many teachers left the profession in each of the last five years on health grounds; and if any figures are available for those suffering mental stress.

Mrs. Rumbold: The table gives the number of teachers in England and Wales granted retirement benefits under the Teachers' Superannuation Regulations on the grounds of ill-health in each financial year since 1982.

Financial year	*Number of retirements*
1982-83	1,910
1983-84	2,172
1984-85	2,449
1985-86	2,698
1986-87	2,707

Information is not available to show the number of retirements due to stress or stress-related illnesses.

University Grants

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will announce the recurrent grants allocated to universities for the academic year 1988-89 by the University Grants Committee, along with the provisional allocations for 1989-90.

Mr. Jackson: The University Grants Committee's initial allocation of recurrent grant to universities in the academic year 1988-89, along with a provisional indication of the basic distribution for 1989-90 is shown in the table. Copies of the general letter of guidance that the chairman of the UGC has sent to all universities have been placed in the Library of the House. The general letter will be followed in about a week's time by an institutional annex about student numbers and funding for individual universities. The annexes will also be placed in the Library.

The total grant distributed by the UGC as announced in the table does not include items which it is the UGC's practice to allocate separately, such as local authority rates, the overseas research student awards scheme, and the committee's small central reserve. These items amount to £147 million. Nor does the distribution include provision which is to be allocated separately for a targeted programme of restructuring for which my right hon. Friend announced an additional £155 million over three years on 3 November 1987 in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) at columns *645-48*.

Also to be distributed separately is the £56 million which the Government have made available in the financial year 1988-89 towards the cost of the 1987 academic pay restructuring settlement. The release of a further instalment of £71 million in the financial year 1989-90 will be subject to continued satisfactory progress on staff appraisal, probation and promotion arrangements.

£ million

University or college	*Basic distribution 1988-89*	*Recurrent grant 1988-89*	*Provisional basic distribution 1989-90*
Aston	15·362	15·91	15·457
Bath	16·209	16·48	17·198
Birmingham	39·878	41·06	40·754
Bradford	15·691	16·17	16·063
Bristol	33·258	33·86	34·889
Brunel	13·807	14·00	14·166
Cambridge	47·806	48·85	49·336
City	12·150	12·29	12·377
Durham	17·728	18·16	17·751
East Anglia	14·666	15·22	14·296
Essex	9·274	9·49	9·529
Exeter	17·245	17·55	17·970
Hull	15·056	15·70	15·384
Keele	8·490	8·67	8·426
Kent	12·049	12·63	12·602
Lancaster	14·584	14·85	15·009
Leeds	44·973	45·85	45·884
Leicester	19·542	19·98	20·223
Liverpool	39·508	40·34	40·374
London Business School	1·803	1·82	1·709
London University (of which Imperial College)	258·219 (32·466)	265·87 (33·70)	267·915 (33·281)
Loughborough	21·184	21·72	22·108
Manchester Business School	0·988	1·00	0·857
Manchester	52·033	53·95	54·085
UMIST	17·857	18·50	18·532
Newcastle	33·238	34·21	33·732
Nottingham	30·009	30·79	30·923
Oxford	48·592	49·84	50·272
Reading	19·982	20·27	20·478
Salford	13·965	14·93	14·407
Sheffield	33·274	34·47	33·958
Southampton	28·841	30·34	30·542
Surrey	13·902	14·47	14·387
Sussex	16·000	16·29	16·774
Warwick	21·274	22·39	22·681
York	13·269	14·33	14·108
Total England	1,031·706	1,062·25	1,065·166
Aberystwyth UC	10·470	10·60	10·617
Bangor UC	10·926	11·46	10·822
St. David's Lampeter	2·109	2·15	2·175
Swansea UC	13·745	14·31	13·730
UWCM	7·398	7·72	7·717
UCC/UWIST	27·061	28·50	27·867
Welsh Registry	2·391	2·39	2·461
Total Wales	74·100	77·13	75·389
Aberdeen	22·016	22·40	21·677
Dundee	14·651	14·99	14·265
Edinburgh	46·593	48·08	47·582
Glasgow	47·584	49·67	48·844
Heriot-Watt	11·641	12·69	12·060
St. Andrews	11·783	11·93	12·006
Stirling	8·288	8·73	8·306
Strathclyde	25·638	26·93	26·704
Total Scotland	188·194	195·42	191·444
Total Great Britain	1,294·000	1,334·80	1,332·000
Queen's Belfast	31·087	31·21	30·630
Ulster	32·478	32·58	34·723

EMPLOYMENT

Job Broking

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what job-broking facilities his Department has *(a)* at Sizewell B power station, *(b)* at Ashford for the Channel Tunnel and *(c)* in London docklands.

Mr. Lee: The employment service is providing special help for people to get jobs on the Sizewell B power station and Channel tunnel projects through on-site jobcentres. We are considering what more can be done in London docklands to help local unemployed people take advantage of the increasing number of jobs which are available there.

Labour Costs

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the increase in unit labour costs in Britain in each of the last nine years, and also in the original EEC six.

Mr. Lee: International comparisons of unit labour costs for the whole economy are not available. However, figures for manufacturing are provided in the table:

Unit Labour Costs in Manufacturing—Percentage Change on Previous Year

	Great Britain	Belgium	France	Germany	Italy	Netherlands
1978	15	1	7	5	11	2
1979	18	3	9	3	10	3
1980	22	4	12	8	12	4
1981	9	4	12	5	19	1
1982	3	−1	11	3	17	4
1983	−1	−1	8	0	14	−2
1984	2	5	5	1	5	−7
1985	3	4	3	0	9	1
1986	4	4	3	3	3	−1

Notes:
1. The percentages are calculated from index series produced by the International Monetary Fund except for Great Britain, figures for which are published in the *Employment Gazette*.
2. Unit labour costs for Luxembourg are not available.
3. The source index series are in local currency and are not adjusted for exchange rate changes.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are engaged in *(a)* service and *(b)* manufacturing industries in (i) the Northwich travel-to-work area, (ii) the Chester travel-to-work area and (iii) the Runcorn travel-to-work area; and what were the figures at the same time of year in each of the past five years.

Mr. Lee: The available employee estimates for travel-to-work areas are from censuses of employment taken in September 1981 and September 1984 and are as follows:

Employees in employment[1]

(Thousand)

Divisions SIC 1980	Travel to work area[2]					
	Northwich		Wirral and Chester		Widnes and Runcorn	
	1981	1984	1981	1984	1981	1984
6-9 Service industries	22·4	24·4	110·7	108·5	26·8	25·2
2-4 Manufacturing industries	14·6	13·6	46·6	39·0	21·3	19·6

[1] The figures exclude the self-employed and members of Her Majesty's forces.
[2] Defined in terms of ward boundaries as at 1981.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of advertised job vacancies in *(a)* the Northwich travel-to-work area, *(b)* the Chester travel-to-work area and *(c)* the Runcorn travel-to-work area; what were the numbers at the same date in each of the last five years; and what each figure represents as a percentage of those unemployed but available for work.

Mr. Lee: The following tables show the number of unfilled vacancies (excluding community programme vacancies) at jobcentres covering areas closely corresponding to the Northwich, Wirral and Chester and Widnes and Runcorn travel-to-work areas in December of each of the last five years, along with the total number of unemployed claimants in each travel-to-work area. Total numbers of advertised job vacancies are not available but it is estimated that nationally about a third of vacancies are notified to jobcentres. Comparisons of the unemployment figures over the period are slightly affected by the change in the method of compiling the figures in March 1986.

Northwich travel-to-work area

	Unfilled vacancies	Unemployed claimants
December 1983	178	6,449
December 1984	186	6,441
December 1985	209	6,465
December 1986	301	6,039
December 1987	209	4,908

Wirral and Chester travel-to-work area

	Unfilled vacancies	Unemployed claimants
December 1983	1,197	37,315
December 1984	1,019	38,848
December 1985	1,139	39,317
December 1986	1,511	37,824
December 1987	1,773	32,633

Widnes and Runcorn travel-to-work area

	Unfilled vacancies	Unemployed claimants
December 1983	198	11,403
December 1984	249	11,549
December 1985	272	11,536
December 1986	278	11,074
December 1987	292	9,535

Business in the Community

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will hold early discussions with interested parties involved in the business in the

community liaison framework with private industry, on further measures to promote employment among young adults from disadvantaged areas.

Mr. Cope: All of this Department's employment and training measures are available to young adults from disadvantaged areas, including the enterprise allowance scheme. Further details of the new training scheme for unemployed adults will be given in a White Paper shortly. While I am always willing to consider new proposals to promote employment, the Government's main contribution to rising employment will continue to come from pursuing sound economic policies as a foundation for sustained growth. I am in frequent contact with business in the community.

Ethnic Minorities (Training Grants)

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when his Department will reach a decision on the application made by Reading borough council in June 1987 for approved training status under section 37 of the Race Relations Act 1976; and if he will explain the reasons for the delay in dealing with the application.

Mr. Nicholls: Reading borough council submitted an application for designation as a training body under section 37(3)*(b)* of the Race Relations Act 1976 on 1 June 1987. Officials from my Department contacted the council on 11 June to seek additional information, and on 28 July met officials from the council. In the light of that meeting, and further contacts, the council submitted revised proposals on 5 January 1988. These proposals, along with additional supporting material dated 29 January, but received by my Department on 5 February, are now under consideration.

A decision on the application will be reached shortly.

Average Earnings

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the level of average earnings of *(a)* male manual workers, *(b)* male non-manual workers and *(c)* managers, senior managers, directors, and professionals, in whatever categories the information is available, for each year since 1979, both current and constant (1987-88) prices; and what has been the percentage increase each year in the earnings of each group in both money and real terms since 1979.

Mr. Lee: The information requested is provided in the table. Data for senior managers and directors are not available.

Average gross weekly earnings
Full-time males whose pay was not affected by absence[1]

£ per week

April	*Manual*	*Non Manual*	*[2]Group 2*	*[3]Group 3*	*[4]Group 5*	*[5]Group 6*
Current prices						
1979	93·0	113·0	129·0	113·1	119·2	114·4
1980	111·7	141·3	167·7	139·6	147·5	145·6
1981	121·9	163·1	189·3	179·6	168·9	162·9
1982	133·8	178·9	211·0	185·8	184·9	176·9
1983	143·6	194·9	230·9	197·6	200·9	195·3
1984	152·7	209·0	251·6	208·1	216·2	212·0
1985	163·6	225·0	270·3	223·1	229·5	229·1
1986	174·4	244·9	298·2	242·2	248·6	246·8
1987	185·5	265·9	328·2	261·2	267·0	265·5
Percentage Increase[6]						
1979-80	20·1	25·0	30·0	23·4	23·7	27·3
1980-81	9·1	15·4	12·9	28·7	14·5	11·9
1981-82	9·8	9·7	11·5	3·5	9·5	8·6
1982-83	7·3	8·9	9·4	6·4	8·7	10·4
1983-84	7·8	9·0	9·2	5·8	8·5	9·1
1984-85	7·1	7·7	7·4	7·2	6·2	8·1
1985-86	6·6	8·8	10·3	8·6	8·3	7·7
1986-87	6·4	8·6	10·1	7·8	7·4	7·6
Constant 1987 prices[7]						
1979	174·4	211·9	241·9	212·0	223·5	214·5
1980	172·0	217·6	258·2	215·0	227·1	224·2
1981	167·5	224·2	260·2	246·8	232·1	223·9
1982	168·1	224·7	265·1	233·4	232·3	222·2
1983	173·4	235·4	278·9	238·7	242·7	235·9
1984	175·4	240·0	288·9	239·0	248·3	243·5
1985	175·7	241·7	290·3	239·6	246·5	246·1
1986	181·8	255·3	310·8	252·4	259·1	257·2
1987	185·5	265·9	328·2	261·2	267·0	265·5
Percentage increase[6] [7]						
1979-80	−1·4	2·7	6·8	1·4	1·6	4·5
1980-81	−2·6	3·0	0·7	14·8	2·2	−0·1
1981-82	0·3	0·3	1·9	−5·4	0·1	−0·7
1982-83	3·2	4·7	5·2	2·3	4·5	6·2
1983-84	2·5	3·6	3·8	0·6	3·2	3·7

April	Manual	Non Manual	[3]Group 2	[3]Group 3	[4]Group 5	[5]Group 6
1984-85	0·2	0·7	0·5	0·3	−0·7	1·1
1985-86	3·4	3·6	7·1	5·3	5·1	4·5
1986-87	2·0	4·2	5·6	3·5	3·0	3·2

Source: New Earnings Survey

[1] Data up to 1983 on the basis of males 21 and over. Data from 1984 on adult rates.
[2] Professional and related occupations supporting management and administration.
[3] Professional and related occupations in education, welfare and health.
[4] Professional and related occupations in science, engineering and technology.
[5] Managerial occupations other than general management.
[6] Increases for 1983-84 based on adult rates of pay.
[7] Constant prices at April 1987 RPI (All items).

YTS

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to expand the YTS scheme in his Department during the current year.

Mr. Fowler: YTS has established itself as a high-quality training programme for young people with a nationally recognised record leading to jobs and vocational qualifications.

YTS has had tremendous support from employers, the training profession and most particularly from young people themselves. YTS leads to jobs. It is the best start in working life young people can have. During the last six months the Department of Employment group has provided 120 training places. It is my intention that this number should be increased. The DE group will be making a further 80 placements available in 1988-89 bringing the total to 200.

DEFENCE

Pin-ups

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will issue instructions for the removal of all offensive pin-ups in all his departmental premises.

Mr. Sainsbury: As part of the Department's equal opportunities plan, on which the trade unions were consulted, an instruction will be issued to all civilian staff in the near future defining the Department's policy on sexual harassment. The instruction states that the display of material which is of a sexual nature and offensive to women and-or men generally may constitute sexual harassment and will not be tolerated. Specific instructions requiring the removal of any such material which may be on display in Civil Service premises will also be issued.

Turkey (Arms Sales)

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Shorland S550 armoured personnel carriers have been supplied to Turkey by Shorts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: It has been the practice of successive Administrations not to announce details of specific defence sales business with other countries as the information is commercially confidential. In this case Shorts themselves announced on 27 January that they had received an order for 40 Shorland S550 APCs for Turkey.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the types and quantities of arms sold to Turkey.

Mr. Sainsbury: It has been the practice of successive Administrations not to give details of defence sales business with other countries.

Irish Air Space (Breach)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information is available on a Royal Air Force aeroplane that breached Irish air space on 30 December 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: On the morning of 30 December 1987 an Army Air Corps Beaver aircraft penetrated Irish air space. The incident has been fully investigated by my Department and it is clear that it occurred as a result of a misunderstanding by the pilot of the exact terms of the flight clearance given to him, and this has been explained to the Irish Government. Appropriate disciplinary action has been taken and the relevant instructions to air crew in Northern Ireland have been clarified in order to avoid the recurrence of such a misunderstanding.

HMS Conqueror (Logbook)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the outcome of the inquiry into the disappearance of the navigator's logbook of HMS Conqueror.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I have nothing to add to the statements made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) on 30 November 1984, at columns *593-94*, and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Mr. Stanley) on 25 October 1985, at column *277*.

Economic League

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department has made use of the services of the Economic League since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: No.

WALES

Private Health Insurance

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has of the proportion of the population of Wales which is not covered, in whole or in part, by private health insurance.

Mr. Grist: The 1983 general household survey indicated that 95 per cent. of the population aged 16 and over living

in private households in Wales did not have private medical insurance cover. Equivalent results from the 1986 general household survey are not yet available.

Infant Cardiology Services

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made concerning infant cardiology services in south and west Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: South Glamorgan health authority is readvertising the post of consultant paediatric cardiologist. Approval has been given to the development of a paediatric cardiac unit at the University hospital of Wales and work on site is planned to commence this year. On the recommendation of the Welsh medical committee, the cardiology committee of the Royal College of Physicians has been invited and has agreed to undertake, early this year, a review of the planning policies and service provision of cardiac services in south Wales for children and adults.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of his spending programmes will show a reduction in real terms in any of the next three years as compared with 1987-88 expenditure; and what is the figure of each reduction in each year.

Mr. Peter Walker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer which I gave on 25 January, *Official Report* columns *121-24* in reply to an earlier question from him, from which the information now requested can easily be derived.

I have already explained that it is misleading to make comparisons between public expenditure plans for one year and outturn (or estimated outturn) for other years.

It will be readily seen that for 1988-89, planned provision in Cmnd. 288 for programmes within my other services block increases substantially over the comparable levels of planned expenditure provision in Cmnd. 56 for 1987-88. Reductions in planned provision for roads and transport (£10 million) housing (£6 million) other environmental services (£5 million) and arts and libraries (£1 million) are more than offset by increases in education (£34 million) and health and personal social services (£51 million). These are in addition to the increase in planned provision of £46 million for my industry, trade and employment programme. It means therefore that, within the programme as a whole, for each £1 of reductions there are more than £5 of increases.

For 1989-90 and 1990-91 the distribution between programmes within my other services block is illustrative only. Decisions on the public expenditure totals and within that the allocation to individual block programmes will be taken in future public expenditure surveys.

SCOTLAND

Hydro-electricity

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make funds available to the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board, for the implementation of the smaller run-of-the-river hydro project.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend sets a limit on the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board's overall capital expenditure in any year and it is for the board to establish priorities between projects within the limits set taking account of system requirements and the expected return on the investments. The board has in recent years taken the view that other projects have had a higher priority against these criteria than run-of-the-river schemes.

Pin-ups

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will issue instructions for the removal of all offensive pin-ups in all his departmental premises.

Mr. Rifkind: In a general notice prohibiting sexual harassment, managers in my Department have been asked to ensure that potentially offensive material is not displayed in the workplace.

Erskine Bridge (Tolls)

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy with regard to tolls on the Erskine bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The policy of successive Governments since 1973 has been to fix tolls at levels which, while having full regard to the economic needs of the areas served by the bridge, are likely to yield the best result in terms of revenue.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if for 1986 he will give the number of planning appeals against local authorities and the number that were successful.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In 1986 decisions were issued on 542 planning permission appeals under section 33 of the Town and Country (Planning) Scotland Act 1972. Of these 193 appeals (36 per cent.) were sustained.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give both the total number of National Health Service beds and the number of acute beds per head of population.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is published annually in "Scottish Health Statistics" (table 6.3), copies of which are held in the Library.

Shaw Medical Centre Ltd.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the structure proposed by the Scottish Development Agency that will allow the repayment of its investment in Shaw Medical Centre Ltd. made necessary by the cash risk after the first year;

(2) what financial support is being given by the Scottish Development Agency to the Shaw Medical Centre Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The Scottish Development Agency's dealings with companies are conducted in confidence and are not disclosed except in cases where the agency holds

more than 20 per cent. of the voting rights, and where the total investment is in excess of £100,000. In these cases a report is made in the agency's annual report. Any investment made by the agency will be in accord with the investment guidelines laid down by my right hon. and learned Friend and will take into account the needs of the company.

Procurators Fiscal (Written Warnings)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in how many cases procurators fiscal in Tayside have issued written warnings following the introduction of the legislation which awarded them the powers to do so; and how many individuals have been charged by Tayside police with offences of indecent acts and have received such written warnings.

Mr. Rifkind: Figures showing the number of warnings issued in recent years are contained in the first of the tables.

"Offences of indecent acts" is not a precise category, but the numbers of offences involving such conduct as can be identified from available statistics are given in the second of the tables.

Total number of warnings issued

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	Total
Dundee	927	971	832	756	819	—
Perth	174	331	135	162	245	—
Forfar	139	211	182	215	177	—
Arbroath	54	89	92	102	98	—
Tayside	1,294	1,602	1,241	1,235	1,339	6,711

Warnings in cases involving indecency

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Dundee	2	6	8	17	35
Perth[1]	—	—	—	—	—
Forfar	—	—	—	—	—
Arbroath	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Figures for Perth are not available.

Scottish Special Housing Association

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if there have been any changes in the senior management of the Scottish Special Housing Association in the last four weeks.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Staffing questions of this kind are a matter for the Scottish Special Housing Association itself. I understand, however, that a member of staff at director level left the association's employment recently under early retirement arrangements.

Fire Safety

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to issue guidance on means of escape from fire in house in multiple occupation in Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: The guide setting out an advisory standard for means of escape from fire in certain houses in multiple occupation in Scotland will be issued by the Scottish Home and Health Department today. The guide also covers related fire safety measures and will assist the process of consultation between housing and fire authorities which is required under housing legislation. Copies of the guide are being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Health Boards (Finance)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will give the total cash allocation to each Scottish health board for each year from 1978-79, including projected allocations for the years 1988-89 and 1989-90;

(2) if he will give the total cash allocation to Scottish health boards for each year from 1978-79, including projected allocations for the years 1988-89 and 1989-90.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer, 26 January 1988]:* Health boards' final allocations for recurrent expenditure on hospital and community health services, for the years 1978-79 to 1987-88 inclusive, are shown in the table. The allocations for 1989-90 will not be determined until the early part of 1989 once the relevant population and other data are available.

£ Thousand

Health boards	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88 (estimated)
Argyll and Clyde	43,038	53,348	67,961	77,063	83,425	86,906	91,463	96,811	105,779	114,482
Ayrshire and Arran	26,313	32,475	43,166	49,467	55,328	60,852	65,902	70,447	77,304	85,129
Borders	8,368	10,095	13,239	14,920	16,498	17,904	19,088	20,163	21,815	24,415
Dumfries & Galloway	15,037	18,556	24,982	27,243	29,713	31,120	33,734	35,642	37,925	41,171
Fife	27,003	33,061	43,249	49,323	53,743	57,640	62,329	67,720	72,509	78,880
Forth Valley	27,134	33,113	44,377	49,002	52,659	56,522	59,960	63,634	69,112	75,115
Grampian	51,646	62,738	82,953	92,119	101,559	106,293	113,677	120,189	130,395	143,452
Greater Glasgow	164,369	203,355	262,095	291,087	310,181	327,945	346,301	360,693	384,189	414,636
Highland	22,198	27,280	35,842	39,342	41,614	44,475	47,849	51,552	56,033	60,186

Health boards	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88 (estimated)
Lanarkshire	47,379	58,114	77,605	85,072	92,542	97,956	104,996	111,060	119,060	129,381
Lothian	98,543	119,359	154,874	172,268	186,705	195,184	207,852	218,430	235,556	253,551
Orkney	1,438	1,718	2,342	2,752	2,985	3,248	3,475	3,674	3,961	4,419
Shetland	1,701	2,203	2,987	3,389	3,849	3,990	4,341	4,523	4,807	5,237
Tayside	61,323	73,926	96,896	105,553	111,711	116,468	122,978	128,462	136,722	146,558
Western Isles	2,600	3,277	4,280	5,047	5,832	5,754	6,508	6,998	7,476	8,050
	598,090	732,618	956,848	1,063,647	1,148,344	1,212,257	1,290,453	1,359,998	1,462,643	1,584,510

NORTHERN IRELAND

Teacher Training

Mr. McCusker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many teacher-training places have been available in Northern Ireland during the past five years; and what is the estimated number of places needed during the next five years in each of the institutions offering teacher training in the Province.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

Academic years	Number
1983-84	630
1984-85	640
1985-86	640
1986-87	640
1987-88	735

For 1988-89, a total of 735 places have been allocated — 110 to Queen's University of Belfast, 145 to the University of Ulster and 240 each to St. Mary's and Stranmillis colleges. Intake places beyond 1988-89 have not yet been determined and estimates would be unreliable.

Health and Personal Social Services

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table setting out for 1987-88 and 1988-89 the estimated number of *(a)* families and *(b)* persons in each health board or equivalent, and in Northern Ireland as a whole, showing net average expenditure on health and personal social services per family and per person in each year, and distinguishing between expenditure on the National Health Service and on the personal social services.

Mr. Needham: Estimates of population at board level are not held for 1987-88 or 1988-89; the following figures are based on the estimate for mid-1986 which gave the population of Northern Ireland as 1,566,800. There is no generally accepted definition of the family, so per capita expenditure figures only are given. The total per capita expenditure on health and personal social services is expected to be:

	£
1987-88	511
[1]1988-89	530

Per capita spending by boards is expected to be[2]:

	Eastern	Northern	Southern	Western
Mid-1986 estimate of population	642,100	379,000	288,900	256,800
Hospital and Community Health Services and Family Practitioner Services	525	285	355	390
Personal Social Services	85	61	63	63
Total	610	346	418	453
Hospital and Community Health Services and Family Practitioner Services	545	294	366	404
Personal Social Services	88	63	65	66
Total	633	357	431	470

[1] These figures include expenditure which is incurred centrally by the Department and which is not possible to attribute to individual Boards.
[2] Comparisons of per capita spending by Boards are not meaningful as administrative populations do not coincide with actual catchment populations for man services including regional medical services, acute hospital services, psychiatric and mental handicap hospital services.

Pin-ups

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will issue instructions for the removal of all offensive pin-ups in all his departmental premises.

Mr. Stanley: The Civil Service policy on sexual harassment is set out in the programme of action to achieve equal opportunities for women in the Civil Service, which was published by the Cabinet Office (MPO) in 1984. Sexual harassment, including the display of sexually offensive material, at work is not tolerated and is dealt with as a disciplinary matter through the usual Civil Service complaints procedures. To reaffirm this position, action is in hand to issue guidance to all members of staff in the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments in the near future.

Travelling People

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what provisions exist for the education of the children of travelling people in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: These children may attend any grant-aided school or further education establishment in Northern Ireland.

However in the Belfast area specific provision is made at St. Paul's primary school, Cavendish square where some 140 such pupils are enrolled and the teaching staff complement is six.

Board and Lodging

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the numbers of people aged under 25 years residing in board-and-lodging accommodation in each health and social board area in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years.

Mr. Needham: Information is not available in the precise form requested. Table A below shows, for each health and social services board, the numbers of single persons aged under 25 years occupying temporary accommodation reserved for homeless persons, during the years 1981 to 1985.

Table A

Year ended 31 December	*Health and Social Services Board*				
	Eastern	*Northern*	*Southern*	*Western*	*Total*
1981	19	12	11	8	50
1982	30	12	5	5	52
1983	50	11	12	16	89
1984	76	20	7	12	115
1985	48	12	3	21	84

Table B below contains, for each Health and Social Services Board, the numbers of homeless families (including children) occupying temporary accommodation reserved for homeless persons, during the years 1981 to 1985.

Table B

Health and Social Services Board	*Year ended 31 December*				
	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
Eastern					
Families	134	208	251	164	164
Children	274	430	476	346	331
Northern					
Families	144	121	35	59	67
Children	204	161	75	136	165
Southern					
Families	29	16	39	35	30
Children	68	36	89	78	44
Western					
Families	55	61	60	61	60
Children	117	125	124	155	145
Total					
Families	362	406	385	319	321
Children	663	752	764	715	685

Attorney-General (Statement)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he informed the Government of the Irish Republic of the Attorney-General's intention to make a statement to the House on 25 January.

Mr. Tom King *[holding answer 10 February 1988]:* The Irish Government were informed on the morning of 25 January that my right hon. and learned Friend would be making a statement. A text was passed to them after the statement had been made.

Salmon

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he intends to take to maintain a boat on the north coast of Northern Ireland for the protection of salmon during the current year.

Mr. Viggers *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* Responsibility for the protection of salmon stocks rests with the Fisheries Conservancy Board for Northern Ireland. It is for the board to determine the most cost-effective manner of properly discharging its responsibility. The fishery patrols of the Department of Agriculture supplement the measures underaken by the Board.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many mobility allowance appeals were heard by medical appeal tribunals at each venue in Northern Ireland in the past three years.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* The information is as follows:

Year	*Belfast*	*Londonderry*
1985	226	58
1986	262	62
1987	295	43

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the waiting times for appeals regarding mobility allowance, indicating any local differences in those waiting times.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* Medical questions arising on mobility allowance appeals are decided in the first instance by medical boards and thereafter, if necessary, by medical appeal tribunals. Boards are held in Belfast and Londonderry although most appellants are examined at home. It takes just under five weeks on average from the time an appeal is received until the board makes its decision. There are no local differences. Non-medical questions are decided, on appeal, by social security appeal tribunals. The administration of both medical and social security appeal tribunals is the responsibility of the president of social security and medical appeal tribunals, Mr. C. G. MacLynn, LL.B and the hon. Gentleman should write to him as regards waiting times for appeals to those tribunals.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the length of time taken to process claims for mobility allowance.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* Eight weeks.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many claims and appeals regarding mobility allowance are pending at present.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* At 1 January 1988 there were 1,529 claims and 342 appeals pending.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are in receipt of mobility allowance in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* Some 11,600 at 31 December 1987.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff there are by grade in the mobility allowance branch of the Department of Health and Social Security in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* The information is as follows:

Grade	*Number of staff*
Deputy principal[1]	1
Staff officer[1]	1
Executive officer I	1
Executive officer II	1
Administrative officer	4
Administrative assistant	2
	10

[1] These grades have additional staff responsibilities.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many renewed mobility allowance claims, from those who had been in receipt of the allowance, have been disallowed in each of the past three years, indicating how many were subsequently awarded on appeal.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* The information is as follows:

Year	*Renewed claims disallowed*	*Subsequently award on appeal*
1985	148	30
1986	224	48
1987	209	52

Appeal figures related to appeals decided in the relevant years and do not necessarily reflect claims disallowed in those years.

AIDS

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has about the decision of the United States national institutes of health to instruct all biological laboratories to review their safety guidelines following the reported infection of two laboratory workers with the AIDS virus after working with concentrated samples; and whether he will carry out such a review of procedures in medical and biological laboratories in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* I am aware of the decision referred to. Current guidance on safety procedures, prepared by the advisory committee on dangerous pathogens and the expert advisory group on AIDS, continues to be appropriate and therefore I have no plans to review those procedures.

Maryfield (Costs)

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what yearly contributions the Irish Republic has made towards *(a)* the maintenance, *(b)* the operating costs and *(c)* the staffing costs at Maryfield; and what proportion these contributions are of the total costs within each of these areas.

Mr. Tom King *[holding answer 27 January 1988]:* The Irish Government do not pay maintenance costs directly, but rather a share of rent for the secretariat building. In the last financial year, their contribution was £32,000. They also contribute to operating expenses in varying proportions, reflecting the use they make of each facility. The cost to the Irish Government of their staff is a matter for them.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Chemical Trials

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what chemical trials are being conducted on farms within the Easington area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) on 10 February 1988.

Dairy Inspections

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many inspectors are currently employed to carry out dairy inspections;

(2) what system there is of monitoring dairy inspections.

(3) whether he will review the workings of the dairy inspections procedure.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The complement of the dairy husbandry discipline of ADAS is currently 103 and there are 91 officers actually in post. Of these, 72 dairy husbandary advisers undertake visits to dairy farms to check compliance with the milk and dairies regulations, but other duties (such as advisory work) account for about half of their time. The work of these advisers is monitored by their line managers and is also subject to regular staff inspection. In addition, as I told my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) on 26 January at column *175*, there is to be a formal efficiency scrutiny of this work.

Wool

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will consider increasing the guaranteed price for wool by 10 per cent. per kilogramme to cover production and other costs in the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My right hon. Friend met the farmers' unions and the British Wool Marketing Board last week to review the prospects for the 1988 clip year and the level of the guarantee which for the 1987 clip was set at 129p/kg. An announcement on the level of the guarantee for the 1988 clip will be made as soon as possible.

Cereals

Dr. David Clark To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what was the shortfall in the amount to the co-responsibility levy in respect of the 1986 cereal harvest, as between that paid by farmers and that collected by the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce; and if he will make a statement;

(2) on how many tonnes of cereal following the harvest of 1986 co-responsibiltiy levy was paid to the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce;

(3) what was the cereal harvest for 1986; and on how many tonnes co-responsibility levy was paid.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The cereals harvest for 1986 was 24·5 million tonnes. Co-responsibility levy has now been collected on 13·4 million tonnes, including 2 million tonnes of grain imported from other member states. About 13 million tonnes of cereals was not liable to levy in the United Kingdom during the 1986-87 marketing year; this comprised grain exported to other member states; grain used for seed; grain used on farms and grain processed by farmers and fed to their own livestock; grain stocks carried over into the current marketing year.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many tonnes of the British cereal harvest in 1986-87 he estimates were liable to co-responsibility levy; and how much of the levy has been collected to date.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The cereals harvest for 1986 was 24·5 million tonnes. Co-responsibility levy has now been collected on 13·4 million tonnes, including 2 million tonnes of grain imported from other member states. About 13 million tonnes of cereals was not liable to levy in the United Kingdom during the 1986-87 marketing year; this comprised grain exported to other member states; grain used for seed; grain used on farms and grain processed by farmers and fed to their own livestock; grain stocks carried over into the current marketing year.

Organic Products

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give import figures for each of the following organic produce for each year in the last 10 years: carrots, parsnips, potatoes, cabbages, turnips, swedes, courgettes, lettuces, tomatoes, cucumbers, apples, pears and strawberries.

Mr. Donald Thompson: No records are maintained in overseas trade statistics of fruit and vegetables classified according to production systems. Moreover, there would be little point in keeping such statistics for organic produce until importing and exporting countries had agreed the necessary organic production standards and the inspection and certification arrangements.

Pesticides

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made in achieving common standards of safety assessment and certification for agriculture pesticides within the European Community.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The European Community has been operating a prohibition directive since 1979 which requires member states to withdraw certain substances from circulation. The EC Commission is advised by a committee of scientific experts in making its recommendations under this directive, and unanimous agreement of member states is required in the Council before substances can be added to the existing list of prohibitions. Outside the scope of this directive member states operate national controls on the supply and use of pesticides. A draft directive proposing an EC regime for approving or accepting pesticides was tabled by the EC Commission in 1976, but no progress has been made in discussing it in recent years.

Ewe Premium

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he proposes to take to repay to British producers and trade interests the sums recoverable from the European Community as a result of recent favourable judgments on ewe premium and clawback, respectively.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The European Court's judgment of 2 February in cases 305/85 and 142/86 declares void the rates of ewe premium which were set by EC Commission regulation for Great Britain for the 1984-85 and 1985 marketing years. This welcome judgment fully vindicates the Government's case that the rates had been wrongly calculated. It means that supplementary premium payments will be payable to GB producers from FEOGA funds. Some £11 million is involved, and we shall make payment arrangements as soon as the EC Commission has made new regulations setting properly calculated rates. And we are pressing the Commission to make the necessary regulations as soon as possible.

The judgment in EC case 61/86—the Government's other sheepmeat case against the EC Commission—declares the relevant EC regulations void in so far as they apply clawback to exports of ewes, ewemeat and other categories of sheep and sheepmeat which cannot receive variable premium. As an immediate result, exporters of the affected categories are no longer obliged to pay clawback. In our view, the judgment also means that the Commission should return to us the clawback collected under the invalid regulations. We are also pressing the Commission on this as a matter of urgency. My officials will be maintaining close contact with the farmers' unions and the export trade who together have a related case before the High Court concerning one particular export consignment.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Company Profits

3. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of profitability in British companies.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of profitability in British companies.

Mr. Brooke: The profitability of non-oil industrial and commercial companies has increased in each of the past six years: the best performance for a generation.

Interest Rates

16. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of interest rates in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the current level of interest rates.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Bank base rates are 9 per cent.

34. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about his policy on interest rates.

Mr. Lilley: Short-term interest rates are the essential instrument of monetary policy and are held at whatever level is necessary to maintain downward pressure on inflation.

Tax and Prices Index

17. **Mrs. Widdecombe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the rise in the tax and prices index in the 12 months to December 1987.

52. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the rise in the tax and prices index in the 12 months to December 1987.

Mr. Brooke: In the 12 months to December 1987 the tax and prices index rose by 1·9 per cent.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the rise in the tax and prices index in the 12 months to December 1987.

Mr. Lilley: In the 12 months to December 1987 the tax and prices index rose by 1·9 per cent.

Inflation

18. **Mr. Ward:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the rate of inflation.

Mr. Brooke: The increase in retail prices over the 12 months ending December 1987 was 3·7 per cent.

26. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the rate of inflation.

Mr. Lilley: The increase in retail prices over the 12 months ending December 1987 was 3·7 per cent.

38. **Mr. Andy Stewart:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the rate of inflation.

65. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current level of inflation.

97. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the rate of inflation.

Mr. Lilley: The increase in retail prices over the 12 months ending December 1987 was 3·7 per cent.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rate of inflation he has assumed in relation to his expenditure plans for *(a)* National Health Service and *(b)* Government expenditure generally for each of the next three years.

Mr. Major: The economic assumptions underpinning the Government's plans set out in the 1988 public expenditure White Paper (Cm. 288), including the assumptions for general inflation as measured by the GDP deflator and the RPI, are set out in volume I, chapter 2, paragraph 4.

The Government do not publish assumptions about the future movements in particular prices affecting individual expenditure programmes though, in planning and managing their programmes, Departments take account of the prices of the goods and services they purchase.

Third World Debts

20. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the Finance Ministers of creditor countries concerning the rescheduling of debt in Third world countries.

Mr. Brooke: Last September my right hon. Friend attended the Commonwealth Finance Ministers' meeting and the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank where the problems of developing countries' debt, especially that of sub-Saharan Africa, were discussed.

Take-home Pay

21. **Mr. Ralph Howell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the growth of real take-home pay for a married man with two children who is on half male average earnings since 1978-79.

27. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the growth of real take-home pay for a married man with two children who is on half male average earnings since 1978-79.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Real take-home pay for a married man on half average male earnings with two children has risen by 18½ per cent. since 1978-79.

49. **Mr. Wood:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the growth of real take-home pay for a married man with two children who is on half male average earnings since 1978-79.

106. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the growth of real take-home pay for a married man with two children who is on half male average earnings since 1978-79.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Real take-home pay has risen by 18·5 per cent. for a married man on half average earnings since 1978-79. Average earnings are those for men in all occupations paid at adult rates who work a full week.

Public Investment

22. **Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the level of public investment as a proportion of gross domestic product.

Mr. Major: In 1987-88 public sector capital spending, as defined in table 2.10 of volume I of the 1988 public expenditure White Paper, is estimated to be about 5½ per cent. of gross domestic product.

VAT (Zero-rating)

23. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has received notice of the date on which

the European Court of Justice will declare its decision on the proceedings initiated by the Commission on the legality of the United Kingdom's zero-rating of supplies of electricity, gas, water and sewerage to industry and commerce and on the construction of commercial and industrial buildings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: No.

Tax Relief

24. **Mr. Blair:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what average income tax relief has been received by a taxpayer earning £50,000 each year since 1979 at 1987 prices.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson).

Manufacturing Output

25. **Mr. Curry:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the underlying rate of growth of manufacturing output.

47. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the underlying rate of growth of manufacturing output.

55. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the underlying rate of growth of manufacturing output.

Mr. Major: In the three months ending last November output was 6 per cent. higher than a year earlier.

Tax (Higher Rates)

29. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the revenue raised from higher rates of tax in 1987-88.

57. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the revenue raised from higher rates of tax in 1987-88.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The total tax liability resulting from the difference between the higher rates of income tax and the basic rate is estimated to be £3·1 billion in 1987-88.

Income Tax

30. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the effect on the income, per week, of a single person and a married couple on average national earnings as a result of cuts in the standard rate of income tax and the raising of personal allowances since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The effect of reductions in income tax since 1978-79 has been to increase income after tax by £10·69 per week for a married man and £10·88 per week for a single person on average earnings in 1987-88. The calculation is made by comparing the tax liabilities of the single person or married man under the 1987-88 income tax regime with those under the 1978-79 regime indexed to 1987-88 levels according to the statutory formula. Average earnings estimated at £229·80 per week are those for full-time men in all occupations, paid at adult rates, whose pay is unaffected by absence.

82. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much a taxpayer earning £50,000 a year would gain per year if the top rate of tax were reduced to 40 per cent.

Mr. Norman Lamont: A married man with gross income of £50,000 per year and no allowances or reliefs other than the married man's allowance would gain £2,961 if the top rate of income tax were reduced to 40 per cent. for 1988-89. The estimate assumes indexation of allowances and rate bands from their 1987-88 levels in accordance with the statutory formula.

Government Shareholdings

31. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy on the disposal of Government-held shareholdings, in the light of the National Audit Office report on the sale of the Government shareholding in Rolls-Royce plc.

32. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy on the disposal of Government-held shareholdings, in the light of the National Audit Office report on the sale of the Government shareholding in Rolls-Royce plc.

40. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy on the disposal of Government held shareholdings, in the light of the National Audit Office report on the sale of the Government shareholding in Rolls-Royce plc.

99. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy on the disposal of Government-held shareholdings, in the light of the National Audit Office report on the sale of the Government shareholdings in Rolls-Royce plc.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett).

Mortgages (Tax Relief)

33. **Mr. Sumberg:** To as the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received seeking an amendment of the law relating to tax relief on mortgage interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: As usual, my right hon. Friend has received a number of representations about the tax relief on mortgage interest. The level of mortgage interest relief has to be fixed each year and will be considered in framing the Budget proposals.

Jobs

35. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many new jobs have been created by growth in the economy since 1983.

43. **Mr. Forth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many new jobs have been created by growth in the economy since 1983.

80. **Mr. French:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many new jobs have been created by growth in the economy since 1983.

Mr. Major: The combination of steady, sustained growth and supply side improvements has contributed significantly to the creation of nearly 1½ million new jobs since 1983.

Borrowing Requirement

36. **Mr. McLeish:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate for the public sector borrowing requirement for 1987-88.

67. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate for the public sector borrowing requirement for 1987-88.

Mr. Major: The Autumn Statement forecast was for a PSBR in 1987-88 of £1 billion. A revised estimate will be published next month in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report".

Income Tax (Reduced Rate Band)

37. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received seeking the introduction of a reduced rate band of income tax.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend has received a small number of representations.

Productivity

39. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the growth of productivity in the United Kingdom economy over the period since 1980.

Mr. Major: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick).

International Debt

41. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next proposes to meet other Finance Ministers to discuss the problems of international debt; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend frequently meets other Finance Ministers; he is likely to do so at the spring meetings of the IMF/IBRD in April when international debt will be discussed.

Balance of Payments

42. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to improve the balance of payments.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace).

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards the balance of payments.

Mr. Lawson: The current account deficit last year was precisely in line with the forecast I made at the time of the Budget. The Government's policies are directed towards improving the performance of the economy overall. This is fully consistent with normal fluctuations in the composition of the balance of payments.

Personal Disposable Income

44. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the growth of real personal disposable income since 1983.

108. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the growth of real personal disposable income since 1983.

Mr. Major: I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend the Chancellor gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood).

Growth

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the current British rate of growth compares with that of the other major industrialised countries.

60. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the current British rate of growth compares with that of the other major industrialised countries.

109. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the current British rate of growth compares with that of the other major industrialised countries.

Mr. Lilley: Total output in the United Kingdom grew by more than 4 per cent. over the year to the first three quarters of 1987. This is faster than any other major industrialised country.

59. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent growth in the economy has been reflected in falling unemployment over the past year.

68. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent growth in the economy has been reflected in falling unemployment over the past year.

81. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent growth in the economy has been reflected in falling unemployment over the past year.

Mr. John Major: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) on 5 February at columns *783-84*.

Overseas Assets

46. **Mr. Page:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide the latest figures for net United Kingdom assets overseas.

107. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide the latest figures for net United Kingdom assets overseas.

Mr. Major: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman).

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide the latest figures for net United Kingdom assets overseas.

Mr. Major: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman).

Business Starts

48. **Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much business starts have exceeded stops between 1979 and 1986.

105. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much business starts have exceeded stops between 1979 and 1986.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much business starts have exceeded stops between 1979 and 1986.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key).

Manufacturing Investment

50. **Mr. Allan Stewart:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest projections for the growth of manufacturing investment in the United Kingdom.

54. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest projections for the growth of manufacturing investment in the United Kingdom.

71. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest projections for the growth of manufacturing investment in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Major: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave to an earlier question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt).

Privatisation

51. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the extent of the state-owned commercial sector which has been transferred to the private sector since 1979.

63. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the extent of the state-owned commercial sector which has been transferred to the private sector since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill).

100. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the proposed privatisation of nationalised companies in the financial year 1988-89.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Government have announced their intention to privatise the water and electricity industries and British Steel. There may also be other privatisation sales in this Parliament. No decision has been taken yet on the timing of sales.

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the extent of the state-owned commercial sector which has been transferred to the private sector since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend the Chancellor gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill).

CBI

53. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the director-general of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss economic prospects.

Mr. Major: My right hon. Friend last met the director-general of the CBI at the meeting of the National Economic Development Council on 13 January 1988.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he last met the director-general of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss economic prospects.

Mr. Major: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor last met the director-general of the CBI at the meeting of the National Economic Development Council on 13 January 1988.

British Banks (Developing Countries)

56. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on tax relief for British banks on their operations in developing countries.

58. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on tax relief for British banks on their operations in developing countries.

110. **Mr. Holland:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on tax relief for British banks on their operations in developing countries.

Mr. Norman Lamont: British banks operating in developing countries qualify for tax relief under general tax law under the same criteria as other traders.

Electricity Prices

61. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the *(a)* deflationary impact on economic activity and *(b)* the inflationary impact on prices of the proposed increases in electricity prices.

Mr. Major: Subject to the decisions of the area boards, the likely increases in electricity prices will add directly about ¼ per cent. to the level of the RPI. Calculating the net impact on activity and inflation would require the simulation of an economic model, and it has not been the practice to publish such estimates.

New Zealand Finance Minister

62. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next expects to meet the Finance Minister of New Zealand.

Mr. Lilley: The Chancellor meets the Finance Minister of New Zealand from time to time.

Gross Domestic Product

64. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the latest figures for the growth of gross domestic product over the past year.

75. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the latest figures for the growth of gross domestic product over the past year.

Mr. Major: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave on 5 February at column *785* to my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett).

69. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the level of public investment as a proportion of gross domestic product.

70. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the level of public investment as a proportion of gross domestic product.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson).

Government Departments (Relocation)

66. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any costings have been undertaken by his Department of the likely saving from the relocation out of London of public bodies, including divisions of Government Departments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The responsibility for undertaking costings for relocation of activities out of London lies with the Department or public body concerned. With regard to a statement, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I provided to the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) on 18 January 1988 at columns *475-76*.

Government Expenditure

73. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will indicate Government expenditure per head of the electorate in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* England and Wales in 1979 and the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: The table shows identifiable public expenditure per head of the electorate:

£ per head of the electorate

	1979-80	*1986-87*
Scotland	1,804	3,235
England and Wales	1,421	2,591

The figures for the two years are not directly comparable because of changes in definition which have taken place between different public expenditure White Papers.

Forestry

74. **Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the annual cost of tax reliefs on forestry.

76. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the annual cost of tax reliefs on forestry.

78. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the annual cost of tax reliefs on forestry.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The income tax forgone is currently estimated at some £10 million. No information on which to base an estimate of the cost of capital tax reliefs is available.

96. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received seeking a change in the taxation rules relating to forestry development.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) on 18 January at column *470*.

Relative Prices

77. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to change the extent to which the impact of relative prices is assessed in the public expenditure White Paper.

Mr. Major: I have no such plans at present. However, the possibility of including information on relative prices in the White Paper has been discussed in the Treasury and Civil Service Committee and the Government will consider carefully any recommendations the Committee may make on the subject.

Inheritance Tax

79. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the revenue to be raised from inheritance tax in 1987-88.

104. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the revenue to be raised from inheritance tax in 1987-88.

Mr. Norman Lamont: £1,050 million.

Merchant Shipping

83. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what fiscal measures he intends to take to prevent the further decline of the merchant shipping fleet.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My hon. Friend will understand that I cannot anticipate the Chancellor's Budget statement.

Council of Ministers

84. **Mr. David Knox:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next proposes to have discussions with the European Community Council of Ministers about European monetary matters.

Mr. Lilley: The next meeting of the European Community's Council of Economic and Finance Ministers is expected to be on 7 March. The agenda for that meeting has not yet been decided.

Personal Equity Plans

85. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the number of personal equity plans entered into since the commencement of the scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: About 250,000 plans were started during 1987.

Nurses (Pay)

86. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what additions to the Government's expenditure plans for *(a)* the National Health Service and *(b)* other central Government services for 1988-89 and 1989-90 would require to be made if (i) nursing staff and (ii) other employees were to receive a pay increase of 20 per cent.

Mr. Major: Departments are generally expected to contain the costs of any pay increases within the published plans. The Government will consider the financing of pay increases for nurses when the report of the nurses pay review body has been received.

Public Expenditure

87. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumptions about pay levels for *(a)* nursing and *(b)* Civil Service staff are made in the Government's expenditure plans for 1988-89.

103. **Mr. Allan Roberts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what account he has taken, in drawing up his expenditure plans for *(a)* the National Health Service and *(b)* central Government expenditure for 1988-89 of the provision of funds for (i) the pay award for nurses and (ii) public sector pay generally.

Mr. Major: The Government do not make a central pay assumption.

91. **Mr. Marlew:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to increase the planned expenditure on *(a)* hospital and *(b)* all Government services for 1988-89 and 1989-90.

95. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether, in the light of representations received, he intends to increase the resources in his published expenditure plans for 1988-89 *(a)* for the National Health Service and *(b)* for Government expenditure generally.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley).

Expenditure

28. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current estimate of underspend for 1987-88.

72. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the expected outturn for 1987-88.

Mr. Major: The latest estimated outturn for the planning total in 1987-88 is £147·3 billion as set out in the 1988 public expenditure White Paper.

88. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the percentage increase in spending on *(a)* hospital and *(b)* all central Government services between 1988-89 and 1989-90.

Mr. Major: Health figures for the United Kingdom are shown in table 2.7 of volume I of the 1988 public expenditure White Paper. The table shows increases between 1988-89 and 1989-90 of about 4½ per cent. for hospital and community health services and about 5 per cent. for the National Health Service as a whole. The overall increase in central Government spending between 1988-89 and 1989-90 is planned to be about 5¼ per cent.

89. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to increase planned expenditure on *(a)* the National Health Service and *(b)* all Government expenditure in the years 1988-89 to 1990-91.

Mr. Major: The Government have announced increases in public spending in total and on the National Health Service. The latest plans are set out in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1988-89 to 1990-91" (Cm. 288). These plans will be reviewed in the normal way in the annual public expenditure survey.

90. **Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received in relation to his recently published expenditure plans for *(a)* education spending and *(b)* Government expenditure generally.

Mr. Major: The White Paper plans, and the increased provision they include for education, have been widely welcomed.

Hospital Radio Broadcasting Equipment (VAT)

92. **Mr. Ancram:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further representations he has received seeking zero rating of value added tax for hospital radio broadcasting equipment.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend has received no further representations since the reply I gave to my hon. Friend on 27 November at column *129*.

Job Creation

93. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received seeking the inclusion in his Budget of measures designed to reduce unemployment.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations covering a variety of proposals, but relatively few have mentioned unemployment.

Taxation

94. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much in real terms the average annual tax payment of someone earning £50,000 has reduced in the past eight years.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The tax liability of a married man earning £50,000 per year with no allowances or reliefs other than the married man's allowance is £4,880 less in 1987-88 than it would be if the 1978-79 tax regime had been retained and indexed by the statutory formula to 1987-88. This is a reduction of one-fifth.

102. **Mr. Greg Knight:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received during the past 12 months urging him to increase the level of taxation.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Of the large number of representations my right hon. Friend has received, only a small number support an increase in the level of taxation.

Companies (Profitability)

98. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of profitability in British companies.

Mr. Major: The profitability of non-oil industrial and commercial companies has increased in each of the past six years: the best performance for a generation.

Income Tax Returns

101. **Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to revise the format of an income tax return.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Following its computerisation programmes for both self-employed taxpayers and employees, the Inland Revenue has over several years altered the layout of its tax returns for individuals so that they may be addressed and issued by machine. The last returns affected were those for issue on or after 6 April 1987. No further amendments are planned but the returns are reviewed annually as a matter of course following the passage of the Finance Bill.

Public Investment

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the level of public investment as a proportion of gross domestic product.

Mr. Major: In 1987-88 public sector capital spending, as defined in table 2.10 of volume I of the 1988 public expenditure White Paper, is estimated to be about 5¼ per cent. of gross domestic product.

Taxation Revenue

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the revenue raised from higher rates of tax in 1987-88.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The total tax liability resulting from the difference between the higher rates of income tax and the basic rate is estimated to be £3·1 billion in 1987-88.

Wages and Salaries

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the expenditure proposed for *(a)* hospital services and *(b)* other central Government services in the plans for 1988-89 to 1990-91 is calculated to account for wages and salaries.

Mr. Major: The Government do not have a central pay assumption.

Confectionery

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if Her Majesty's Customs and Excise have completed their review of the current borderline between standard rated and zero rated confectionery.

Mr. Lilley: No.

Harvest Chewy Bars

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise of seeking to levy value added tax on Harvest Chewy Bars.

Mr. Lilley: I regret that this information is not yet available.

Special Car Tax

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the implications of EEC fiscal harmonisation for the United Kingdom special car tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 10 February 1988]:* The European Commission's package of proposals as currently drafted make no provision for the continuation of car tax in its current form. The proposals have been submitted by ECOFIN to the Economic Policy Committee for consideration of their implications. They cannot be adopted without the unanimous agreement of the Governments of member states.

ENERGY

NUM (Meeting)

Mr. Eadie: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish in the *Offical Report* the text of his reply to the request from the general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers for a meeting with him.

Mr. Parkinson: I understand that the general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers has said that he and the president asked for a meeting when I took office. Neither I nor my Department have any record of such a request and I have written to the general secretary asking for further details.

UDM (Meetings)

Mr. Eadie: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy on what dates he or his representatives have met the leaders of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers.

Mr. Parkinson: Energy Ministers meet leaders of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers from time to time to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Deep-mined Coal (Subsidies)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish the average level of Government subsidy per tonne of deep-mined coal in each year since 1978 *(a)* for each of the United Kingdom coal fields, *(b)* for England, *(c)* for Wales, *(d)* for Scotland and *(e)* for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Government grants accrued in British Coal's accounts in each year since 1978-/79 are set out in the table:

Year	*Government Grants £ million*	*Deep-mined Production million tonnes*	*Grant per tonne £/tonne*
1978-79	172	107·8	1·60
1979-80	251	109·3	2·30
1980-81	254	110·3	2·30
1981-82	575	108·9	5·28
1982-83	520	104·9	4·96
1983-84	1,145	90·1	12·71
1984-85	2,414	27·7	87·15
1985-86	563	88·4	6·37
1986-87	882	88·0	10·02

Grants are not given to specific areas or coalfields, so it is not possible to provide the other information requested.

Power Stations (Environmental Import)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are the implications for *(a)* the Sizewell B pressurised water reactor project, *(b)* the proposed Hinkley C pressurised water reactor project, *(c)* the proposed European demonstration reprocessing plant at

Dounreay, *(d)* the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield, *(e)* the planned coal-fired power station at Fawley, *(f)* the proposed Severn barrage tidal energy project and *(g)* any plans for a nuclear waste repository chosen by Nirex, of the new EEC regulation for environmental impact assessments, due to come into force on 3 July.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The sole purpose of the EC directive is to ensure that as from 3 July 1988 the environmental implications of major new developments are carefully examined in a fashion consistent throughout the Community, before consent is given to their construction. Such assessments have been undertaken for major energy developments, including those referred to by the hon. Member, in the United Kingdom for many years within the framework of planning law. Existing procedures will be brought into line with the directive's requirements. These will apply to developments for which planning or other consent is sought after 3 July. The directive does not apply to planning or consent applications submitted before that date.

Nuclear Power Stations

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his policy towards the provision of funds to objectors and section 34 parties at the forthcoming public inquiry into Central Electricity Generating Board plans to build a pressurised water nuclear reactor at Hinkley Point C.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Select Committee on Energy's recent report on the Electricity Generating Stations and Overhead Lines (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1987 raised the issue of funding for objectors at public inquiries. The Government will respond to this report as soon as possible. The hon. Member will know that the Government have hitherto taken the view that the funding of the objectors would not improve the efficiency of public inquiries.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to commission a public opinion survey of national and regional acceptance of nuclear station siting in the United Kingdom, in the light of the recently published study by the Health and Safety Executive on the tolerability of risks from nuclear power stations.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No. The Health and Safety Executive have produced a careful study, on which the Health and Safety Commission have invited considered comments.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make it his policy to invite the International Atomic Energy Agency operational review safety team to *(a)* review the technical necessity and *(b)* be present at any future experimental test at a Magnox reactor of the type presently postponed at Trawsfynydd.

Mr. Michael Spicer: We fully support the development of the International Atomic Energy Agency's OSART missions. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has invited the agency to send such a mission to visit a United Kingdom nuclear plant. Details will be announced in due course. However, the objectives of OSART missions do not include the examination of specific porposals for tests, which are a matter between the plant operators and the regulatory authority.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make it his policy to be present at any future experimental test at a Magnox plant of the type presently postponed at Trawsfynydd.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I would consider at the time if there was any advantage to my being present at such a test.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will seek to obtain for his departmental library transcripts of the three BBC2 "Brass Tacks" programmes on nuclear power, broadcast in October 1987.

Mr. Parkinson: No.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he possesses on the resolution and vote in the European Parliament on 21 January on the proposed Central Electricity Generating Board experimental test at the Trawsfynydd Magnox reactor.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I am arranging for a copy of the text of the resolution to be placed in the Library of the House. It was carried by a majority of 24.

Pit Closures

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many pits have closed in each year since 1979; what was the location and name of each pit; how many jobs were lost as a result of each closure; and what was the profit of loss of each pit closed in the year prior to closure.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This is a matter for British Coal and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Combined Heat and Power Scheme (Edinburgh)

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the development of combined heat and power/district heating in Edinburgh.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My Department has carefully considered the report prepared by the Edinburgh CHP consortium. I accept the consortium's judgment that the options they studied are insufficiently attractive economically to proceed without further substantial support from public funds.

It is the Government's long-standing policy that combined heat and power-district heating schemes should be taken forward by the private sector. The consortium has been informed that under these circumstances, I am not prepared to meet their requests for further financial support.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Child Benefit

111. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the cost of increasing child benefit in line with the projected rate of inflation.

Mr. Scott: Increases in the rate of child benefit are not statutorily linked to movements in the retail prices index, but even for those benefits which are, the calculations are made on a "historical" and not a "projected" basis. If the current rate of child benefit were to be increased from April 1988 in line with the prices movement—over the

12 months to September 1987—used for uprating other benefits, the net additional cost for a full year would be £120 million.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what provision he has made in his public expenditure plans for additional funding to meet increased housing benefit costs arising from the proposed deregulation of the privately rented sector.

Mr. Portillo: The public expenditure plans published in Cm. 288 include provision for increased expenditure on housing benefit as a consequence of the Government's proposals to remove controls on new private lettings of some £10 million in 1988-89 rising to some £80 million at the end of the survey period. As explained in Cm. 288, the plans also allow for rents in the private sector to increase in real terms by 3 per cent. per year over the survey period.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take urgent steps to pay housing benefit due to residents for part III accommodation in Wakefield metropolitan district council for 1985-86 and 1986-87; what has been the cause of the delay; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The administration of the housing benefit scheme, including the payments of awards of benefit, is the responsibility of local authorities. The Department has, however, withheld subsidy payments to a number of local authorities, including Wakefield, in respect of awards of housing benefit made to residents of part III accommodation. This is because we need to be satisfied that local authorities dealt with such claims in accordance with the regulations and detailed information from each of the authorities concerned is now being considered. I regret the delay, but final decisions on settlement will be taken once this process has been completed, which will be done as quickly as possible.

Social Work Training

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what assessment he has made of the progress being made towards the introduction of the new mode of social work training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Officials of this Department, in conjunction with those of the other Government Departments involved, are currently considering the proposals submitted by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work in its publication "Care for Tomorrow". We expect to be in a position to respond to the proposals by the spring of this year.

Special Payments

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps have been taken to ensure that disabled persons who are in receipt of two allowances through a combined order book will receive the £8 special payment on each allowance.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) on 2 February, at column *591*.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether leaflet N1262 issued to indicate the benefits which attract the £8 special payment took account of those people who receive more than one benefit through a combined order book.

Mr. Scott: The leaflet was designed to provide basic information to everyone qualifying for a special payment. There is a limit to the amount of detailed information that can be included in a leaflet of this kind, and a balance had to be struck. The leaflet did, however, make it clear that anyone needing further information should contact the Department.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many severely disabled people in the United Kingdom currently receive more than one benefit through the use of a combined order book.

Mr. Nicholas Scott: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list by categories the amounts raised by the ambulance services collectively from third parties in the last financial year.

Mrs. Currie: The summarised accounts of health authorities in England for 1986-87 record income in total only from charges to third parties for the non-national Health Service use of ambulance services as £340,263.

This does not, however, include a small element in respect of ambulance services within the income arising from the provision of services to private health care establishments and private patients (totalling £1,490,424 in 1986-87) which health authorities are required to account for as income under section 58 of the National Health Service Act 1977.

Supplementary Benefit (Caseload)

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the supplementary benefit caseloads in terms of (i) pensioners, (ii) unemployed claimants paid through unemployment benefit offices and (iii) other supplementary allowance cases *(a)* for each local office and *(b)* nationally, for the 32-week period ended on 7 April 1987.

Mr. Portillo: Information is not available in the precise form requested.

A breakdown by claimant category and local office of the number of people receiving supplementary benefit on 10 February 1987 is available in the "Analysis of Supplementary Benefit Claimants as at 10 February and 28 July 1987", a copy of which is in the Library.

The national totals for each category of claimant is as follows for 10 February:

	Numbers
Pensioners	1,683,580
Unemployed claimants paid through unemployment benefit offices	2,069,962
Other supplementary allowance cases	1,465,560

Source: 100 per cent. count of cases in action at 10 February 1987.

Dental and Sight Test Charges

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to which countries in the EEC charge for *(a)* dental check-ups and *(b)* sight tests.

Mr. Newton: I regret that the information available to the Department on optical and dental charges in European Community Countries is insufficient to provide the details requested.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what statement or other evidence he has that charges will not deter people from having sight tests.

Mr. Newton: The effect of the Government's proposals is necessarily a matter of judgment, especially since it would be for opticians themselves to determine the level of any charges for those ceasing to be entitled to a free NHS sight test. But it is relevant to note that approximately a third of the population would continue to be so entitled, including the least well-off, and that most people who have a test need spectacles and there is no evidence that they have been deterred from attending the optician by the price of private spectacles.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what statistical evidence he has on the relationship between charges and the take-up of dental treatment.

Mrs. Currie: After an increase in dental charges there is evidence of a short-term drop in demand, followed by a recovery and a continuation of the long-term rise in the number of courses of dental treatment.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many representations he has now received on his proposal to introduce a charge for eye examinations; what proportion were in favour of charges; and what proportion were against charges;

(2) how many representations he has now received on ending free dental checks; and what proportion were in favour of introducing a charge.

Mr. Newton: We have now received about 1,500 representations on the proposals to restrict the NHS sight test to certain groups and to introduce a charge for the NHS dental examinations subject to the same exemptions as for other dental charges. Concerning the balance of these representations, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) on 11 January, at column *181*.

Hospital and Community Health Service

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the share of gross national product represented by the hospital and community health service budget, adjusted by the hospital and community health service pay and price index, in each year since 1979.

Mr. Newton: The table shows the available figures. Deflators of whatever kind are not appropriate to this calculation since each figure represents one cash sum expressed as a percentage of another in the same year.

Gross expenditure on the NHS and HCHS as a percentage of GDP

Year	NHS	[1] [2] HCHS
1979	4·8	[3]—
1980	5·3	[4] 4·2
1981	5·5	4·3
1982	5·4	4·2
1983	5·7	4·5
1984	5·5	4·2
1985	5·4	4·2
1986	5·5	4·3

[1] Including expenditure on central health and miscellaneous services (separate figures for United Kingdom not readily available).
[2] The adjustment from financial year data to calendar year has been estimated using Departmental records.
[3] Comparable data for 1979 are not readily available.
[4] Estimated.

Health Service Funding

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the findings of the review of Health Service funding conducted by his Department between 1981 and 1982.

Mr. Moore: The preliminary survey carried out during 1981-82 into methods of health financing was confidential advice to Ministers. In consequence, as reported to the Select Committee on Social Services ("Reply by the Government to the Second Report from the Select Committee on Social Services", Session 1981-82 Cmnd. 8775 page 8), it will not be made available outside Government.

Research

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what proposals he has to change the contractual agreements between his Department and scientists and social scientists relating to the publication of results obtained in the course of research undertaken on behalf of his Department;

(2) what restrictions are presently imposed upon the publication of results by persons contracted to undertake research on behalf of his Department.

Mrs. Currie: I refer the hon. Member to the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) on 1 December 1987, at column *562*.

Earnings (Jury Service)

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what consideration he is giving to changing the regulations concerning the non-recognition of jury service payments for average pay calculations in order to permit jury allowance to be taken into account for average earnings purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: None. I assume the hon. Member is referring to the calculations used in establishing entitlement to statutory sick pay (SSP). Payments for jury service are not part of an employee's normal weekly earnings, nor do they attract liability for national insurance contributions. Such payments do not count, therefore, in the calculation of average weekly earnings for SSP.

Abortion

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services why the information on the identity of doctors carrying out abortions in private sector places approved under the Abortion Act is confidential.

Mr. Newton: The detail of a person's employment in this field is information which some individuals may not wish to be made publicly available. The Department respects this and treats all such information as confidential. I see no reason to change our practice in this respect.

Airline Passengers (Smoking)

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has about the effects on the health of those non-smoking airline passengers obliged to occupy smoking seats.

Mrs. Currie: It is not possible to quantify separately the risk arising from particular episodes. However, the Independent Scientific Committee on Smoking and Health has concluded that there is evidence to link passive smoking with exacerbation of respiratory and cardiovascular symptoms in non-smokers, and that over an extended period exposure to passive smoking is consistent with an increase of between 10 and 30 per cent. in the risk of lung cancer. Non-smokers who are dissatisfied with facilities provided for their comfort when travelling should complain to the company concerned.

Departmental Offices (Staffing)

Ms. Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the staffing allocations for 1988-89 as determined by the agreed complementing system, for his Department's offices in Hackney, Stoke Newington, Shoreditch, Hoxton and Finsbury Park; and what were the comparable staffing levels in 1986-87 and 1987-88.

Mr. Portillo: Staffing allocations for the year 1988-89 have yet to be finally determined. It is expected that details will be available in March 1988.

The information requested for the previous two years is as follows:

	1986-87	*1987-88*
Hackney ILO	195	210·5
Stoke Newington ILO	135	141·5
Shoreditch AO	88	95·5
Hoxton ILO	149	163·0
Finsbury Park ILO	210	224·0

Abbreviations:
ILO = Integrated Local Office.
AO = Area Office.

Income Support

Ms. Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will report progress on the conversion of supplementary benefit cases to income support at his Department's offices in Hackney, Stoke Newington, Shoreditch, Hoxton and Finsbury; what percentage of cases have to date been converted; what is his Department's estimate of the percentage of cases at each office that will be converted by 11 April; and when his Department's staff in each office expect to have finished the conversion exercise.

Mr. Portillo: We plan to complete the conversion of supplementary benefit cases to income support by 11 April in all the offices mentioned although we recognise that there is stil a great deal to be done. The percentage of cases converted by 26 January (the latest information available) in each of these offices was:

Office	*Percentage*
Hackney ILO	26
Stoke Newington ILO	38
Shoreditch AO	18
Hoxton ILO	39
Finsbury Park ILO	16

Additional staff are working at Shoreditch AO and Finsbury Park ILO to assist them with conversion of cases.

Prescriptions (Drugs)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what he estimates would be the cost to the National Health Service if hospital doctors prescribed brand name drugs, after the patent period had expired, rather than generic drugs.

Mr. Newton: Substitution of generic equivalents for brand name drugs is common practice in National Health Service hospitals. Where a generic equivalent is available hospital pharmacists and doctors carefully evaluate its suitability for use instead of the brand name product.

Figures for the increased costs which health authorities would incur if brand name drugs were used exclusively are not held centrally.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what he estimates would be the saving to the National Health Service if all general practitioners prescribed generic drugs rather than brand name drugs, after the patent period.

Mr. Newton: It is estimated that if all general practitioners were to prescribe drugs generically the savings, assuming no change to prescribing patterns or mix or cost of drugs, would be in the region of £35 million in England.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what evidence he has that general practitioners are increasingly prescribing generic drugs rather than brand name drugs, after the patent period.

Mr. Newton Statistics derived from prescriptions for drugs dispensed by community pharmacists show that the percentage of prescriptions written and dispensed generically in England has risen from 15 per cent. in 1976 to 28 per cent. in 1986.

Management Consultants

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total expenditure by his Department on management consultants on health matters each year since the introduction of general management in 1984.

Mr. Newton: The expenditure by the Department in 1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87 and the estimated expenditure for 1987-88 on fees and expenses for outside consultants on health matters are as follows:

	£ million
1984-85	0·911
1985-86	1·700
1986-87	4·525
1987-88	[1]4·845

[1] Estimated.

The figures are approximate. In some cases expenditure has been apportioned where consultants have been employed on both health and social security matters. The figures include social services consultancy.

NHS (Performance Indicators)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services upon what date a copy of the new National Health Service performance indicators for 1986-87 will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him on 17 December 1987, at column *709*. The national set of performance indicators for 1986-87 will now be completed by the end of February 1988 ready for issue to all health authorities in England in March 1988; they will be placed in the Library at the same time.

GPs (Postgraduate Educational Allowance)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if the programme of regular education and training which general practitioners must undertake to qualify for the new postgraduate educational allowance is relevant to general practice; and if the programme's content will be approved by the Royal College of General Practitioners.

Mr. Newton: Relevance to general practice will be a key feature of courses qualifying for the new postgraduate educational allowance announced in the White Paper "Promoting Better Health". No decisions have been made about this new allowance. The detail will be discussed with the family doctors' representatives, the General Medical Services Committee during the coming year. The views of the Royal College of General Practitioners will be an essential part of our consideration of this issue.

National Insurance

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many companies or individuals were prosecuted during 1985 and 1986 by his Department for non-payment of national insurance contributions on behalf of their employees.

Mr. Portillo: Both criminal and civil proceedings are used to recover class 1 national insurance contributions which have not been paid by employers. The numbers of court proceedings involving individuals and companies were as follows:

	1985	*1986*
Criminal Proceedings	17	14
Civil Proceedings	1,196	1,402

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how much has been expended by his Department since 1979 on national insurance credits in cases where deductions had been made by employers but then not passed on.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the national insurance contribution per year of a person on average earnings.

Mr. Portillo: In 1988-89 a person on average earnings is expected to earn £175 per week and will therefore contribute £15·75 per week if not contracted out of the state earnings related pension scheme (SERPS) and £13·07 per week if contracted out of SERPS. A person receiving £175 during each week in 1988-89, will pay £819 in contributions if not contracted out, and £679·64 if contracted out, on the basis of 52 weekly payments.

Medical Personnel (Liverpool)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many *(a)* nurses, *(b)* midwives, *(c)* doctors *(d)* professional medical staff, *(e)* administrative officers and *(f)* ancillary workers were employed by the Liverpool health authority in each of the last six years; and what was the average yearly pay for each group in each year.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 11 January 1988]*: Because of the 1982 National Health Service reorganisation, figures on a consistent basis are not held for the years prior to 1982. The figures for medical staff excludes senior registrars whose contracts are held by the regional health authority. The district health authority where those staff actually work cannot be identified separately. There will therefore be more doctors working in the Liverpool health authority than are accounted for in the table.

Information on the pay of NHS staff in individual health authorities is not collected centrally and the hon. Member may care to contact the chairman of the Liverpool health authority for this information.

NHS staff in post: Liverpool district health authority at 30 September

	Whole-time equivalent[1]				
Staff group	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Medical[2]	560	580	550	560	540
Nursing[3]	5,160	4,960	4,780	4,780	4,920
Midwifery[3]	230	260	270	290	290
Administrative and Clerical	1,360	1,330	1,350	1,290	1,310
Ancillary[4]	2,630	2,490	2,320	2,190	1,860

Source: DHSS annual census of NHS medical and non-medical manpower.

[1] Figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents.

[2] Includes permanent paid, honorary and locum staff. Excludes senior registrars—these staff have their contracts with the regional health authority.
[3] Includes agency staff.
[4] On 1 April 1984 operating department assistants transferred from ancillary to professionsl and technical staff group. Figures have not been adjusted to take account of this change.

TRANSPORT

Rail Services (South-east)

Mr. Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the response from the British Railways Board to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on rail passenger services supplied by the board in the south-east of England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: The British Railways Board has responded to the report and I have placed copies of its reply in the Library of the House. It shows that it has accepted all the Commission's recommendations, and sets out the action it intends to take. I have discussed the commission's report with Sir Robert Reid, and I welcome the board's positive response. I shall be monitoring BR's progress in following up the commission's recommendations and I shall make a further statement on this in the autumn.

Our policy is that by improving its efficiency BR should provide its customers with an attractive and reliable service and at the same time reduce its call on the taxpayer. I believe the commission's findings show that we have got this right, but there is still room for improvement and I agree with the commission's view that investment will be needed on some routes to relieve overcrowding and cater for traffic growth. I have already approved some investment in new rolling stock on this basis and I am pleased to see that BR is investigating options to identify what further investment is required to meet the quality standards I have agreed with it. In deciding BR's future investment ceilings, the Government will take account of any additional requirements that are shown to be justified. The expenditure figures incorporated in the public expenditure White Paper already contain provision for much of the investment mentioned by the commission, including improvements to the south-eastern approaches to London. I am always happy to receive sensible proposals from BR for cost effective new projects.

The report suggests that we clarify the purpose of the public service obligation grant (PSO) for Network SouthEast and whether it is directed at certain groups of passenger rather than others. The grant is not intended to distinguish between different groups of passenger. Its main purpose is to enable BR to provide essential services and to subsidise fares where that is the most cost-effective way of contributing to the relief of road congestion in the south-east. I shall be discussing with the board in the light of the MMC's report whether its current fares structure reflects both the purpose of subsidy and the proper allocation of costs.

The commission has taken a close look at BR's employment practices and the report contains a number of recommendations. This is an important area for BR to tackle and one where I hope that swift and substantial progress can be made.

Finally, I must comment on the commission's statement that the board has failed to meet its statutory requirement to break even on revenue account, taking one year with another. The Government do not accept this conclusion. The statutory requirement allows for fluctuation between profit and loss in individual years. The period covered by this report includes the ASLEF strikes in 1982 and the miners' strike — both of which had serious "one-off" effects on the board's revenue — and the taking of substantial provisions for the restructuring of British Rail Engineering Ltd. The board has also now changed its accounting policies so that the contribution made by the substantial proceeds from property sales is, for the first time in the 1986-87 annual report and accounts, reflected in the profit and loss account. Over the longer term, the fluctuation between profit and loss has been in balance. I do not, therefore, accept that the board can be said to have failed to meet its statutory duty.

We are grateful to the commission for this comprehensive and detailed report, which follows up its 1980 investigation into BR's London commuter services. I am sure that it will prove to be an equally effective stimulus for further improvements in the way BR runs its services in the south-east.

M3-M27 Road Link

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the dated of the public inquiries which have been held over the past 20 years into the route of the M3/M27 road link.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The following inquiries have been held into proposals for the sections of the M3 stated:

March-April 1971	Popham to Compton
June-July 1972	Compton to M27
June 1976-June 1977	Popham to Compton
June-August 1985	Bar End to M27
June 1987-to date (re-opened inquiry)	Bar End to Compton

Winchester Bypass

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents there have been on the Winchester bypass in each of the last 10 years, and what percentage of these involved heavy goods vehicles.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The number of recorded personal injury accidents on the A33 between Compton and Bar End in the last 10 years is as follows:

	Number of accidents	*Percentage involving HGVs over 3 tons*
1978	15	33
1979	22	22
1980	23	17
1981	20	10
1982	19	16
1983	12	none
1984	26	19
1985	25	24
1986	27	37
1987 Jan-Nov	28	32

Our proposals for improving this road are currently being considered at a public inquiry.

Railway Property (Trespass)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many legal actions for trespass on railway property were initiated by British Rail against fox hunts during 1986 and 1987.

Mr. David Mitchell: My Department has no figures readily available. These are detailed matters for the British Railways Board and the British Transport police.

Car Ownership

Mr Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the growth in the last year in car ownership as expressed as a percentage of the adult population; what is the projected annual growth *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in Surrey; what recent census there has been of traffic on major roads and motorways in Surrey; and what is the density of major road traffic (i) nationally and (ii) in Surrey.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In the year to December 1986 the number of cars per head of adult population increased by 3 per cent. both in Surrey and in Great Britain. At national level growth of between 18 and 27 per cent. is forecast between 1986 and 2000. Similar growth is expected for Surrey.

In 1986 the estimated traffic flow on major roads was 25,500 vehicles per day in Surrey, compared with 11,000 in Great Britain as a whole. These estimates are based on the continuing national traffic census.

Figures for the number of cars per adult in 1985 and 1986 are derived from Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre records and from population estimates produced by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. Figures for the number of cars at the end of 1987 will be available by end February.

Forecasts of car ownership, expressed per head of total population are from the national road traffic forecasts for five-year periods to the year 2015 published by the Department.

The Department's rotating census covers the whole major road network over a six-year period. Average daily flow on a link in the latest year is derived by scaling counts in earlier years using a factor derived at national level from repeated counts at a small number of sites.

The average flow is obtained by weighting together flows on all links by their length.

Air Misses

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people in each of the last 10 years, passengers plus aircrew, have been at risk in serious air misses where, in the opinion of the Civil Aviation Authority, a collision would have resulted had one or both pilots not taken avoiding action without prior instructions to do so from air traffic control.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information is not available.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the inquiry which he has ordered in connection with his statement to the House on air misses on Monday 8 February, *Official Report*, column 21-24, has power to require the pilot of the Maley aircraft concerned to give evidence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The investigation into the air miss on 6 February involving a British Airways Tristar and a Bulgarian Balkan Airways TU154B was ordered by the Department's chief inspector of accidents, following a request from the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority. The investigation is being carried out under the Civil Aviation (Investigation of Accidents) Regulations 1983, which give the inspector powers to examine all such persons as he thinks fit. Where witnesses are resident overseas reliance is placed on annex 13 to the Chicago convention on international civil aviation, which covers the investigation of accidents and incidents. The Bulgarian authorities have accepted an invitation to participate in this investigation in accordance with the provisions of annex 13.

Economic League

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department has made use of the services provided by the Economic League since 1979.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No.

Road Costs

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he is considering further action which will ensure that local authority expenditure allocations for road construction and repair will be used to their fullest extent.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Provision for new construction has not been underspent since transport supplementary grant was limited to roads capital expenditure in 1985-86. We shall be keeping the position under review.

The recent substantial underspend on road maintenance is regrettable. We are looking to highway authorities to set budgets for 1988-89 which more closely reflect provision in the public expenditure survey. In the light of those budgets we shall consider whether further action is necessary and might be effective.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the amount of money made available for roads to *(a)* the Department of Transport and *(b)* local authorities in England and Wales for (i) capital expenditure and (ii) repairs; and what was the amount spent in each year from 1978 to 1987.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 10 February 1988]:* The tables show provision and outturn for national roads (motorways and other trunk roads) and local roads in England. The Secretary of State for Wales is responsible for roads in Wales.

(a) National Roads (Department of Transport)
£ million cash

	Provision	*Outturn*
1978-79		
Capital	377	327
Current	—	40
1979-80		
Capital	443	402
Current	—	45
1980-81		
Capital	536	472

	Provision	Outturn
Current	—	50
1981-82		
Capital	685	557
Current	—	69
1982-83		
Capital	739	672
Current	—	60
1983-84		
Capital	652	641
Current	71	64
1984-85		
Capital	724	718
Current	71	78
1985-86		
Capital	741	734
Current	75	77
1986-87		
Capital	812	766
Current	81	93
1987-88		
Capital	893	..
Current	83	..

.. Not available.

Notes:

1. Capital expenditure covers new construction and improvement schemes and structural maintenance. Current expenditure covers routine maintenance of the network. (A different capital/current distinction applies to local roads expenditure.)
2. Because of changes in the structure of the vote, for the years 1978-79 to 1982-83, an accurate allocation of the provision totals between capital and current cannot be made. Separate outturn figures are available.

(b) Local Roads (Local Authorities)

£ million cash

	Provision	Outturn
1978-79		
Capital	n/a	221
Current	477	505
1979-80		
Capital	295	293
Current	591	575
1980-81		
Capital	318	354
Current	708	667
1981-82		
Capital	344	308
Current	710	793
1982-83		
Capital	410	385
Current	799	844
1983-84		
Capital	469	437
Current	844	877
1984-85		
Capital	482	451
Current	902	907
1985-86		
Capital	492	522
Current	972	963
1986-87		
Capital	523	538
Current	1,115	1,072
1987-88		
Capital	617	n/a
Current	1,264	1,117

Notes:

1. Capital expenditure covers new construction and improvement schemes only. Current expenditure covers all renewal (including structural) and routine maintenance plus road safety. (A different capital/maintenance distinction applies to national roads expenditure).
2. Figures exclude urban programme and car parks.
3. Outturns for 1986-87 remain provisional.
4. Current outturn for 1987-88 is the total of local authority budgets.

Consumer Policies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in implementing the Consumer Affairs Council resolution of 1986 on the integration of consumer policies on transport.

Mr. Butcher: I have been asked to reply.

The European Commission has recently submitted its first report to the Council on the progress made towards better integration of consumer policy into other common policies including agriculture, competition, and transport, as requested by the Council resolution of 15 December 1986. A copy of the report is available in the Library (document 10541/87 of 14 December 1987). It is a disappointing report, recording little progress.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 12 February 1988

HOME DEPARTMENT

Representation of the People Act (Charges)

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many charges under section 106 of the Representation of the People Act have been brought in each of the last five years.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested is not available from the records held centrally.

Prisons (Management)

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had about involving the private sector in the construction and management of prisons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are carefully considering the recommendations of the Select Committee on Home Affairs and hope to reply shortly. The private sector is already heavily involved in the construction of new prisons. The new Prisons Building Board, which includes representatives from the private sector, will help to ensure that private sector expertise and techniques are harnessed to bring new prisons on stream as quickly as possible.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will indicate the levels of reportable and detectable crime in Seaham and Peterlee subdivisions over the last five years.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the statistics given by the chief constable of Durham in his annual reports (Appendix G of the issue for 1986). The figures are collected centrally only for police force areas and are published each year in chapter 2 of the Command Paper "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales". Copies of both of these publications are available in the Library.

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will indicate the levels of reported and detected crime in the Barnsley, East constituency over the last five years, on a year by year basis.

Mr. John Patten: Crime statistics for the B (Barnsley) division of the South Yorkshire police are published by the chief constable in his annual reports (page 59 of the issue for 1986). The information which is collected centrally relates only to police force areas, and is published each year in chapter 2 of the Command Paper "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales". Copies of both publications are available in the Library.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to review the conditions under which remand prisoners are held in England and Wales.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. The reasons for the unsatisfactory conditions in which many remand prisoners are held are well known — antiquated and inadequate buildings and a continually increasing remand population. In order to tackle these problems we have started the biggest prison building and refurbishment programme this century, built new courts, appointed additional judges, set time limits on the remand period before trial, provided for further bail hostel places and introduced other measures aimed at reducing the need for remands in custody.

Police Manpower

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the levels of police manning in the Barnsley, East constituency over the last five years on a year by year basis.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable that the information requested is as follows:

On 31 December	*Strength*
1983	126
1984	134
1985	143
1986	136
1987	145

Radio Stations

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he intends to limit the percentage of equity in new radio stations which can be held by companies involved in record production, newspapers, publishers or advertising; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he intends to limit the percentage of equity in new radio stations which can be held by individuals who have substantial involvement with newspapers, publishing houses, record companies; or advertising agencies, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We have not yet reached firm conclusions on all aspects of the rules on ownership of independent radio stations which may be needed in order to safeguard competition. We are giving careful consideration to this matter as we develop our proposals for legislation.

DNA Testing

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has now received the results and report on DNA testing that he had commissioned from Dr. Alec Jeffries; and when he intends to publish it.

Mr. Renton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 5 February at column *781*.

WALES

Regional Assistance

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what, in real terms, has been the difference between the expenditure on regional development grant and regional selective assistance in Wales since 1978-79; and what are the projected figures for the next three years.

Mr. Peter Walker: Total expenditure in real terms[1] on regional development grant and regional selective assistance in Wales between 1978-79 and 1986-87 (last complete financial year) was £1,029 million and £248 million respectively, the difference being £781 million. Planned provision for 1988-89 to 1990-91, as contained in the 1988 public expenditure White Paper, is, in real terms, £119 million for regional development grant and £141 million for regional selective assistance, the difference being an additional £22 million on regional selective assistance as compared with regional development grant. Additional resources are being provided for regional selective assistance following the ending of the regional development grant scheme; I hope that industry in Wales will take full advantage of the substantial resources being provided not only for regional selective assistance but for the Welsh Development Agency and the new investment, innovation, and business development grant schemes.

[1] Cash figures adjusted for general inflation as measured by GDP deflator at market prices (1986-87 base year).

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is his estimate of the proceeds accruing to the Welsh Development Agency's property budget for 1988-89; what will be derived from increased rents and the sale of property; and what were the comparable proceeds for 1987-88;

(2) what is his estimate of the Welsh Development Agency's budget for *(a)* its WINtech operation, *(b)* its WINvest operation and *(c)* its venture capital programme, in 1988-89; and what the comparable figures were in 1987-88;

(3) whether he will list the objectives and powers of the Welsh Development Agency's urban renewal unit; what is his estimate of the budget for that unit in 1988-89; and what the relationship will be between that unit and his own Department's organisation of urban development grants.

Mr. Peter Walker: The buoyancy of the property market in Wales allows the Welsh Development Agency to plan for a continued rise in income generated from receipts. In total, the property-related receipts are forecast at £38 million in 1988-89, of which about £18 million and £14 million relate to factory rents and sales respectively. In the current financial year total property-related receipts are currently projected at £30·8 million, of which £14·3 million relate to rents and £11 million to sales.

A detailed breakdown of the agency's increased budget for 1988-89 and comparisons with spending in the present financial year will be available when the Supply Estimates are presented to Parliament in March.

The Welsh Development Agency's urban renewal unit will be strengthened considerably in 1988-89 in order for it to contribute even more effectively to the development and implementation of my urban policies.

Over the next three years the agency is likely to have up to £75 million available to fund its land reclamation, urban renewal and environmental improvement programmes—about 40 per cent. more than originally planned.

Further information on the role of the urban renewal unit, the measures at its disposal and the links with my Department and other bodies will be available when I announce my proposals for developing the valleys initiative.

Regional Development Grant

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his most up-to-date estimate of the expenditure on regional development grants in Wales in the next financial year, if there were no changes in the regional aid scheme to industry.

Mr. Peter Walker [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1988, c. *321-22*]: The reply should have been as follows: The 1988 public expenditure White Paper contained planned provision of £63·5 million (net of non-EC receipts) for regional development grants in Wales in 1988-89. Equivalent provision in the 1987 public expenditure White Paper was £26·7 million. The increase in provision results from a combination of several factors, including the need to provide resources for those RDG applicants who meet the deadline of 31 March 1988 and are thus subject to the transitional arrangements provided for the ending of the scheme. I am not able to make any precise estimate of the cost of such transitional arrangements at this stage.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Public Inquiries (Legal Fees)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Attorney-General if he will establish a scale of fees for *(a)* judges and *(b)* Queen's counsel (i) chairing or (ii) appearing before major public inquiries, involving the Cleveland child abuse inquiry and the King's Cross tube fire inquiry.

The Attorney-General: A judge who chairs an inquiry continues to receive the usual judicial salary. The amount of the fee for Queen's counsel chairing or appearing at an inquiry is a matter for negotiation between the counsel concerned and the person instructing that counsel. The fee payable depends on many factors, including the experience and seniority of counsel and the length and complexity of the inquiry. As each inquiry differs from another, scale fees would not be appropriate. Where a Queen's counsel is appointed by a Secretary of State to chair an inquiry, the fee is settled with the approval of the Treasury.

Conveyancing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General in what ways the conveyancing standing committee of the Law Commission has attained its first objective of bringing about within two years of its appointment improvements in matters relating to conveyancing which will be apparent to ordinary housebuyers and sellers.

The Attorney-General: The conveyancing standing committee has published practice recommendations on preliminary inquiries before contract and on pre-contract deposit agreements. It has issued an explanatory guide to

"House Selling the Scottish Way for England and Wales". It has also initiated the widespread use of mortgage certificates.

Council for Licensed Conveyancers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General on what date the initial period of existence of the Council for Licensed Conveyancers contemplated by sub-paragraph (1) of paragraph 3 of schedule 3 to the Administration of Justice Act 1985 will come to an end.

The Attorney-General: It is envisaged that the initial period will come to an end on 28 February 1989.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General what procedures the Council for Licensed Conveyancers has established for consultation with licensed conveyancers generally and for telling them about decisions taken or rulings made by the council itself and by the committees which it establishes and about action taken in the fulfilment of the general duty of the council, in accordance with subsection (2) of section 12 of the Administration of Justice Act 1985.

The Attorney-General: The Council for Licensed Conveyancers consults groups representing licensed conveyancers. The rules governing the profession and other forms of guidance will be made available to all licensed conveyancers. This action is taken in the fulfilment of the general duty to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General what committees have been established by the Council for Licensed Conveyancers under the power accorded in paragraph 8 of schedule 3 to the Administration of Justice Act 1985.

The Attorney-General: The council has established an education working group, a licence and practice working group and a financial working group.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General who are the members of the discipline and appeals committee established by the Council for Licensed Conveyancers in accordance with the provisions of section 25 of the Administration of Justice Act 1985; and what relevant professional or other qualifications each member has.

The Attorney-General: Caroline Hutton, practising barrister; Peter Davis, licensed conveyancer; Katherine Foss, chairman of the Insurance Ombudsman Council; Ian Oddy, chartered surveyor, member of the Council of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and chairman of its professional practice committee; Peter Price, licensed conveyancer.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General who are the members of the investigating committee established by the Council for Licensed Conveyancers in accordance with the provisions of section 24 of the Administration of Justice Act 1985; and what relevant professional or other qualification each member has.

The Attorney-General: Rachel Waterhouse, Ph D, chairman of the Consumers' Association; Robert King, solicitor, Law Society council member; Phillip Kenny head of law school, Newcastle-upon-Tyne polytechnic.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General in what form the Council for Licensed Conveyancers is accountable to *(a)* Her Majesty's Government and *(b)* licensed conveyancers.

The Attorney-General: The Council for Licensed Conveyancers is accountable to Her Majesty's Government for the proper use of grants made to it by the Lord Chancellor in pursuance of the council's responsibility to give effect to the relevant provisions of part II of the Administration of Justice Act 1985. The council is responsible for publishing its audited annual accounts and for sending a copy of these, together with any report of the auditors thereon, to the Lord Chancellor.

As to accountability to licensed conveyancers, from 1 March 1988 the Council for Licensed Conveyancers will comprise a majority of licensed conveyancers. After 1 March 1989 members of the council will be elected from among licensed conveyancers.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General if he will give particulars of *(a)* attendance fees, *(b)* travelling allowances, *(c)* subsistence allowances and *(d)* other allowances paid during its first year by the Council for Licensed Conveyancers in exercise of the power accorded to it by paragraph 5 of schedule 3 to the Administration of Justice Act 1985.

The Attorney-General: The particulars for the first 15 months up to 31 March 1987 are:

(a) £16,654; *(b)* and *(c)* £8,952; and *(d)* none.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General on what date the Council for Licensed Conveyancers published accounts for its first year of existence; and by what means copies are made available for hon. Members and others.

The Attorney-General: Accounts for the first 15 months of the existence of the Council for Licensed Conveyancers (that is up to 31 March 1987) will be published shortly. Copies will be available to all licensed conveyancers on request and copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about the circumstances in which the Council for Licensed Conveyancers conducted a review of the outcome of examinations held by it in July 1987, with the result that a number of candidates who had been notified that they had failed to satisfy the examiners then were later notified that they had passed in papers which they had taken.

The Attorney-General: Representations made following the publication of the results of examinations held in July 1987 led the Council for Licensed Conveyancers to conclude that those results might not give a fair indication of candidates' abilities. The decision to review those results was taken in the knowledge that there would not be a further opportunity for unsuccessful candidates to demonstrate their abilities before they would be precluded, from 1 December 1987, from drawing or preparing a contract in addition to the instrument of conveyance.

SCOTLAND

Blood Donors

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has as to the proportion of blood donors in Edinburgh who are HIV positive.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Effective measures are taken to ensure that blood donations are free from HIV. First, all potential donors are required to sign a statement that they are not in one of the groups which have a high risk of catching AIDS. Secondly, all blood donations have been screened for HIV antibodies since October 1985. In the south-east of Scotland region (which includes Edinburgh) since screening began the proportion of donors found to be HIV positive is only 0·012 per cent.

Foreign Language Teaching

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what figures he has to show foreign language teaching provision in Scottish schools and that provided in other EEC countries.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The timetabled percentage of teaching group time in secondary schools in Scotland devoted to foreign languages was 7·6 in 1983. Comparable statistics for other European Community countries are not readily available.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to implement EEC recommendations about foreign language teaching in Scottish schools; if he has any plans to increase current language teaching provision; and what steps he is taking to improve the present situation.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Advice on curricular design for the secondary stages of schooling was issued by the Consultative Committee on the Curriculum (CCC) with the approval of my right hon. and learned Friend in November of last year. The CCC has now submitted further advice on the teaching of languages other than English which my right hon. and learned Friend is now considering.

Regional Aid

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total expenditure on regional aid to industries in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow and *(b)* Strathclyde in each category of aid in each financial year since 1978-79, both at current and outturn prices.

Mr. Lang: Total payments of regional selective assistance under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 to firms in the Greenock and Port Glasgow parliamentary constituency and Strathclyde region are set out in table 1 at both current (synonymous with outturn) and constant (1986-87) prices. Total payments under the revised regional development grant scheme are set out in table 2.

Information on the old RDG scheme is available only by local employment office area (EOA) for payments exceeding £25,000 to individual firms in any quarter. Payments to firms in the Greenock and Port Glasgow EOAs (which approximate to the Greenock and Port Glasgow parliamentary constituency) and in those EOAs which approximate to Strathclyde region are given in table 3.

Table 1: RSA Payments (£ million)

Year	Greenock and Port Glasgow Parliamentary Constituency		Strathclyde Region	
	Current prices	Constant (1986-87) prices	Current prices	Constant (1986-87) prices
1978-79	0·4	0·9	6·7	13·1
1979-80	1·0	1·6	9·7	16·1
1980-81	2·6	3·7	14·4	20·2
1981-82	2·8	3·6	13·4	17·2
1982-83	1·4	1·7	12·1	14·4
1983-84	0·8	0·9	13·4	15·2
1984-85	0·7	0·8	18·2	19·9
1985-86	3·8	3·9	30·0	30·9
1986-87	0·9	0·9	19·6	19·6

Table 2: Payments of revised RDG (£ million)

1984-85	—	—	—	—
1985-86	0·1	0·1	9·6	9·9
1986-87	0·6	0·6	31·6	31·6

Table 3: Payments of old RDG (£ million)

	Greenock and Port Glasgow EOAs		EOAs lying wholly or mainly in Strathclyde region	
1978-79	2·0	3·9	31·2	60·7
1979-80	0·4	0·7	17·2	28·6
1980-81	2·0	2·8	35·5	49·8
1981-82	5·1	6·5	51·9	66·3
1982-83	7·6	9·0	61·5	73·3
1983-84	2·2	2·5	34·6	39·5
1984-85	8·0	8·8	41·5	45·3
1985-86	8·8	9·1	39·7	40·8
1986-87	9·1	9·1	61·4	61·4

Local Government

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of those eligible to vote in local government elections in *(a)* Strathclyde region and *(b)* Inverclyde district authority are (i) domestic ratepayers, (ii) spouses of domestic ratepayers and (iii) people who receive relief from domestic rates.

Mr. Lang: This information is not held centrally.

Sheep (Restricted Areas)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the reply of 5 February, *Official Report*, column 786, how many *(a)* ewes, *(b)* rams and *(c)* lambs, respectively, were given a dispensation to be moved unmarked (i) within and (ii) out of the restricted areas following the Chernobyl accident; and on what dates.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: During August 1986 60 ewes but no rams or lambs were allowed to be moved unmarked within the restricted areas. No ewes but seven rams and 8,404 lambs were allowed to be moved unmarked out of the restricted areas.

Student Grants

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what account he took, in providing for an increase of 3·9 per cent. in student grants for 1988-89, of the loss of housing benefit suffered by students.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The changes in claimants' entitlement to housing benefit, to be introduced in April of this year, will affect all beneficiaries, not simply students; but they do not amount to withdrawal of the benefit.

The enhancement of the maintenance grant rates for students living away from the parental home, which was introduced in session 1986-87 in recognition of changes in benefit arrangements, was retained in the base used to calculate the 1988-89 rates. The changes in housing benefit were also one factor in the decision to increase the rates broadly in line with inflation.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what account he took in settling the student grant increase at 3·9 per cent. for 1988-89, of students' liability for the poll tax from 1 April 1989.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The grant rates for 1988-89, announced on 18 December, do not include any specific addition for students in Scotland who will be liable to pay 20 per cent. of the community charge from 1 April 1989. For most students, that liability extends to only a small part of the session.

For the future, the student support review group is taking account of students' discounted liability for the community charge as part of its consideration of undergraduate student support in general.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to publish the student financial support review.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We hope to publish the report of the student support review by June this year.

Education (Grant Allocations)

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will announce the recurrent grant allocations to the centrally funded colleges in Scotland for 1988-89; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am pleased to announce that my right hon. and learned Friend has made the following offers of grant to the 17 colleges of higher education in Scotland for 1988-89. These offers are conditional on parliamentary approval of the Supply Estimates.

	£,000
Central institutions	
Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art	3,671
Dundee College of Technology	6,636
Edinburgh College of Art	4,100
Glasgow College of Technology	11,861
Glasgow School of Art	3,613
Napier College of Commerce and Technology	16,499
Paisley College of Technology	10,582
Queen Margaret College	4,251
Queen's College, Glasgow	3,042
Robert Gordon's Institute of Technology	11,909
The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama	2,479
Scottish College of Textiles	2,344
Colleges of education	
Craigie	1,508
Jordanhill	10,001
Moray House	7,302
Northern	6,141
St. Andrew's	3,710

In contrast to previous years, the allocation of grant to individual institutions has been made without regard to estimates of other income available to each institution, but with regard to their efficiency and economy. I welcome the improvements in efficiency that have been achieved in recent years. I am sure that the colleges will respond positively to the incentives that we have now introduced to raise income from sources other than the Exchequer and to improve efficiency yet further.

Tayside Health Board (Staff)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many doctors, dentists, nurses and other professional staff were employed by the Tayside health board in 1978, 1985 and 1986.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is shown in the following table.

Whole-time equivalent doctors, dentists, nurses and other professional staff[1] employed by Tayside health board at 30 September

Type of staff	*[1]1978*	*1985*	*1986*
Hospital and community[2]			
Doctors	546·8	552·0	536·0
Dentists	71·5	66·7	65·0
Qualified nurses[3]	2,721·0	3,259·0	3,385·5
Scientists	41·0	45·3	44·9
Paramedical staff and speech therapists	[5]260·8	307·0	318·4
Pharmacists[4]	[5]42·0	47·9	44·5
Opticians[4]	[5]—	0·2	0·2

[1] The data refer to qualified staff only. Students, helpers and other similar categories of staff are excluded.
[2] Includes general practitioners employed part-time in hospitals.
[3] The conditioned hours, on which whole-time equivalents is based, for nurses changed from 40 in 1979 to 37·5 hours

thereafter.

[4] Excludes high street pharmacists and opticians.

[5] Figures for 1978 for qualified Paramedical staff, Speech Therapists, Pharmacists and Opticians are not readily available. 1979 data are therefore shown.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Industrial Action

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether his Department is undertaking research into the effects of industrial action by teachers on the advancement and motivation of pupils.

Mrs. Rumbold: No research on this topic is currently being funded by the Department.

Examination Syllabuses

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures have been taken to collate all previous examination syllabuses, including those for O-levels, CSE, GCSE and 16+, in order that comparative studies may be made.

Mrs. Rumbold: The GCSE examining groups and the Secondary Examinations Council are responsible for ensuring continuity of standards and for making any comparative studies that may be required. Within the groups, the GCE and CSE boards are specifically charged with ensuring GCSE grades require at least the level of achievement required for the corresponding O-level and CSE grades.

American Degrees

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made on the evaluation of American degrees for the purposes of pay of teachers in the United Kingdom with such degrees.

Mrs. Rumbold: Under the provisions of the "School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 1987" it is for local authorities to take a view on whether American and other overseas qualifications are of equivalent standard to a United Kingdom degree. Local authority employer and teacher union representatives are holding discussions with the National Academic Recognition Information Centre to consider how degrees from the USA might be scrutinised with greater sensitivity to assess equivalence.

Teachers (Trade Unions)

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to how many individual teachers are not members of national trade unions.

Mrs. Rumbold: This information is not available within the Department.

Inner London

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what studies he has commissioned on the viability of education provision in inner London being transferred to borough authorities under the provisions of the Education Reform Bill.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government's decision to legislate for the transfer of education responsibilities to the inner London councils took account of the nature of the present education service in the area, and of the experience of borough LEAs in outer London and in other inner-city areas.

Maintenance Grants

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what estimates he has made of the financial effect of indexing maintenance grants for each category of student.

Mr. Jackson: The cost would depend on the index used and the date from which grants were assumed to be adjusted. In the 1988-89 academic year the main rates of student grant will be increased broadly in line with inflation.

Medical Students (Grants)

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received regarding the reduction of parental contributions in grants for medical students; and what action he intends to take.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend receives representations about various aspects of the system of parental contributions to student support; those in respect of medical students cannot be separately identified. Future arrangements for student support are the subject of a comprehensive review under my chairmanship.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what will be the financial effect of the abolition of the special equipment grant for medical students *(a)* for the Government and *(b)* for the students; and what representations he has received on this subject.

Mr. Jackson: The abolition of the special equipment grant has achieved savings in public expenditure which have been redeployed within the student awards system. Students attending courses which began before 31 August 1986, and which were in subjects—including medicine—qualifying for the special equipment grant, continue to be eligible to claim up to £90 during their courses. Students whose courses began after 31 August 1986 are ineligible to claim.

Since the abolition of the grant was announced, some 140 letters on the subject have been received, about half of them referring specifically to the situation of medical students.

Extra-mural Education

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will list the allocations of funds by the University Grants Committee for extra-mural education in Wales and England in each of the past 10 years;

(2) if he will list the allocations of funds by the University Grants Committee for extra-mural education in Scotland in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Jackson: Extra mural provision is a factor in the University Grants Committee's calculation of university grant levels but is not separately identified in the distribution of block grant.

Students (Special Difficulties)

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what funds have been allocated by University Grants Committee to students with special difficulties in each of the past five years in *(a)* Welsh and English and *(b)* Scottish universities; and which categories of students have benefited.

Mr. Jackson: The University Grants Committee's distribution of recurrent grant makes no specific provision for students with special difficulties.

Press Releases

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much in the last year for which figures are available, his Department has spent on the preparation and issue of press releases.

Mrs. Rumbold: In 1986-87, the last financial year for which figures are available, the cost of printing and distributing the Department's press notices was £112,419.

The preparation of press notices is undertaken as a normal part of their duties by departmental officials and cannot be costed separately.

Education Reform

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many bodies have expressed an interest in opting out of local education authority control in Barnsley under the terms of the Education Reform Bill.

Mr. Dunn: All individual schools which have approached the Department have done so on the basis that their interest will be treated in confidence.

University Students

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing the *(a)* numbers of and *(b)* percentage of (i) English and (ii) Scottish students attending university in (1) Scotland and (2) England; and if he will express the figures as a proportion of all students attending universities in each of the countries.

Mr. Jackson: The information is shown in the following table:

Full-time students in 1986

	Universities in Scotland	*England*
Total	47,230	233,538
Numbers domiciled in		
England	9,073	188,316
Scotland	30,449	2,938
Other[1]	7,708	42,284
Total[2]	100	100
Percentages domiciled in		
England	19	81
Scotland	64	1
Other[1]	16	18

[1] Includes those domiciled in Wales, Northern Ireland and overseas.
[2] Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing the *(a)* numbers of and *(b)* percentage of (i) English, (ii) Scottish and (iii) other students attending each university in Scotland; and if he will express the figures as a proportion of all students attending each university.

Mr. Jackson: Information is given in the following table. Figures for students domiciled in England are not readily available.

Full-time students at Scottish universities in 1986

	Numbers Domiciled in				*Percentages Domiciled in*			
	Total	*England and Wales*	*Scotland*	*[1]Other*	*[2]Total*	*England and Wales*	*Scotland*	*[1]Other*
Aberdeen	5,629	930	3,853	846	100	17	68	15
Dundee	3,300	967	1,874	459	100	29	57	14
Edinburgh	10,127	3,161	5,537	1,429	100	31	55	14
Glasgow	10,521	719	8,369	1,433	100	7	80	14
Heriot-Watt	3,487	618	2,137	732	100	18	61	21
St. Andrews	3,627	1,732	1,223	672	100	48	34	19
Stirling	2,897	807	1,541	549	100	28	53	19
Strathclyde	7,642	382	5,915	1,345	100	5	77	18

[1] Includes those domiciled in Northern Ireland and overseas.
[2] Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Balance of Payments

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the United Kingdom's balance of payments, current and trade, for the years 1972 to 1987, with respect to the following groups *(a)* worldwide, *(b)* total European Economic Community, *(c)* European Economic Community national, and *(d)* Japan; and what was the balance of trade in manufacturing goods with regard to those groups for the same period.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available information is in the following tables.

United Kingdom balance of payments

£ billion

	World			European Community		
	Current balance	*Visible balance*	*[1]Manufactures*	*Current balance*	*Visible balance*	*[1]Manufactures*
1972	0·2	−0·8	2·1	n.a.	−0·5	0·1
1973	+1·0	−2·6	1·5	n.a.	−1·3	−0·4
1974	−3·3	−5·4	2·0	n.a.	−2·1	−0·5
1975	−1·6	−3·3	3·7	n.a.	−2·5	−0·6
1976	−0·9	−3·9	4·9	−2·5	−2·2	−0·5
1977	−0·1	−2·3	5·9	−2·3	−1·8	−0·5
1978	1·0	−1·5	5·1	−3·1	−2·5	−1·7
1979	−0·7	−3·4	2·7	−3·2	−2·7	−2·6
1980	2·9	1·4	5·5	0·1	0·8	−1·2
1981	6·3	3·4	4·6	0·7	0·1	−2·6
1982	4·0	2·3	2·4	−0·5	−1·2	−4·3
1983	3·3	−0·8	−2·3	−1·1	−2·4	−7·2
1984	1·5	−4·4	−3·9	−2·2	−3·1	−8·1
1985	2·9	−2·2	−3·0	−2·8	−2·0	−8·7
1986	−0·9	−8·5	−5·5	−9·2	−8·4	−10·1
1987	−2·7	−9·8	−7·3	n.a.	−8·9	−10·2

n.a. = not available.
[1]Standard International Trade Classification sections 5 to 8.
Source: CSO United Kingdom Balance of Payments 1987.
Department of Trade and Industry.

United Kingdom Balance of Trade[1]

Overseas Trade Statistics basis £ million

	European Community	*Belgium/ Luxemburg*	*Denmark*	*France*	*FRG*	*Greece*	*Ireland*	*Italy*	*Nether-lands*	*Portugal*	*Spain*	*Japan*
1972	−571	20	−110	−92	−250	50	24	−69	−163	−13	32	−143
1973	−1,376	−34	−148	−300	−561	52	84	−121	−308	−40	0	−172
1974	−2,380	−58	−146	−429	−876	37	3	−212	−651	−49	1	−252
1975	−2,508	−181	−177	−457	−698	53	−26	−244	−752	−43	17	−363
1976	−2,369	−180	−47	−344	−916	85	199	−278	−921	25	8	−436
1977	−2,214	−278	−11	−508	−1,078	130	327	−534	−341	69	30	−590
1978	−2,921	−152	−124	−702	−1,412	113	423	−805	−267	30	−25	−741
1979	−3,581	−382	−64	−989	−1,561	122	863	−1,016	−382	−33	−139	−882
1980	−70	−122	−76	−254	−587	91	870	−394	441	56	−95	−1,110
1981	−612	−357	−123	−353	−425	92	1,031	−588	124	35	−48	−1,593
1982	−2,165	−348	−237	225	−1,993	104	886	−712	131	49	−70	−1,978
1983	−3,657	−554	−353	608	−3,597	113	766	−918	337	−79	18	−2,556
1984	−4,281	−636	−464	1,111	−3,604	75	759	−905	12	−259	−370	−2,845
1985	−3,247	−667	−344	1,136	−3,689	15	814	−827	792	−256	−221	−3,104
1986	−9,580	−251	−545	−1,177	−5,589	47	499	−1,203	−1,181	−296	115	−3,743
1987	−10,141	−505	−642	−600	−6,380	89	343	−1,071	−1,292	−148	65	−3,968

[1] Standard International Trade Classification Sections 0 to 9.
Information on trade with individual countries is not available on a Balance of Payments basis.
Source: UK Overseas Trade Statistics.

United Kingdom Crude Balance of Trade in Manufactures[1]

Overseas Trade Statistics basis £ million

	European Community	*Belgium/ Luxemburg*	*Denmark*	*France*	*FRG*	*Greece*	*Ireland*	*Italy*	*Nether-lands*	*Portugal*	*Spain*	*Japan*
1972	113	29	59	2	−307	55	166	−36	55	6	84	−141
1973	−340	−8	78	−89	−624	69	218	−70	11	−15	90	−196
1974	−647	−2	96	−106	−900	70	243	−110	−43	−8	111	−269
1975	−540	−34	129	−157	−749	84	265	−186	10	−15	113	−379
1976	−494	−60	234	−119	−1,030	104	347	−190	47	50	123	−464
1977	−662	−125	264	−280	−1,334	171	476	−376	294	104	144	−641
1978	−1,981	−177	179	−535	−1,868	141	735	−667	162	53	−4	−800
1979	−3,144	−403	147	−727	−2,523	184	954	−796	84	13	−77	−960
1980	−3,743	−168	114	−439	−2,001	140	793	−368	184	79	−77	−1,185
1981	−3,014	−379	−5	−594	−2,152	136	690	−497	−191	49	−71	−1,657
1982	−5,024	−525	−1	−535	−3,314	137	547	−826	−466	39	−80	−2,045
1983	−8,071	−499	−71	−1,082	−4,926	172	471	−1,175	−803	−74	−84	−2,654
1984	−8,944	−558	−81	−1,154	−5069	162	495	−1,302	−844	−236	−257	−2,913
1985	−9,543	−518	−21	−1,221	−5833	167	548	−1,387	−747	−238	−293	−3,206
1986	−10,837	−357	−1	−1,510	−6,712	149	584	−1,590	−1,128	−216	−54	−3,918
1987	−11,083	−529	−57	−1,161	−7,456	152	488	−1,554	−1,119	−98	252	−4,165

[1] Standard International Trade Classification Sections 5 to 8.
Information on trade with individual countries is not available on a Balance of Payments basis.
Source: UK Overseas Trade Statistics.

Textile Products (West Bank)

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the action taken by Her Majesty's Government following the discovery of an alleged commercial violation by Israel of a consignment of textile products from the occupied West Bank in which the certificate of origin and description had been altered and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 11 February 1988]:* I am aware of one case involving a consignment of lingerie from a supplier in the occupied territories which arrived in the United Kingdom under cover of an Israeli certificate of origin. This certificate had been improperly substituted for the original document issued by a West Bank chamber of commerce. After consultation between officials from my Department and Customs and Excise, the goods were imported without difficulty. However, in view of the alteration of the certificate, the Government referred this case to the European Commission to investigate. I understand they have now made a formal complaint to the Israeli authorities, whose response is awaited.

ENVIRONMENT

Toxic Waste

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviroment if he will list *(a)* the amount in tonnes of toxic waste imported through and offloaded at the port of Seaham over the last five years, *(b)* the composition of the toxic waste, *(c)* the point of origin of the toxic waste, *(d)* the dates of offloading of the toxic waste, *(e)* the point of disposal of the said toxic waste and *(f)* the method of transport.

Mrs. Roe: My Department does not normally keep records of waste movements. However, I am advised by Durham WDA that no waste covered by the special waste regulation has been imported through Seaham in the last five years.

Badger Sets

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received any representations seeking an amendment of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to protect badger sets.

Mrs. Roe: We have recently received a number of representations from right hon. and hon. Members and members of the public on this matter.

However, badgers are not under threat as a species and already receive a substantial degree of protection under the existing law. We therefore have no plans at present to amend the current statutory provisions.

Housing Associations

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the proposals in the Housing Bill to increase the level of private funding of housing associations.

Mrs. Roe: My Department has received over 300 representations on the provisions of the Housing Bill relating to housing associations and in response to the consultation paper "Finance for Housing Associations" issued in September 1987.

Water Supplies

Mr. Allan Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all public water supply zones in the Yorkshire and Southern water authority regions which failed on bacteriological criteria in the years 1985-87, in particular those which exhibited coliform contamination in distributed water samples on more than five per cent. of occasions.

Mrs. Roe: No public water supplies in the Southern water authority area failed to meet the bacteriological standards set in the EC drinking water directive in the years 1985-87. In the Yorkshire water authoriy area the following supplies marginally failed at some time in 1985-87, but almost half of these now comply and the remainder will do so shortly.

Supply area
Calverley Service Reservoir
Garforth Service Reservoir
Tinshill Service Reservoir
Sowden Beck Spring
West Burton Spring
Sicklinghall Service Reservoir
Burnshall Spring
Crumma Spring
Carr Bottom Treatment Works
Panorama Treatment Works
Blackmoorfoot North Treatment Works
Blackmoorfoot South Treatment Works
Austwick Spring
Blackhill Service Reservoir
Kirkburton Service Reservoir
Ingbirchworth Treatment Works Royd Moor
Cranworth Service Reservoir
Kimberworth No. 1 Service Reservoir
Moonshine Service Reservoir
Sandtoft Service Reservoir
Stannington Service Reservoir
Wadsley Service Reservoir
Wickersley Service Reservoir
Jaw Hill Treatment Works
Gypsey Lane Service Reservoir
Hazelwood Service Reservoir
John O'Gaunts Service Reservoir
Middleton Service Reservoir
Moortown East Service Reservoir
Park Hill (2) Service Reservoir
Tinshill (3) Service Reservoir
Stalling Busk Spring
Countersett Spring
Norwood Treatment Works
Fossdale Spring
Marsett Spring
Gayle Spring
Middlesmoor Spring
Lofthouse Spring
Caperby Spring
Cranehow Bottom Spring
Ellingstring Spring
Newbiggin Spring
Feldom Spring
Cockmoor Service Reservoir
North Coates Road Service Reservoir
Dunnington Service Reservoir
Kexmoor Service Reservoir
Green Hammerton Service Reservoir
Gallogate Service Reservoir
Osmotherley Service Reservoir
Bentham High Level Spring
Bentham Low Level Spring
Blackhouse Spring
Chapel Le Dale Spring
Grassington Spring
Hawkswick Spring
Ingleton Low Level Spring
Lancliffe Spring
Baw Head Spring
Oughtershaw Spring
Moor Lane—Menston Service Reservoir
Clough Head—Goldear Service Reservoir
Cowersley Service Reservoir
Gledhill Service Reservoir
Star Inn Service Reservoir

Mr. Allan Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the proportion of private water supplies in the United Kingdom which fail the provisions of the European Community directive relating to the quality of water intended for human consumption; and whether the Government have requested the European Commission to exempt all private supplies from the provisions of the directive.

Mrs. Roe: Local authorities are responsible for ascertaining the quality of private water supplies and information on the proportion which fail the provisions of the EC drinking water directive is not held centrally. The

Government are discussing with the European Commission a suitable time scale for the application to private supplies of the lead and microbiological parameters of the directive.

Car Exhaust Emissions

Mr. Allan Roberts To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total annual emissions of (i) nitrogen oxides, (ii) hydrocarbons and (iii) carbon monoxide from all petrol-engined motor vehicles registered in the United Kingdom for each of the following categories *(a)* over 2 litres cubic capacity, *(b)* 1·4 to 2 litres cubic capacity and *(c)* under 1·4 litres cubic capacity in each year since 1970, and the number of vehicles in each of these categories for each of the specified years.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 20 January at column *753*.

London Residuary Body

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much office space is presently unoccupied at London's county hall; and how much is occupied by the London residuary body.

Mr. Chope: Vacant office accommodation in county hall amounts to 196,400 sq ft. The LRB currently occupies 237,450 sq ft of office accommodation.

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for what reason board members and staff of the London residuary body occupy office space at St. Vincent house, Orange street London.

Mr. Chope: The LRB was established some seven months before the GLC was abolished. It was therefore necessary to acquire premises outside the GLC's property portfolio. Suitable available space was identified at St. Vincent house. The continuing location of the board and support staff is an administrative matter for the LRB.

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost to his Department of maintaining the headquarters of the London residuary body at St. Vincent house, 30 Orange street, London WC2H 7HH; and how much of the available space there is occupied by the London residuary body.

Mr. Chope: There is no cost to my Department. The London residuary body occupies about 5,400 sq ft of office space in St. Vincent house.

Care in the Community (Barnsley)

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what extra resources he intends to make available to Barnsley metropolitan borough council to provide care in the community.

Mr. Chope: Local authority revenue expenditure is supported by rate support grant block grant; this is an unhypothecated grant; which cannot be attributed to particular elements of an authority's expenditure. The 1988-89 RSG settlement makes provision for local authorities' spending needs on all services, including community care. If Barnsley MBC chooses to spend in 1988-89 at the level assumed in the settlement 55·1 per cent. of its total expenditure will be supported by block grant. In addition, local authorities have almost complete freedom to target their capital spending according to local appreciation of need, within their total capital resources.

Rate Limits

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further progress there has been, since his reply to the hon. Member for Banbury on 3 February, *Official Report*, column *652*, in the finalising of rate limits for rate-capped authorities in 1988-89.

Mr. Ridley: I announced on 3 February that I was seeking the agreement of five rate-capped authorities to limits higher than those which I had proposed in December. Two of those authorities — Greenwich and Hackney — have accepted their new figure and these limits have now been prescribed by written direction.

In three other cases, where I was prepared to agree a particular higher figure, the authorities did not accept my proposal. In these cases, and in the eight others where I was not minded to agree an increase over the limits proposed in December, I have looked carefully at any further information provided by the authorities and any further representations which they have made. I was not persuaded, however, that I should take a different view from that which I announced on 3 February. I have therefore today laid a draft order before the House and shall be seeking the approval of the House to the rate limits specified in that draft.

Lancashire

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* those services on which Lancashire county council spends above the national average; by how much; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* The comparative information has been presented in terms of net current expenditure per head of population in 1986-87 is as listed.

Net Current Expenditure Per Head

£

Services	*Lancashire County Council*	*Average for all Shire County Councils*	*Spending by Lancashire County Council in excess of the average for all Shire Counties*
Education	245	228	17
School meals and milk	11	8	3

Services	Lancashire County Council	Average for all Shire County Councils	Spending by Lancashire County Council in excess of the average for all Shire Counties
Personal Social Services	51	41	10
Police	53	47	6
Fire	13	12	1
Courts and probation	7	6	1
Town and Country Planning	4	2	2
Local Transport	34	29	5

EMPLOYMENT

London Docklands

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if for each year since 1981, he will give the number of deaths or serious injury recorded by the Health and Safety Executive in the London docklands, together with the respective number of successful or unsuccessful prosecutions.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Industrial Tribunals (Membership)

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of industrial tribunal members are from ethnic minorities.

Mr. Nicholls: 1.5 per cent. of the lay membership of industrial tribunals is from ethnic minorities.

Community Programme

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether proposals for the replacement for the community programme have been finalised; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: The details about the new training programme for unemployed adults, which is to replace the community programme from September this year, will be set out in a White Paper to be published very shortly.

DEFENCE

Service Children's Education Authority

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on reducing cost-of-living allowances paid to single parents working as teachers for the Service Children's education authority in respect of dependent 18-year-old children when such children take up full-time undergraduate courses at English polytechnics.

Mr. Sainsbury: In the circumstances described a single parent whose child is presently on a full-time course in the United Kingdom is treated no differently from their married colleagues. However, if the hon. Member has a particular case in mind perhaps he might care to send me the details.

Atomic Energy (Agreement)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the full text of any addenda or amendments made to the 1958 agreement for co-operation on the uses of atomic energy for national defence purposes with the United States.

Mr. Sainsbury: The 1958 United States/United Kingdom agreement for co-operation on the uses of atomic energy for mutual defence purposes and all subsequent amendments thereto have been published in Command Papers. Generally, the amendments have served only to extend the life of the agreement and keep pace with developments in nuclear technology.

Horse Riding

Mr. Allan Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to abolish limits on the number of permits for horse riding on his Department's land and towards the setting up of circular bridleway routes for each Ministry of Defence permit area; and if he will make a statement on any problems presently being faced by permit holders and those awaiting permits, in the Aldershot area.

Mr. Freeman: It is Ministry of Defence policy to allow maximum use of its facilities for recreational purposes where such use is consistent with military requirements and with the interests of tenants and licensees and where it does not affect the local amenities and environment unreasonably. Within these parameters it is up to the local military commander, in consultation with the PSA estate surveyor, to decide to what extent horse riding may be permitted.

The huge popularity of horse riding in the Aldershot area has necessitated the operation of a permit scheme so as to control the number of riders on MOD land. The number of permits issued is reviewed annually and reflects military training requirements and conservation interests, including the avoidance of soil erosion. In view of the large number of applicants on the waiting list, discussions were held with the British Horse Society in November last year with a view to doubling the number of permits but restricting the number of days each member of the public could ride. This proposal has not yet been accepted. It is not, however, my intention to abolish limits on the number of permits for horse riding in this area or to set up circular bridleway routes for each permit area.

D-Notice Committee

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State of Defence if he will publish in the *Official Report* the texts of the letter from Mr. Michael Ramsden, vice-chairman, to Sir Clive Whitmore, chairman of the D-Notice Committee, concerning the future of the D-Notice system, and Sir Clive's letter in reply; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Younger: The text of the correspondence between Sir Clive Whitmore, chairman of the Defence Press and Broadcasting committee, and Mr. J. M. Ramsden, vice-chairman and leader of the press side, was published on Friday 5 February 1988. It is as follows:

Text of a letter from Sir Clive Whitmore to Mr. J. M. Ramsden, dated 21st January 1988

At the special meeting of the Defence Press and Broadcasting Committee which we held on 21st December to discuss the Government's actions in respect of the BBC 4 programme "My Country Right or Wrong" you made the following statement on behalf of the media members of the Committee:—

> "We deplore the Government's resort for the second time this year to legal action in cases where the D Notice procedures have been scrupulously followed by the Press side of the D Notice Committee. The D Notice system rests on mutual trust between Government and media. This trust is now seriously at risk, putting into question the continued relevance of the D Notice Committee. In the light of the injunction against the BBC Radio 4 programme "My Country Right or Wrong" we seek an early statement clarifying the Government's attitude towards the D Notice system."

2. The main point that I wish to make in this reply is that the Government continues to place very great value on the D Notice system. It has served the country well. It has done so because there has been a general recognition on the part of the media, as well as the Government, that publication of certain material could or would prejudice national security and that it is in the national interest to avoid its being made public. The Government continues to hold that view and hopes that the media continue to share it.

3. The Government wishes to continue to operate the D Notice system on the established basis. As your statement above says, its continued value will require trust on both sides. The Government hopes and expects that the media will continue to discuss freely and fully with the Secretary of the DPBC any material within the scope of the D Notices, so that the Secretary can be in a position to provide clear and full advice.

4. The D Notice system deals with information in specific categories, as set out in the D Notices themselves. It is advisory and voluntary. It does not deal with the question of breaches of the duty of confidentiality owed by members and former members of the security and intelligence services to the Crown, a matter which therefore falls outside the remit of th DPBC Secretary. The Government's position, expounded at length in the Peter Wright case, is that members and former members of the security and intelligence services owe a lifelong duty of confidentiality to the Crown and that the upholding of that duty is essential to the effectiveness of these services and thus to the overall security of the country. If advice on a question in this field is desired, the Treasury Solicitor would always be glad to provide it.

5. The D Notice system will continue only if both the Government and the media regard it as worthwhile in the national interest. Whatever disagreements there have been and may continue to be in other areas, nothing has changed, in the Government's view, with regard to the value of the system. The Government hopes very much that the media will agree with this and will continue to participate in the system.

Text of a letter from Mr. J. M. Ramsden to Sir Clive Whitmore, dated 2 February 1988

Thank you for your letter of January 21, and for your reassurance—which we understand has the backing of the Prime Minister and the Attorney-General — that the Government places great value on the D Notice system. We note that the Government wishes to continue to operate the system "on the established basis", but we have again to express our concern that this may not prove possible while the Government maintains its present course of proceeding against the media in the Courts rather than against those it believes to be in breach of their duty of confidentiality.

We accept the breaches of confidentiality by members and former members of the security and intelligence services should not be matters for the D Notice Committee, but we remind you that the Government's own actions have brought the issue before us. The injunction suppressing the BBC Radio 4 programme "My Country Right or Wrong" is still in force, though the Secretary of the D Notice Committee found nothing in it to prejudice national security; and reports on some activities of the security services which have been published in the past without objection from the D Notice Secretary are now the subject of injunctions in the Courts. These and similar inconsistencies on the part of the Government which have threatened the D Notice system and have led us to question our role in its operation. We cannot accept that the duty of confidentiality should become a Government licence to prevent the publication of material which complies with D Notices.

You recognise that the system's "continued value will require trust on both sides". We have to warn you again that this trust will not be forthcoming from the Press side of the Committee if the principle of absolute confidentiality becomes enshrined in any new law with no corresponding recognition of the value of Press freedom.

Yours
J. M. Ramsden
Editor-in-Chief

Text of a letter from Sir Clive Whitmore to Mr. J. M. Ramsden, dated 5 February 1988

Thank you for your letter of 2nd February.

2. I have taken note of the response of the media members of the Defence Press and Broadcasting Committee to my letter of 21st January in which I explained why the Government placed great value on the D Notice system and hoped that the system would continue in being. I have drawn your letter to the attention of those in the Government who are concerned with these matters.

Isle of Wight (Training Area)

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many days in the last 12 months for which figures are readily available live ammunition was used by Her Majesty's forces in the Ministry of Defence danger area south of the Isle of Wight.

Mr. Freeman: Figures are not readily available for the last 12 months, but during the six months from 3 August 1987 to 7 February 1988 live ammunition was used by Her Majesty's forces on 66 days in the danger area in question.

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many men were trained in the Ministry of Defence danger area south of the Isle of Wight in the last 12 months for which figures are readily available; and what was the total cost of such training exercises.

Mr. Freeman; It is not possible to quantify the benefits arising from these exercises in terms of individual training programmes. However, it may help my right hon. Friend to know that, during the period 3 August 1987 to 7 February 1988, for which records are available, exercise and trials activities in the area referred to amounted to some 530 ship days; and that independent flying activity in the same period totalled some 220 aircraft days. The cost of these activities cannot readily be extracted from the total operating costs of the ships and aircraft concerned.

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the maximum height at which practice military targets fly within the Ministry of Defence danger area south of the Isle of Wight; and whether they are only used in good visibility.

Mr. Freeman: The maximum heights for practice military targets used in tracking exercises and target towing exercises are 40,000 ft and 25,000 ft respectively. Good visibility is not necessarily a prerequisite for their use.

Search and Rescue Helicopters

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he is yet in a position to make a statement on his decision on proposals submitted to his Department advocating the transfer of responsibility for United Kingdom search and rescue helicopter units to civil contractors.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the announcement made by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces in the debate on the Royal Air Force on 11 February.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, in the light of recent statements by a former official in his Department, Mr. Paul Newbigin, he will reopen the inquiry into the disappearance of the navigator's log book of HMS Conqueror.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I have already written to the hon. Member to explain that recent suggestions in the press that the missing control room logs of HMS Conqueror were destroyed on official orders have been looked into and found to have no substance. The civil servant alleged to have claimed that he was present at the destruction of the logs had no involvement in the administration or reception of units, including submarines, returning from the Falklands conflict. Indeed, he has never been in a post which brought him into contact with naval logs of any kind. As no new light has been shed on the disappearance of the logs since the statements made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) on 30 November 1984, at columns *593-94*, and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Mr. Stanley) on 25 October 1985, at column *277*, it would serve no purpose to reopen the inquiry.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Profit-Related Pay

Mr. Steel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many copies of the Treasury leaflet on profit-related pay, ISBN 0 947819 088, were printed and circulated; and if there is a similar leaflet for profit-sharing schemes.

Mr. Lawson: One hundred and ninety thousand copies of the Treasury leaflet on profit-related pay were printed and nearly all of them have been distributed. There is no separate Treasury leaflet on profit-sharing schemes, but I refer the right hon. Member to the reply which I gave to him on 21 January, at column *833*, drawing attention to the variety of Inland Revenue leaflets which have been made available.

European Community (Finance)

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the United Kingdom's net contributions to the European Community for the financial years 1982-83 to 1986-87; and what are the projected net contributions for 1987-88 and 1988-89.

Mr. Brooke: The latest figures for the United Kingdom's net contributions to the European Community for the financial years 1982-83 to 1990-91 are shown in table 3.1 in the public expenditure White Paper (Cm. 288-II, page 33).

Parliamentary Papers

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what expenditure has been incurred on providing computers for use in producing (i) Order Papers and (ii) Amendment Papers for use in Standing Committees of the House; if he is satisfied with the arrangements for training Her Majesty's Stationery Office staff to use such equipment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The computers employed at the Parliamentary Press form part of an integrated computer typesetting system which is used to produce a wide variety and large volume of parliamentary work — of which Standing Committee Order and Amendment Papers form a part. It would not be possible to identify separately the expenditure on computers associated with production of Standing Committee Papers alone. The training for HMSO staff at the new press compares very favourably with that provided in the printing trade generally.

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he proposes to take to improve the punctuality of delivery of (i) Order Papers and (ii) Amendment Papers for use in Standing Committees of the House.

Mr. Brooke: I am advised that there has been no occasion during the current parliamentary Session when Standing Committee proceedings have been delayed owing to lateness of Order or Amendment Papers. These have been made available either in printed form or in typescript, but I am conscious of attendant difficulties. HMSO is making every effort to increase the number of Committees provided with papers in printed form, including the use of outside trade assistance to cope with the quite exceptional volume of parliamentary business.

Growth

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the reply of 25 January, *Official Report*, column *81*, concerning the rate of growth in each of the past three decades, to what factors he attributes the higher rate of growth in 1957 to 1967; and whether he expects that rate of growth to be achieved in the next four years.

Mr. Major *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* Among other things, the world economic environment was more favourable in the 1950s and 1960s than subsequently. Even so, growth in the non-oil economy over the past six years has averaged 3·3 per cent; higher than in the period 1957-67. The Chancellor will be publishing a forecast to mid-1989 at the time of the Budget.

Profits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the level of profits in each major sector of the economy in each year since 1979, at both current prices and constant 1987-88 prices; and what has been the percentage increase in each case for each year since 1979, both in money and real terms.

Mr. Major *[holding answer 11 February 1988]:* The information is given in the tables. Profits figures for 1987

are not yet available. Financial year 1987-88 has not yet finished; the real profit figures cannot, therefore, be expressed in 1987-88 prices. Real profits are instead shown in 1980 prices.

Table 1

Profits[1] (including self employment income and other trading income) by sector 1979-86

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
£ million current prices								
Agriculture forestry and fishing	3,068	3,371	3,791	4,205	4,063	4,556	4,089	4,206
Energy and water supply	10,580	14,295	17,758	19,809	23,287	25,209	25,379	15,993
Manufacturing	14,721	12,733	12,118	14,362	16,609	18,634	21,175	24,404
Construction	4,472	5,053	5,457	6,285	7,390	8,553	9,789	10,888
Distribution hotels, catering, repairs	9,233	8,549	8,691	8,715	10,499	12,411	14,921	18,019
Transport	2,452	2,257	2,417	2,658	3,214	3,413	3,777	4,718
Communication	1,504	1,523	1,967	2,540	2,337	2,708	3,226	3,686
Banking, finance, insurance, business services and leasing[2]	9,546	10,032	10,997	13,191	13,728	15,076	17,718	20,463
Education and health services	1,075	1,384	1,481	1,583	1,987	2,208	2,499	2,928
Other services	2,073	2,265	2,641	2,830	3,260	3,676	4,411	5,511
Adjustment for financial services	−7,323	−9,353	−10,609	−11,728	−11,636	−13,793	−15,734	−17,404
Total gross profit	58,724	61,462	67,318	76,178	86,374	96,444	106,984	110,816
Percentage increases on a year earlier								
Agriculture forestry and fishing	11·5	9·9	12·5	10·9	−3·4	12·1	−10·3	2·9
Energy and water supply	60·8	35·1	24·2	11·5	17·6	8·3	0·7	−37·0
Manufacturing	14·2	−13·5	−4·8	18·5	15·6	12·2	13·6	15·2
Construction	22·0	13·0	8·0	15·2	17·6	15·7	14·5	11·2
Distribution hotels, catering, repairs	16·7	−7·4	1·7	0·3	20·5	18·2	20·2	20·8
Transport	−0·5	−8·0	7·1	10·0	20·9	6·2	10·7	24·9
Communication	−3·5	1·3	29·2	29·1	−8·0	15·9	19·3	14·3
Banking, finance, insurance, business services and leasing[2]	32·2	5·1	9·6	20·0	4·1	9·8	17·5	15·5
Education and health services	15·1	28·7	7·0	6·9	25·5	11·1	13·2	17·2
Other services	3·2	9·3	16·6	7·2	15·2	12·8	20·0	24·9
Adjustment for financial services	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total gross profit	22·4	4·7	9·5	13·2	13·4	11·7	10·9	3·6

[1] Including gross trading surpluses of public enterprises.
[2] Includes adjustment for financial services.

Table 2

Profits[1] (including self employment income and other trading income) by sector 1979-86

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
£ million 1980 prices								
Agriculture forestry and fishing	3,644	3,371	3,443	3,567	3,261	3,489	2,957	2,960
Energy and water supply	12,565	14,295	16,129	16,802	18,689	19,302	18,351	11,255
Manufacturing	17,483	12,733	11,006	12,182	13,330	14,268	15,311	17,174
Construction	5,311	5,053	4,956	5,331	5,931	6,549	7,078	7,662
Distribution hotels, catering, repairs	10,966	8,549	7,894	7,392	8,426	9,503	10,789	12,681
Transport	2,912	2,257	2,195	2,254	2,579	2,613	2,731	3,320
Communication	1,786	1,523	1,787	2,154	1,876	2,074	2,333	2,594
Banking, finance, insurance, business services and leasing[2]	11,337	10,032	9,988	11,188	11,018	11,544	12,811	14,400
Education and health services	1,277	1,384	1,345	1,343	1,595	1,691	1,807	2,061
Other services	2,462	2,265	2,399	2,400	2,616	2,815	3,189	3,878
Adjustment for financial services	−8,697	−9,353	−9,636	−9,947	−9,339	−10,561	−11,377	−12,248
Total gross profit	69,743	61,462	61,142	64,613	69,321	73,847	77,356	77,985
Percentage changes on a year earlier								
Agriculture forestry and fishing	−1·1	−7·5	2·1	3·6	−8·6	7·0	−15·2	0·1
Energy and water supply	42·6	13·8	12·8	4·2	11·2	3·3	−4·9	−38·7
Manufacturing	1·3	−27·2	−13·6	10·7	9·4	7·0	7·3	12·2
Construction	8·2	−4·9	−1·9	7·6	11·3	10·4	8·1	8·3
Distribution hotels, catering, repairs	3·5	−22·0	−7·7	−6·4	14·0	12·8	13·5	17·5
Transport	−11·7	−22·5	−2·7	2·7	14·4	1·3	4·5	21·6
Communication	−14·4	−14·7	17·3	20·5	−12·9	10·6	12·5	11·2
Banking, finance, insurance, business services and leasing[2]	17·3	−11·5	−0·4	12·0	−1·5	4·8	11·0	12·4
Education and health services	2·1	8·4	−2·8	−0·1	18·8	6·0	6·9	14·1
Other services	−8·5	8·0	5·9	0·0	9·0	7·6	13·3	21·6

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Adjustment for financial services	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total gross profit	8·6	−11·9	−0·5	5·7	7·3	6·5	4·8	0·8

[1] Including gross trading surpluses of public enterprises.
[2] Includes adjustment for financial services.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Overseas Civil Service (Pensioners)

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to propose measures to safeguard the value of Her Majesty's overseas Civil Service pensions of those serving in or retired from Hong Kong following the transfer of sovereignty to the People's Republic of China and during the transition period prior to then; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: In the past sterling safeguards have normally been negotiated on behalf of members of Her Majesty's overseas Civil Service immediately before constitutional change. It would be a significant departure from previous practice to contemplate such arrangements at this stage, and we have no plans to do so.

Afghanistan

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the sale of weapons to Afghanistan by British manufacturers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Our general policy is to consider all applications for licences to export defence equipment on a case by case basis.

Stalker/Sampson Report

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of the Republic of Ireland following the criticism by the Irish Minister for Justice, Mr. Collins, of the statements in the House on the Stalker/Sampson report by the Attorney-General; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We fully conveyed our concern to the Irish ambassador at the time, and made it clear that certain of the remarks made on British radio and television by the Irish Minister for Justice were totally unacceptable.

CIVIL SERVICE

Qualifying Test

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what is the machine-marked qualifying test in the Civil Service; and how it operates.

Mr. Lace: There are two qualifying tests used in Civil Service selection. One is used in the executive officer scheme of recruitment, the other in the appointments in administration scheme. In both cases, the tests perform a dual function. First, they provide selectors with essential information about a range of aptitudes for the work—for example, candidates' verbal skills, numeracy and general reasoning ability. Secondly, they act as an objective method of reducing initial applicant numbers to proportions suitable for interview. The tests are in the multiple-choice form, which enables the Civil Service Commission to use a computer-linked optical mark reader to mark the answer papers.

ENERGY

Dr. David Lowry (Publication)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will seek to obtain for his departmental library a copy of Open University energy research group report, ERG-048, entitled "Reflections on Britain's Nuclear History, A Conversation with Lord Minton", by David Lowry, dated September 1984;

(2) if he will seek to obtain for his departmental library a copy of the 1986 doctoral thesis, "Nuclear Powers—An Assessment of Nuclear Decision Making, 1932-1979, with Special Reference to the Anglo-American Atomic Relationship" by Dr. David M. Lowry, of the Open University.

Mr. Parkinson: Yes.

Nuclear Power Stations (Tests)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he or his predecessor informed the European Commission and Euratom under article 34 of the Euratom treaty of the test carried out at Hinkley Point; and if he will list all those occasions of which his Department has informed Euratom under article 34 of such tests in civil nuclear facilities in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Spicer: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) on 10 February 1988 at column 227.

Coal Industry

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will indicate the proposed levels of capital investment at the following collieries in each of the years 1988-89 to 1990-91 *(a)* Houghton Main *(b)* Goldthorpe Hickelton, *(c)* Darfield Main, *(d)* Dearne Valley and *(e)* Grimethorpe.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Decisions on capital investment at individual collieries are a matter for British Coal.

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has about the workable reserves at the following collieries *(a)* Houghton Main *(b)* Goldthorpe Hickelton, *(c)* Darfield Main, *(d)* Dearne Valley and *(e)* Grimethorpe.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This is a matter for the British Coal Corporation, and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has about the cost per colliery for subsidence at the following collieries in the past five years *(a)* Houghton Main *(b)* Goldthorpe Hickelton, *(c)* Darfield Main, *(d)* Dearne Valley and *(e)* Grimethorpe.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This is a matter for the British Coal Corporation, and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Nuclear Material (Safeguards)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy on how many occasions since July 1986 nuclear material has been withdrawn from safeguards under article 14 of the 1978 tripartite agreement between the United Nations, Euratom and the International Atomic Energy Agency; from which reactors such material originated; what quantities of material were involved on each occasion; and to what use the material was being put.

Mr. Michael Spicer *[holding answer 22 January 1988]:* In the period 1 July 1986 to 31 December 1987 there have been five withdrawals of plutonium in greater than gramme quantity. One withdrawal was permanent and involved material of Calder Hall/Chapel Cross origin. Four involved the temporary removal from safeguards of material for treatment by specialised equipment in non-civil plant. These are purely technical movements which are necessary for safety reasons. All of this material will be returned to safeguards after treatment.

PRIME MINISTER

Stalker Inquiry

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister which members of the Government were consulted prior to the removal of Mr. John Stalker from his inquiry into the alleged shoot-to-kill policy of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Mr. Hurd: I have been asked to reply.

None. The then Attorney-General was, however, consulted about the decision to appoint Mr. Sampson to continue the investigation which Mr. Stalker had started. I and my Home Office colleagues were also informed of Mr. Sampson's appointment.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Debt

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what total levels of debt existed in each of the years from 1979 to 1986 in each category for which deductions were made from debtors in those years under the Payments for Debt (Emergency Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1971.

Mr. Stanley: The information is available only for financial years and is as follows:—

£ million

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
NIHE (Rent, Rates District Rating)	8·7	10·1	12·2	16·9	21·2	20·1	18·9	18·2
NIE (Electricity)	12·0	11·1	12·7	8·1	7·9	7·5	7·1	7·0
Rating Division	3·9	4·2	5·0	6·1	11·0	14·3	9·7	9·3
Belfast Gas	3·7	3·7	3·7	3·6	3·6	3·3	3·1	2·8

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland from how many people deductions were made under the Payments for Debt (Emergency Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1971 in each of the years from 1979 to 1986.

Mr. Stanley: Numbers of people from whom deductions were made in each category are not available. However, the total number of debt cases recorded by the four creditor bodies was as follows:

Year	*Numbers*
1979-80	175,300
1980-81	176,300
1981-82	165,000
1982-83	158,000
1983-84	169,100
1984-85	141,400
1985-86	137,000
1986-87	127,000

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what total deductions were made from public sector employees earnings in each of the years from 1979 to 1986 under the Payments for Debt (Emergency Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1971.

Mr. Stanley: Information on the total deductions made from public sector employees earnings is readily available only for 1985-86 and 1986-87 and is as shown:

Year	*Amount £*
1985-86	1,736,302
1986-87	1,799,290

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the total amounts recovered in each of the years from 1979 to 1986 under the Payments for Debt (Emergency Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1971; and what were the total administrative costs for the recovery of these sums.

Mr. Stanley: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what total deductions were made from *(a)* criminal damage compensation payments and *(b)* criminal injury compensation payments in each of the years from 1979 to 1986 under the Payments for Debt (Emergency Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1971.

Mr. Stanley: The information is available only from April 1981 and is as follows:

Deductions from Compensation

Financial Year	*Criminal Damage* £	*Criminal Injuries* £	*Totals* £
1981-82	328,137	76,362	404,499
1982-83	[1]1,518,210	113,638	1,663,848
1983-84	202,042	119,143	321,185
1984-85	146,038	98,074	244,112
1985-86	64,296	102,223	166,519
1986-87	72,805	139,720	212,525

[1] Included a single deduction in excess of £1·2 million.

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what categories of debts payments were deducted from debtors in each of the years from 1979 to 1986 under the Payments for Debts (Emergency Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1971; and what are the total amounts deducted in each category were in each of those years.

Mr. Stanley: The categories of debt in respect of which deductions were made from 1979 to 1986 were rent, rates, district heating, electricity and gas. Information on the total amounts deducted over this period is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Travelling People

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans exist to establish further serviced legal sites for travelling people in Northern Ireland; where it is intended that these should be located; what services will be provided; and how many families will be accommodated at each site.

Mr. Needham: Current plans provide for additional serviced sites to Great Britain gipsy site design guide standards for 98 families distributed over three council areas; namely, Belfast city council 72, Derry city council 12 and Strabane city council 14.

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps the Government have taken to prevent harassment of travelling people in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Travelling people are entitled to the same protection as other Northern Ireland citizens. The Advisory Committee on Travellers is particularly vigilant in respect of conflicts between the travelling people and local communities and seeks to resolve such conflicts as speedily and amicably as possible.

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what environmental health monitoring is undertaken at legal and other sites occupied by travelling people in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Environmental health officers of district councils in Northern Ireland visit legal and other sites occupied by travelling people to monitor living conditions and general environmental and sanitary standards. Close liaison is maintained with doctors, health visitors and social workers who also visit the sites.

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what provision has been made in the Belfast urban area plan for site provision for travelling people; and what plans exist for serviced site provision in the Belfast area.

Mr. Needham: Belfast city council plans to develop fully serviced sites for the 72 travelling families resident in its area. It has currently planning permission for one site and has made applications for planning permission to develop five other sites. A further location is under active investigation by the council. The Belfast urban area plan deals with strategic development issues and is not an appropriate basis for dealing with the needs of travelling people.

The council was represented on the 1984 Department of Environment working party on travelling people. The working party produced recommendations which are the basis of current Department of the Environment policies for travelling people. The council has three representatives on the Advisory Committee on Travellers which advises the Minister on the implementation of travellers policy and takes an active role in promoting that policy.

Students

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the number of students aged over 19 years who have received lesser value awards in each of the past five years in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available in the form requested.

Education Maintenance Allowances

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the total amounts awarded in education maintenance allowances in each year since 1980 by each education and library board in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

Education and Library Board £

	1980-81	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	[1]*1986-87*	[2]*1987-88*
Belfast	16,765	26,941	50,344	48,631	45,392	35,318	30,084	35,000
North-Eastern	32,262	54,646	73,517	74,027	74,382	52,270	40,416	38,000
South-Eastern	21,782	30,531	36,661	37,075	43,522	38,887	30,922	32,000
Southern	71,573	104,014	172,745	174,114	180,459	113,048	87,298	82,000
Western	94,419	162,758	180,562	189,991	174,558	124,467	127,681	101,000

[1] Unaudited figures.
[2] Estimated figures taken from 1987-88 revised recurrent schemes.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what figures are available to indicate the cost of administering education maintenance allowances in Northern Ireland;

(2) what information is available to indicate the number of applications for education maintenance allowances in each board area in Northern Ireland in each year since 1980.

Dr. Mawhinney: No such figures or information are available.

St. Peter's Gaelic Athletics Association Club

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information is available to him on what action is to be taken following the Local Government Auditor's inquiries regarding Craigavon council's expenditure in relation to St. Peter's Gaelic Athletics Association Club.

Mr. Needham: The Local Government Auditor has written to a number of former and serving members of Craigavon borough council setting out the matters which he proposes to take into account in relation to this case. The recipients have until 19 February 1988 to make written representations and to indicate whether they wish to seek an oral hearing. Following this the Local Government Auditor will decide whether to proceed with the issue of a certificate under section 82(1) of the Local Government Act (NI) 1972, as amended by article 28 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order 1985, that the loss has been incurred due to wilful misconduct.

It is entirely a matter for the Local Government Auditor to decide on the action to be taken in such cases.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Butane Gas

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has any records concerning death or personal injury caused through the inhalation of butane gas.

Mrs. Currie: It is not possible to give exact information relating specifically to injury or death associated with the inhalation of butane gas. Mortality data are available, but cannot precisely separate the category required. The tables show the most reliable currently available information.

Table 1 shows the number of deaths the underlying cause of which relates to the use of liquefied petroleum gas distributed in mobile containers. Most, but not necessarily all, of these products contain butane; in addition, it is not possible to be sure whether butane was inhaled in each case.

Table 2 shows data taken from a continuing study undertaken by the department of clinical epidemiology and social medicine of St. George's hospital medical school, London, of deaths associated with the abuse of volatile substances. This study collects data from a variety of sources, including death registrations and a survey of coroners' findings; the resulting data relate only to those cases where it appeared that the use of volatile substances was deliberate. As with table 1, most but not necessarily all the cases shown involved the use of butane.

Table 1: Number of deaths with an underlying cause relating to poisoning by liquefied petroleum gas distributed in mobile containers, England and Wales, 1980-86.

Year	Number	
	ICD (9) E868.0	*ICD (9) E981.1*
1980	18	0
1981	12	1
1982	6	1
1983	17	0
1984	24	0
1985	18	1
1986	16	1

International Classification of Disease (ICD) E868.0: Accidental poisoning by liquefied petroleum gas distributed in mobile containers.
ICD E981.1: as above, but undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted.

Table 2: Number of deaths associated with the deliberate abuse of gas fuels, England and Wales, 1980-85.

Year	Number
1980	9
1981	11
1982	7
1983	13
1984	27
1985	22

Source: National Study of deaths associated with the abuse of volatile substances, Department of Clinical Epidemiology and Social Medicine, St. George's Hospital, London.

National Insurance

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what portion of national insurance contributions from the average family on average pay is attributable to the cost of the National Health Service.

Mr. Moore: In 1988-89, the NHS contribution from class 1 national insurance contributions will be 0·95 per cent. of earnings up to the upper earnings limit of £305 per week for all employees, and 0·8 per cent. of earnings for employers. The actual amount that the average family will pay will depend on their earnings, and whether one or both partners work. This NHS contribution will fund 13·2 per cent. of the gross cost of the NHS in Great Britain in 1987-88. The table provides the information.

Estimated Average amount of weekly National Insurance Contributions Paid to the NHS (couples with children) Great Britain 1988-89 (Employees Contribution)

	Weekly Earnings (average) £	NHS Contribution 0·9 per cent. of earnings £	Total NIC (not contracted out) £	Percentage of NIC Paid to NHS
One Earner Couples				
Husband Working	280	2·66	25·20	10·6
Wife Working	83	0·79	5·81	13·6
Two Earner Couples:				
Husband	257	2·44	23·13	10·5
Wife	80	0·76	5·60	13·6
Total	337	3·20	28·73	11·1

Note:
Earnings figures are based on the 1985 family expenditure survey with earnings uprated to 1988-89 levels in line with the normal assumptions about the growth of average earnings.

Family Statistics

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will update to 1985 the reply given to the hon. Member for Kensington, *Official Report*, 27 January 1987, column *215* showing the numbers of working and out-of-work families with children at different income levels.

Mr. Portillo: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 21 January 1988 at columns *836-40*.

Operation Statistics

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the 10 most frequently performed surgical operations carried out in National Health Service hospitals; and what estimate he has of the average cost of each type.

Mrs. Currie: The information requested is given in the table.

Estimated number of the 10 most common forms of surgery (in order of frequency) performed in NHS non-psychiatric, non-maternity hospitals, England 1985

Condensed[1] list operation number		Operation	Estimated number of operations	Approximate cost (current prices)	Estimate based on
1.	080	Dilatation, Curettage, Biopsy and Excision of Lesion of Cervix	127,450	£200 to £250	National average cost per patient day in hospital
2.	093	Treatment of Fracture by Operations	105,850	—	Not available
3.	061	Cystoscopy (with Destruction of Lesion)	87,680	—	Not available
4.	023	Tonsils and Adenoids	83,550	£300 to £350	National average cost per patient day in hospital
5.	078	Hysterectomy	68,590	£1,200	Study carried out in 1982
6.	038	Operations on Abdominal Wall, Peritoneum and Mesentery	67,710	—	Not available
7.	039	Inguinal Hernia Operations	66,660	£650	Study carried out in 1982[2] (average for all hernia operations)
8.	092	Post-natal or Post-abortion Operations	65,800	—	Not available
9.	014	Operations on Lens	60,100	£950	1986 estimate for cataracts (including lens implant) only
10.	100	Arthroplasty[3]	53,080	£3,300	1984 estimate for hip joint replacement only

[1] OPCS condensed list of surgical operations.
[2] Many of these operations are now carried out by day surgery but a separate costing for such operations is not available.
[3] Arthroplasty also includes knee joint replacement for which a separate figure is not available.
Source: Hospital In-Patient Enquiry (HIPE).

NHS Staff Statistics

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many medical dental and nursing/midwifery staff *(a)* left and *(b)* joined the service of the National Health Service in each of the past five years in (i) the Crewe health service district, (ii) the Chester health district and (iii) the Halton health district;

(2) what were the numbers of directly employed medical/dental and nursing/midwifery staff at 30 September 1987 in *(a)* Crewe health district, *(b)* Chester health district and *(c)* Halton health district.

Mrs. Currie: The latest staff in post figures held centrally are for 30 September 1986. This information is shown in the table. Information on "leavers" and "joiners" is not held centrally.

National Health Service medical and dental and nursing and midwifery staff at 30 September 1986

Whole-time equivalents[1]

District health authority	*Medical and dental*[2]	*Nursing and midwifery*[3]
Crewe	89	1,794
Chester	109	1,744
Halton	39	604

Source: DHSS annual census of National Health Service medical and non-medical manpower.

[1] Figures independently rounded to nearest whole-time equivalent.

[2] Includes permanent paid, honorary and locum staff. Excludes consultants and senior registrars whose contracts are held by the regional health authority.

[3] Includes agency staff.

Social Fund

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much of the expenditure on the social fund set out in table 15.1 of volume II of the Government's expenditure plans 1988-89 to 1990-91 for each year between 1988-89 to 1990-91 is attributable to *(a)* help with maternity expenses, *(b)* help with funeral expenses, *(c)* severe weather payments, *(d)* community care grants, *(e)* budget loans and *(f)* crisis loans.

Mr. Scott: Information for 1989-90 and 1990-91 was given in my reply to the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 1 February at column *488*. The breakdown for maternity and funeral payments for those two years is as follows:

£ million

	1989-90	*1990-91*
Maternity payments	19·3	19·6
Funeral payments	15·9	16·7

The information for 1988-89 is as follows:

£ million

Maternity payments	19
Funeral payments	15
Exceptionally cold weather payments	4·5
Community care grants	60
Net cost of loans	[1]65

[1] Separate allocations are not made for budgeting and crisis loans.

Operating Theatres

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he is taking in the light of the report of the Audit Commission to increase the use of operating theatres in National Health Service hospitals; and if he will a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The report by the National Audit Office on the use of operating theatres in the NHS is being studied by the Department together with that from the confidential inquiry into perioperative deaths to see what further initiatives by the Department would be helpful. The five district health authorities studied by the NAO have told us of a number of steps they have taken locally to improve utilisation.

Hospital Charges

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is his estimate of the annual yield, excluding administration costs, from requiring all patients except the chronically sick and those in receipt of retirement pension or supplementary benefit to make a payment of £25 a day for hospital in-patient care;

(2) what is his estimate of the annual yield, excluding administration costs, from requiring all patients, excluding those in receipt of supplementary benefit, to make a payment of £25 a day for hospital in-patient care;

(3) what is his estimate of the annual yield, excluding administration costs, from requiring all patients, excluding those in receipt of retirement pension, to make a payment of £25 a day for hospital in-patient care;

(4) what is his estimate of the annual yield, excluding administration costs, from requiring all patients, excluding those who are chronically sick, to make a payment of £25 a day for hospital in-patient care;

(5) what is his estimate of the annual yield, excluding administration costs, from requiring all patients to make a payment of £25 a day for hospital in-patient care;

(6) what is his estimate of the annual yield, excluding administration costs, from requiring all patients to pay £10 for each visit to a hospital accident and emergency unit;

(7) what is his estimate of the annual yield, excluding administration costs, from requiring all patients except those in receipt of supplementary benefit, to pay £10 for each visit to a hospital accident and emergency unit;

(8) what is his estimate of the annual yield, excluding administration costs, from requiring all patients except those in receipt of retirement pension, to pay £10 for each visit to a hospital accident and emergency unit;

(9) what is his estimate of the annual yield, excluding administration costs, from requiring all patients except those who are chronically sick or in receipt of retirement pension or supplementary benefit, to pay £10 for each visit to a hospital accident and emergency unit;

(10) what is his estimate of the annual yield, excluding administration costs, from requiring all patients except those who are chronically sick, to pay £10 for each visit to a hospital accident and emergency unit;

Mrs. Currie: I regret that information is not held centrally on the number of chronically sick, retirement pensioners or supplementary benefit recipients who are in-patients or who visit hospital accident and emergency units, and estimates in respect of these groups are not therefore possible. The gross annual yield from a £25 daily charge to all NHS in-patients is estimated at £2,370 million. The gross annual yield of a £10 charge for all NHS visits to a hospital accident and emergency unit is estimated at £138 million (this does not include out-patient attendances). No estimate has been made of the administration costs involved in collecting such charges but these costs would not be insignificant.

Fraud Investigators (Seaham and Peterlee)

Mr. John Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many benefit fraud investigators are employed in Seaham and Peterlee by his Department.

Mr. Portillo: The most recent available information relates to 8 February 1988. On that date Seaham had one benefit fraud investigator in post and Peterlee had two.

EC (Health Expenditure)

Mr. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table showing for *(a)* 1984,

(b) 1985 and *(c)* 1986, for each member state of the EEC, the (i) total, (ii) public and (iii) private spending on health as a proportion of gross domestic product.

Mr. Newton: The information for 1984 and 1985 is shown in the table. Comparable statistics for 1986 are not yet available.

Expenditure on health in total and by sector as a percentage of GDP in EEC countries in 1984 and 1985.

	1984			1985		
EEC Country	*Total*	*Public*	*Private*	*Total*	*Public*	*Private*
Belgium	7·2	5·5	1·7	7·2	5·5	1·7
Denmark	6·3	5·3	1·0	6·2	5·2	1·0
France	8·4	6·7	1·7	8·4	6·7	1·7
Germany	8·1	6·3	1·8	8·2	6·4	1·8
Greece	4·0	3·9	0·1	4·2	4·1	0·1
Ireland	8·0	6·9	1·1	8·0	6·9	1·1
Italy	6·6	5·3	1·3	6·7	5·4	1·3
Netherlands	8·3	6·6	1·7	8·3	6·5	1·8
Portugal	5·5	3·9	1·6	5·7	4·1	1·6
Spain	6·0	4·3	1·7	6·0	4·3	1·7
United Kingdom	6·2	5·3	0·9	6·1	5·2	0·9

Source: OECD 1987
Note: Luxembourg is excluded from the table because of reported inconsistencies in the national health accounts.

Performance Indicators

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the 450 performance indicators now available to the National Health Service.

Mr. Newton: A table listing the indicators included in the current package issued to health authorities in England is kept in the Library. A copy of the performance indicator packages issued so far which cover the years 1983-84, 1985-86 and 1986-87 is held also in the Library along with guidance material which gives full descriptions of the indicators and the sources of data from which they are calculated. Indicators for 1986-87 will be placed in the Library during March 1988.

Management Boards

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services who are the members of the National Health Service management board; what are its terms of reference; and how often it meets.

Mr. Newton: The board has no formal terms of reference. Its role and membership are set out in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. McNair-Wilson) on 9 February at columns *207-8*. In general it meets formally twice a month.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services who are the members of the Social Security management board; what are its terms of reference; and how often it meets.

Mr. Scott: The members of the Social Security Management Board are:

C. W. France, Permanent Secretary, DHSS *(Chairman)*
Mrs. A. E. Bowtell, Deputy Secretary, Social Security Policy
D. V. Chislett, Director of Finance, Social Security
N. E. Clarke, Director Social Security Operations
M. E. G. Fogden, Chief Executive, The Employment Service

Non-Executive
N. L. Colne, Director, Marks and Spencer PLC
Sir Geoffrey Otton KCB, formerly Second Permanent Secretary, DHSS

The board is responsible for ensuring that social security benefits are administered quickly, accurately and economically; that the Government's investment in computers and information technology is brought into use as soon as possible; and that the social security reforms are successfully implemented. It meets at least once a month.

Local Offices (Staff)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total number of staff employed in local offices of his Department in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland at the latest available date; if any changes are envisaged in the number of those employed in the near future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The most recent available information regarding the numbers of staff in post in local offices relates to 1 February 1988 and is as follows:

	Numbers
Greenock ILO	176
Port Glasgow ILO	81
Strathclyde Region	4,582·5
Scotland	8,192

Notes: Figures exclude cleaners.
ILO = Integrated Local Office.

The number of staff employed are expected to reduce by April 1988 to take account of reductions in work loads. As part of the annual recomplementing exercise staffing allocations will then be revised. Final details should be available in March 1988.

Income Support Scheme

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the estimated numbers of claimants in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Greenock and Port Glasgow who will be eligible for transitional payments under the income support scheme; and if he will list them in terms of categories of claimant.

Mr. Scott: I regret that this information is not available.

Agency Nurses

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list in the *Official Report* the district health authorities which spent more than 1 per cent. of their allocation in 1986-87 on agency nurses, giving the percentage for each case;

(2) if he will list in the *Official Report* the district health authorities which spent more than £300,000 in 1986-87 on agency nurses, giving the amount spent in each case.

Mr. Newton: Following is information derived from the 1986-87 annual accounts of district health authorities and those of the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.

Expenditure on non-national health service (agency etc.) staff—nursing

	Expenditure (authorities in excess of £300,000) £	*Expenditure in excess of one per cent. of total revenue expenditure* Per cent.
Yorkshire Region		
Scarborough	—	1·28
Leeds Western	357,453	—
Leeds Eastern	446,994	—
East Anglian Region		
West Norfolk and Wisbech	—	1·02
Cambridge	664,086	—
Norwich	622,285	—
North West Thames Region		
South West Hertfordshire	531,657	1·88
Barnet	1,432,868	1·93
Harrow	1,267,046	3·20
Hillingdon	1,526,023	2·54
Hounslow and Spelthorne	2,002,673	3·66
Ealing	337,476	—
Brent	1,207,244	2·23
Paddington	2,370,432	3·62
Riverside	4,056,499	3·04
North East Thames Region		
Basildon and Thurrock	560,161	1·17
Mid Essex	559,114	1·05
West Essex	478,906	1·19
Southend	691,564	1·48
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	378,802	—
Hampstead	1,349,503	2·27
Bloomsbury	4,745,219	3·68
Islington	777,354	1·51
City and Hackney	2,123,687	2·43
Newham	1,444,239	3·36
Tower Hamlets	1,365,551	1·92
Enfield	954,921	2·39
Haringey	1,433,658	2·91
Redbridge	771,162	1·89
Waltham Forest	1,580,540	2·87
South-East Thames Region		
Brighton	882,130	1·49
Eastbourne	522,100	1·20
Canterbury and Thanet	584,661	—
Dartford and Gravesham	758,412	1·62
Maidstone	466,874	1·25
Tunbridge Wells	671,782	1·41
Greenwich	799,327	1·30
Bromley	946,556	1·75
West Lambeth	1,648,359	1·95
Camberwell	1,797,873	2·55
Lewisham and North Southwark	1,882,684	1·67
South-West Thames Region		
North-West Surrey	519,334	1·28
West Surrey and North-East Hampshire	803,363	1·97
South-West Surrey	471,817	1·31
East Surrey	747,873	1·58
Worthing	444,352	1·28
Croydon	343,861	—
Kingston and Esher	575,102	1·37
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	911,998	2·44
Wandsworth	2,510,595	2·72
Merton and Sutton	588,650	—
Wessex Region		
East Dorset	449,749	—
Oxford Region		
East Berkshire	358,770	—
West Berkshire	496,669	—
Aylesbury	371,664	—
West Midlands Region		
Central Birmingham	400,071	—
East Birmingham	301,405	—
West Birmingham	304,732	—
Mersey Region		
Liverpool	551,626	—
Special Health Authorities for the London Postgraduate Teaching Hospitals		
Hospital for Sick Children	1,405,078	4·15
National Hospital for Nervous Diseases	1,171,056	6·30
Moorfields Eye Hospital	645,679	4·73
National Heart and Chest Hospitals	787,255	2·46
Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's Hospitals	1,518,411	3·28

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will reconsider the application by Mr. John Davis of 6 Tudor Gardens, Shoeburyness, Essex, for invalid care allowance; references ICA/988302 and ICA/168680, which was rejected on the grounds that his father had not been granted the attendance allowance, in the light of the decision to grant the allowance to his father on 3 June 1987, backdated to 14 November 1986, under the reference 0074P 937, and in the light of Mr. Davis's attempts since June 1987 to clarify the situation in various letters to his Department in Palatine house, Preston.

Mr. Scott: A revised decision on Mr. Davis's claim was made on 11 February and he should receive payment within the next seven days. I regret that the review of his entitlement took longer than is usual and I will be writing to my hon. Friend.

Mentally Handicapped Patients (Salford)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many mentally handicapped patients have been registered in the Salford heath authority area for each year from 1979 to 1987;

(2) if he will give the levels of staff, by National Health Service category, working with mentally handicapped patients in the Salford area for each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mrs. Currie: The information requested since 1982, when the current authority was formed, is given in the tables. Figures for 1987 are not yet available.

Numbers of residents in mental handicapped hospitals and units in Salford Health Authority at 31 December

Year	Number
1982	81
1983	82
1984	80
1985	78
1986	73

NHS medical and nursing and midwifery staff in post in mental handicap area of work, Salford District Health Authority, at 30 September

Year	Whole time equivalents[1]	
	Medical[2]	Nursing and midwifery[3]
1982	2	90
1983	3	122
1984	2	133
1985	2	121
1986	2	120

Source: DHSS Annual Censuses of NHS Medical and Non-medical Manpower

[1] Figures are independently rounded to the nearest whole time equivalent.

[2] Includes permanent paid and honorary staff. Excludes Senior Registrars whose contracts are held by the Regional Health Authority.

[3] Excludes agency staff.

NHS Review

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will now publish the terms of reference approved for the internal review of the National Health Service.

Mr. Moore: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on 1 February 1988 at columns *489-90*. I have nothing to add.

NHS (Beds)

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the numbers of beds in National Health Service hospitals *(a)* reserved solely for the use of private patients, *(b)* sometimes used for private patients and *(c)* never used for private patients, for the years 1979 and 1987; and if he will give for 1987 the percentage occupancy of beds under each category.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 28 January 1988]:* I am sorry I cannot give the hon. Member all the information he seeks. The available information is given in the tables. Authorised pay beds are rarely used exclusively by private patients.

Beds for NHS and private patients in NHS hospitals, 1979 and 1986 (England)

Year	Average daily available beds	Average daily occupied beds	Percentage bed occupancy
1979	361,670	293,272	81·1
1986	315,714	254,597	80·6

Authorised pay beds in NHS hospitals, 1979 and 1986 (England)

Year	Authorised pay beds at 31 December	Average daily occupancy by private patients	Percentage bed occupancy by private patients
1979	3,171	1,508	47·6
1986	2,980	958	32·1

Accident and Emergency Units

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the estimated average cost of each treatment by a hospital accident and emergency unit in England.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* I regret that the information is not available in the form requested. Hospital cost returns show that the average total cost of an accident and emergency out-patient attendance in England in 1985-86 was £17·30. The range of treatments available in NHS hospitals is so diverse that it would be very expensive to cost each one separately, and difficult to obtain statistically sound results. We estimate that approximately 5 per cent. of all attendances are admitted to in-patient care.

Hospital Accommodation and Food

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the estimated daily cost of *(a)* accommodation and *(b)* food for hospital patients in each district health authority in England.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* I regret that information on the daily cost of hotel services for in-patients could not be provided in the form requested without incurring disproportionate cost. However, the average daily cost of in-patient hotel services (including catering) in large acute hospitals was £4·89 in 1985-86 (the latest year available).

The estimated cost of feeding patients is not available by district health authority. The estimated cost by regional health authority in 1985-86 was:

Region	Total catering cost per patient/day (£)
Northern	2·74
Yorkshire	2·77
Trent	2·81
East Anglian	2·94
North West Thames	2·83
North East Thames	2·70
South East Thames	2·91
South West Thames	2·66
Wessex	2·90
Oxford	2·76
South Western	2·74
West Midlands	2·75

Region	Total catering cost per patient/ day (£)
Mersey	2·56
North Western	2·79
All Regions	2·78

Care in the Community

Mr. Dixon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the latest figures available of the number of people returned into the community from mental illness and mental handicap institutions in *(a)* South Tyneside health authority area, *(b)* Northumbria health authority area and *(c)* nationally.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 11 February 1988]:* I am sorry I cannot give the hon. Member all the information he seeks as it is not centrally collected. An indication of the number of people who have been settled in the community after living in hospital is given in the table. Some of these people may have been readmitted since because of changes in their condition.

Discharges for 1986 from mental health hospitals and units after durations of stay of 5 years or more (excluding transfers to other NHS hospitals and special hospitals)

Health Authority	Mental illness	Mental handicap
(a) South Tyneside	0	0
(b) Northumberland	3	48
(c) All England	1,082	1,951

Ambulance Authorities (Orcon Standard)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he will place in the Library a list of which ambulance authorities are not meeting the Orcon standard.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 11 February 1988]:* Information about ambulance authorities meeting the Orcon standard is included in the NHS performance indicators published by the Department. A copy of the three performance indicator packages published since 1985 are available in the Library. The performance indicators for 1986-87 will be completed by the end of February 1988 ready for issue to all health authorities in England in March 1988; a copy will be placed in the Library at the same time.

TRANSPORT

Roads (Designation)

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the criteria a roadway has to meet to acquire an M designation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Motorways, designated M, are special roads whose use is restricted to certain classes of motor traffic.

The decision to build or improve a road as a motorway takes into account the level and nature of traffic and the function and location of the road.

Vehicles (Lighting)

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to amend the present rules for the lighting of vehicles.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Following a major revision of the vehicle lighting regulations in 1984, a large number of small corrections and clarifications have become necessary.

Draft regulations to revise the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1984 are being circulated to interested parties for comment by 30 April.

New requirements are included for direction indicators on agricultural trailers and certain invalid carriages and for new bicycles to have front lamps conforming to British standard.

Stansted Airport

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has considered the responses to the consultation on his proposals for aircraft departure routes from Stansted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: We received many helpful replies to the consultation document sent out on 16 December 1987. We are grateful to all those who responded.

For air traffic control reasons the route structure is needed this summer. But many of those consulted have raised questions which cannot be resolved before then. I have therefore decided to introduce the proposed routes on 7 April on a provisional basis, with a few changes to take into account some of the more straightforward comments which we have received. I shall continue the consultation through a small working party with local representation to see whether the revised routes can be improved in 1989.

Our objectives will continue to be to establish a route structure which will be adequate for the traffic expected as the airport develops, which will safely and efficiently integrate with the air traffic patterns in the London terminal manoeuvring area (the air space serving all the London airports), which will avoid heavily populated areas as far as practicable, and which will give local people and local authorities reasonable certainty for many years to come of those areas which are likely to be overflown.

My noble Friend the Minister with responsibility for aviation will write to my hon. Friend and to other hon. Members with a constituency interest, local authorities and the airport consultative committee, with copies of large-scale maps showing the provisional routes.

Tyres

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish details of those who responded to his Department and their comments on the EEC directive about tyre tread depth legislation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department has not issued any general invitation to comment on this draft directive. We have received a large number of letters inspired by the tyre industry's published and circulated views on this matter.

Coach Passengers (Accident Statistics)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to the number of

passengers in inter-city coaches killed or injured over the most recent period for which figures are available; what assessment he has made of what the number would have been in each case had seat belts been worn by those concerned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department's accident records do not show figures for inter-city coach services. The number of public service vehicle passengers who were injured on non-built-up motorways, A(M) and A-class roads in the last three years for which figures are available are:

	1984	*1985*	*1986*
Fatal	5	12	1
Serious	85	166	65
Slight	521	671	523
All	611	849	589

The number of casualties who might have been saved by seat belts cannot be assessed.

Coaches (Seat Belts)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now consider seeking to make mandatory the use of seat belts by coach passengers.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: From 1 October this year all newly registered coaches will be required to have seat belts fitted to all exposed forward facing seats. It is passengers in these seats who are most at risk, because they have no other impact protection. They should wear the belts. We will encourage them to do so.

Coaches (Speed Limits)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, in order to harmonise provisions within the EEC, he will consider reducing the speed limit for coaches on motorways to 60 mph.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Seventy miles per hour on motorways is a safe speed limit for coaches in normal traffic and weather conditions. We are making regulations to require coaches to be fitted with speed limiters which will ensure this is not exceeded. There are no Community proposals for harmonised speed limits currently under consideration.

Driving Tests

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many driving tests were cancelled between September 1987 and 31 January 1988 at the driver and vehicle licensing centre, north western traffic area; what was the average waiting time between cancellation and the new appointment; and how many vacant posts for examiners there are.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: 4,417 L-tests and 33 vocational (HGV/PSV) driver tests were cancelled after test programmes had been dispatched to test centres (i.e., four days before test date). No record is kept of the number of cancellations made prior to dispatch. During this period some 120,000 L-tests and 4,000 vocational tests were conducted.

Periods between cancelled and rebooked appointments were in the order of three to four weeks.

There are currently two vacancies for L-test examiners and three for HGV/PSV examiners against complements of 191 and 12 respectively.

London Underground

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy towards the granting of fire certificates to London Underground station platforms and access passages.

Mr. David Mitchell: The conditions under which a fire certificate is required in respect of offices, shops and railway premises are set out in the Fire Precautions Act 1971. Where a certificate is required, it is the responsibility of the owner of the premises to apply for one to the appropriate fire authority. The Secretary of State for Transport has no responsibility for the granting, or otherwise, of fire certificates for London Underground's premises.

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will deposit in the Library copies of the correspondence and memoranda exchanged between Lieutenant-Colonel Anthony Townsend-Rose of his Department's railways inspectorate and the London fire brigade on the subject of the granting of fire certificates for platforms and access passages at Heathrow Central underground station.

Mr. David Mitchell: No. Copies of the correspondence have been made available to the King's Cross investigation. It will be for the investigation to consider whether it is relevant to the circumstances of the King's Cross fire or the lessons to be learnt from it.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, when he last met the chairman of London Regional Transport, he held any discussion on the future staffing of London Underground stations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: No. Staffing is a matter for management in accordance with its statutory duty to operate safely and efficiently. Within that framework, I would expect staffing levels to reflect the manpower required to do the job.

London Transport (Women Passengers)

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many cases of attacks on women passengers were reported in the London Regional Transport area on one-person-operated buses and buses with a conductor, respectively, in the 12 months to the latest available date.

Mr. David Mitchell: Assaults on passengers on buses are dealt with by the Metropolitan police. London Regional Transport does not maintain a central statistical record of such assaults.

Pedal Cycles (Accidents)

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many children have been killed or injured in each of the last five years while riding with their parents or another adult on a pedal cycle.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The number of children aged between 0 and 14 inclusive who were recorded as being killed or injured whilst passengers on a bicycle ridden by an adult aged 18 or more are as follows:

Child pedal cycle passenger casualties, carried on pedal cycles ridden by adults. Great Britain 1982 to 1986

	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Fatal	1	2	2	0	1
Serious	10	6	9	12	5
Slight	49	67	46	52	42
Total	60	75	57	64	48

Volunteer Ambulance Schemes

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to ensure that vehicles used to carry members of the public in volunteer ambulance schemes, are subject to the same licensing procedures as those applying to vehicles used for general hire.

Mr. David Mitchell: PSV operator licences are generally needed for private ambulances that carry passengers for hire and reward. Non-profit-making volunteer ambulance organisations may obtain minibus permits that exempt them from PSV operator licensing. I see no need to change these arrangements.

Buses

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will, in the course of his current review of the Public Service Vehicles, Conduct of Drivers, etc, Regulations, give further consideration to the case for preserving in the revised regulations the existing obligation on drivers and conductors, as opposed to bus operators, to ensure that information on vehicles about destinations, route numbers, and so on, is correctly displayed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: Any failure by a driver or a conductor to display adequate information about the destination or routes of a service should be a disciplinary matter for the operator, not a criminal offence.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will, in the course of his current review of the Public Service Vehicles, Conduct of Drivers, etc, Regulations, propose the introduction of a ban on smoking by drivers, conductors and inspectors at all times in those areas of a bus in which smoking by passengers is prohibited; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The 1936 regulations ban smoking by drivers and conductors during a journey or when there are passengers on board. I propose to extend this obligation to inspectors.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will, in the course of his current review of the Public Service Vehicles, Conduct of Drivers, etc, Regulations, give further consideration to the case for preserving in the revised regulations the existing prohibition on singing, shouting, spitting and begging; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The revised regulations that I propose to put to Parliament contain a new prohibition against actions which cause discomfort to anyone travelling on the vehicle or which soil the fittings of the vehicle or the clothing of other passengers. They would also make it an offence to play musical instruments or sound-recording equipment unreasonably to the annoyance of other people.

Maritime Fleet

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the size in tonnes of the maritime fleet owned and registered in the United Kingdom in 1979 and that for the latest period for which figures are available; what information he has about the corresponding trend in other major European Community fleets over the same period; and what recent discussions have taken place with the European Commission and in the Council of Ministers regarding likely future developments, including the subject of aid to fleets.

Mr. David Mitchell: The available information is as follows:

Table 1
Deadweight tonnage of trading vessels 500 grt and over owned and registered in the United Kingdom and the Crown Dependencies

	Million tonnes
End 1979	36·6
End 1987	9·5

Table 2
Deadweight tonnage of trading vessels 100 grt and over registered in other European Community Countries with major fleets

	Million tonnes	
	Mid-1979	Mid-1987
Greece	63·3	42·6
France	20·6	8·2
Italy	19·0	12·0
Spain	13·6	8·0
Federal Republic of Germany	13·5	5·5
Denmark	8·9	6·8
Netherlands	8·2	4·7

Note: Statistics above are not entirely compatible:

(i) United Kingdom figures are based on vessels of 500 grt or over since ownership information is not available for vessels below this threshold;

(ii) United Kingdom figures are end-year; figures in table 2 are mid-year;

(iii) Figures in table 2 relate only to registration. Ownership information is not available.

The Council of Ministers requested the Commission in December 1986 to produce proposals aimed at the harmonisation of state aids and improving the competitiveness of the European fleets. Commissioner Clinton Davis assured the Council of Ministers last December that this was being pursued, and I hope that proposals will be received shortly.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 15 February 1988

PRIME MINISTER

Corporations (Statistics)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Prime Minister how many people were employed in the work force in 1987 in *(a)* British Coal, *(b)* British Telecom, *(c)* British Rail, *(d)* the Post Office, *(e)* British Gas, *(f)* British Steel, *(g)* British Shipbuilders and *(h)* British Airways; and how much was paid to the chairmen of these concerns.

The Prime Minister: British Telecom, British Gas and British Airways are no longer in the public sector. The information requested for the public sector corporations is as follows:

	Average number of employees[1]	*Salary of Chairmen*[2]
British Coal	162,800	145,000
British Rail	171,400	81,000
Post Office	188,732	90,000
British Steel	54,650	100,000
British Shipbuilders	8,642	65,000

[1] Information taken from 1986-87 annual reports and accounts.
[2] Salaries payable to current chairmen following each Board's latest pay review. Some chairmen are additionally eligible for performance bonuses.

Economic League

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Prime Minister what directives or policy statements have been issued to nationalised industries regarding the use by those industries of information supplied by the Economic League; and what information she has about the involvement of that organisation in supplying information to nationalised industries or Government-sponsored bodies.

The Prime Minister: No such directives or policy statements have been issued; such matters would be for the industries themselves. I also refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), to the hon. Member for Erdington (Mr. Corbett) on 11 February, at column 307.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Prime Minister what steps she is taking to ensure that public funds designed to create employment do not go to bodies which use information supplied by the Economic League in taking employment and staff decisions.

The Prime Minister: Grants from public funds are made in accordance with the appropriate guidelines and are not allocated or withheld by reference to such criteria.

Trawsfynydd (Test)

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to her reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas), *Official Report* 25 January, column 21, which authorities were consulted concluding that article 34 of the Euratom treaty is not relevant to the Trawsfynydd nuclear test.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) on 25 January, at column 8.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Unification Church

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Attorney-General what assessment he has made of the likelihood of new evidence becoming available to enable him to reverse his intention not to continue with the appeal against the decision not to remove charity status from the Unification Church; what efforts are being made to obtain fresh evidence; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: With the leave of the court, my appeal has been discontinued and cannot therefore be proceeded with further. If circumstances were to change further so as seriously to call into doubt the charitable status of either of the trusts in question I would consider raising the matter afresh with the Charity Commissioners. Immense efforts were made by the Treasury Solicitor to obtain new material while the proceedings were pending, but no active steps are being taken to amass further evidence now that my action has been discontinued.

Legal Aid

Mr. Heffer: To ask the Attorney-General what steps the Lord Chancellor is prepared to take to change the present position whereby, because of regulation 9 of the Legal Advice and Assistance Regulations (No. 2) 1980, legal aid is not available when defendants are outside the United Kingdom, following their extradition; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Legal advice and assistance is restricted to the application of English law. The Lord Chancellor is not contemplating any change.

Mr. Heffer: To ask the Attorney-General whether legal aid has been available since the House of Lords judgment in the Heysel stadium extradition case, to help English lawyers in their efforts in the United Kingdom to assist Belgian lawyers in their defence of those involved in this case; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: No, Sir. Legal aid is not available in respect of proceedings abroad.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Civil Service (Staffing and Conditions)

59. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the staffing and conditions of civil servants with a view to ensuring adequate levels to provide an efficient service to the public.

Mr. Brooke: The standards and efficiency of service to the public provided by individual Departments are a matter for the Ministers responsible for those Departments.

Terms and conditions of service for civil servants, and other matters of personnel management policy determined centrally, are kept under constant review to ensure that they meet the needs of individual Departments and Government as a whole.

Income Tax

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost of reducing the top rate of income tax from 60 per cent. to 50 per cent. and what would be the gain to the Exchequer if personal allowances for those who paid the original rate of 50 per cent. and above were not raised in line with inflation, on income which attracts income tax at that level and above.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The cost of reducing the 55 per cent. and 60 per cent. rates of income tax to 50 per cent. would be £530 million in a full year at 1988-89 levels of income. The cost assumes that 1987-88 personal allowances and tax bands are indexed to 1988-89 levels according to the statutory provisions. The yield from not indexing personal allowances for those liable to rates of 50 per cent. or more under indexation would be about £50 million.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will update his reply of 10 April 1986, *Official Report*, columns 191-92, to give the tax band table for 1986-87, 1987-88 and his estimate for 1988-89;

(2) how many people in work or in receipt of unearned income paid *(a)* no income tax and *(b)* tax at top rate of (i) 60 per cent., (ii) 55 per cent., (iii) 50 per cent., (iv) 45 per cent., (v) 40 per cent., and (vi) 27 per cent. for the two years ended 1986-87, with estimates for the year ended 1987-88; and what was the total tax yield from each of the above groups for 1986-87.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answers 26 and 27 January 1988]:* Information is in the tables. All estimates are provisional. Estimates of the number of taxpayers by marginal rate in 1988-89 are not available.

Number of tax units (thousands)

	1985-86	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
Marginal rate[1]			
Basic rate[2]	19,400	19,400	19,700
40 per cent.	400	410	390
45 per cent.	290	290	330
50 per cent.	160	170	210
55 per cent.	70	80	100
60 per cent.	100	110	140
Total higher rate	1,020	1,060	1,170
Total paying tax	20,400	20,500	20,900
Total[3] not liable to tax	5,300	5,500	5,500

Income tax liabilities by marginal rate[1] of tax unit (£ million)

	1986-87
Marginal rate[1]	
Basic rate[2]	29,630
40 per cent.	2,360
45 per cent.	2,220
50 per cent.	1,820
55 per cent.	1,240
60 per cent.	3,800
Total tax from higher rate tax units	11,450
Total tax liabilities	41,080

[1] The marginal rate is taken as the higher of the marginal rates for married couples making a wife's earnings election.
[2] The basic rates are 30 per cent. for 1985-86, 29 per cent. for 1986-87, and 27 per cent. for 1987-88 and 1988-89.
[3] ie the total with earned income or investment income.

Mortgage Tax Relief

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated cost in 1988-89 of increasing mortgage tax relief to £35,000.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The direct revenue cost, in 1987-88 terms, of an increase in the ceiling for mortgage interest relief to £35,000 is estimated to be about £165 million. This estimate makes no allowance for any consequential changes to the distribution of outstanding mortgages. It would be premature to provide an estimate for 1988-89, since the cost will depend on the amounts of mortgage lending and level of interest rates, as well as on the 1988-89 income tax rates and bands.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the estimated saving to the revenue of allowing only one individual to claim tax relief on any mortgage.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I assume that my hon. Friend is interested in the cost of the additional mortgage interest relief which sharers can receive in respect of a shared loan which exceeds £30,000. The direct revenue cost in 1987-88 of this additional relief is estimated to be about £25 million.

United States Forces

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total cost to the Exchequer of United States forces in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Information on the total cost to the Exchequer is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However the net identifiable public expenditure costs in 1986-87 were as follows:

	£ million
Host Nation Support	[1]6·1
PSA Administrative Expenditure	[2]15·7
Rents for Married Quarters	1·2
Contributions in lieu of rates	9·6
Total	32·6

[1] These are costs incurred by the United Kingdom in pursuance of its obligations under the Status of Forces Agreements.
[2] These costs reflect the net expenses incurred by PSA in design of buildings, letting contracts, supervising work in progress and consultancy fees.

Tax Burden

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the direct tax burden has changed for those on below average earnings since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Income tax liabilities of single people and married couples with total income below

average earnings are £3·4 billion less in 1987-88 than they would be if the 1978-79 tax regime had been retained and indexed for inflation. Average earnings are those for full-time males (all occupations) paid at adult rates and they are estimated at £229·80 per week in 1987-88.

Foreign Companies

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish details of the additional income brought into charge as a result of the controlled foreign companies legislation introduced in the Finance Act 1984, specifying in each financial year *(a)* the total acceptable distributions paid to United Kingdom residents, *(b)* the total number of directions made, *(c)* the total chargeable profits apportioned and assessed under those directions, excluding those under appeal, and *(d)* the number of individual controlled foreign companies and individual groups involved in (i) pursuing acceptable distribution policies and (ii) having directions made on them, including those under appeal.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The additional income brought into charge as a result of the controlled foreign companies legislation introduced in the Finance Act 1984 is as follows:

	Financial year 1985 £ *million*	*Financial year 1986* £ *million*	*Financial year 1987 (to date)* £ *million*
(a) The total acceptable distributions paid to United Kingdom residents	111·57	181·17	203·73
(b) The total number of directions made	Nil	9	16
(c) The total chargeable profits apportioned and assessed under those directions, excluding those under appeal	Nil	2·98	4·12
(d)(i) The number of *individual controlled foreign companies* involved in pursuing acceptable distribution policies	101	138	145
The number of *individual groups* involved in pursuing acceptable distribution policies	48	77	69
(d)(ii) The number of *individual controlled foreign companies* involved in having directions made on them, including those under appeal	Nil	8	14
The number of *individual groups* involved in having directions made on them, including those under appeal	Nil	7	11

Note: The statistics are on the basis of amounts agreed or determined in each Financial Year, and, in the case of acceptable distributions, as reported by local offices.

EC Finance Ministers

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations he will hold with Finance Ministers of other EEC countries in regard to the framework of his forthcoming Budget.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend consults his counterparts in other EC countries on a range of fiscal and monetary issues. The composition of the Budget is, however, a matter for him alone.

Tax Offices (Relocation)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from bodies within the county of Durham concerning the relocation of the 21 district tax offices away from London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Inland Revenue has received representations on this subject from Durham county council. The Inland Revenue's plans to relocate the 21 district tax offices—and parts of head office—have their origin in the reluctance of many trained inspectors to accept transfers to the London area. The choice of location for these offices was made only after a careful and thorough consideration of all the options. Operational and personal needs pointed to locations which already had a number of offices with a sufficient core of fully trained inspectors at particular grades.

Tobacco Tax

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received seeking a substantial increase in tobacco tax in the 1988 Budget, in the light of continuing evidence by bodies including the Royal College of Physicians of the dangers to health posed by smoking.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend has received a number of such representations.

Public Bodies and Corporations

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the public bodies and corporations whose accounts are presented to Parliament each year and the dates on which the accounts were presented in the last 12-month period.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I regret that this information cannot be provided without a disproportionate expenditure of time and resources.

ECOFIN Council

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest meeting of the European Community's Economic and Finance Council.

Mr. Nigel Lawson: The ECOFIN Council met in Brussels on 9 February. I represented the United Kingdom.

The Council heard and discussed interim reports from the chairmen of the monetary committee and committee of central bank governors on the Commission's proposals to complete the liberalisation of capital movements in the Community. The Council agreed that the committees should complete their final reports to the Council by April and that Council working group discussions should start forthwith.

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each of the years 1981-82 to 1985-86 and for the aggregate of these years the number of taxpayers claiming 100 per cent. capital allowances for investment in enterprise zones.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* I regret that this information is not available.

Tax Fraud

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the number of prosecutions for cases of tax fraud detected in 1979 and 1986-87 for which the amount recovered was *(a)* under £999, *(b)* £1,000 to £4,999, *(c)* £5,000 to £9,999, *(d)* £10,000 to £24,999, *(e)* £25,000 to £49,999, *(f)* £50,000 to £99,999, *(g)* £100,000 to £499,999, *(h)* £500,000 to £990,999, *(i)* £1,000,000 to £1,499,999, *(j)* £1,500,000 to £1,999,999 and *(k)* over £2,000,000.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* No records are kept of the total amounts recovered in cases of prosecution for tax fraud. However, the numbers of prosecutions categorised by the amounts of tax due from fraud provable to criminal standards, were:

	1979	*1986-87*
Under £999	42	7
£1,000-£4,999	46	20
£5,000-£9,999	11	33
£10,000-£24,999	14	66
£25,000-£49,999	7	50
£50,000-£99,999	1	25
£100,000-£499,999	3	18
£500,000-£999,999	—	—
£1,000,000-£1,499,999	—	—
£1,500,000-£1,999,999	—	4
over £2,000,000	—	—

These figures do not include police prosecutions, for which details of the tax involved are not held by the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the total amount of money recovered from those cases of tax fraud in 1986-87 which each individually involved more than £1 million.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* The total amount recovered including, where appropriate, interest and penalties was £7,888,255·14.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the number of cases of tax fraud detected in 1979 and 1986-87 for which the amount recovered was *(a)* under £999, *(b)* £1,000 to £4,999, *(c)* £5,000 to £9,999, *(d)* £10,000 to £24,999, *(e)* £25,000 to £49,999, *(f)* £50,000 to £99,999 *(g)* £100,000 to £499,999, *(h)* £500,000 to £990,999, *(i)* £1,000,000 to £1,499,999, *(j)* £1,500,000, to £1,999,999 and *(k)* over £2,000,000.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* The Inland Revenue do not keep records of the number of investigations opened in any particular year, and the total number of investigations settled within each of the categories stipulated could not be provided except at undue cost.

Unpaid Tax

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the numbers of taxpayers for whom the ground for non-payment of tax in 1979 and 1986 was *(a)* that they had gone abroad *(b)* that they were untraceable.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* The numbers of cases in which tax was irrecoverable in 1979 and 1986 because *(a)* the taxpayer had gone abroad or *(b)* the taxpayer was untraceable were:

	Number
1979	
(a) Gone abroad	2,491
(b) Untraceable	23,680
1986	
(a) Gone abroad	2,295
(b) Untraceable	49,009

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for 1979 and 1986 the numbers of taxpayers from whom tax was not collected for reasons of going abroad or being untraceable for whom the amount of tax owing exceeded *(a)* £10,000, *(b)* £50,000, *(c)* £100,000, *(d)* £500,000 and *(e)* £1,000,000.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* I regret that the detailed information requested is not readily available and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

PAYE

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases have been detected since 1979 of employers deducting moneys from employees in respect of PAYE and then not passing such payments to the Inland Revenue; and how many prosecutions ensued.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 11 February 1988]:* Where amounts of PAYE deducted have been properly reported to the Inland Revenue by employers but not paid, debt recovery procedures are instituted. Prosecution does not occur in these cases.

In 1986-87 — the first year for which figures are available — there were 852 detected cases in which deductions made from employees' earnings were not reported to the Revenue. In many of these cases the omissions were simply errors. In cases of negligence or fraud the normal consequence would be money penalties provided for in the Taxes Act. Only in very few instances would the question of criminal proceedings arise. The figures for such proceedings are not recorded separately, and could not be provided except at undue cost.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been expended by his Department on crediting employees with PAYE deductions which had been made by employees but not subsequently passed on to the Inland Revenue..

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 11 February 1988]:* Employees are given credit for all PAYE deductions actually made, whether paid over to the Inland Revenue or not. The total amount of such deductions written off as irrecoverable between 1 November 1979 and 31 October 1986 was £214·7 million.

Taxation

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each year since 1979 *(a)* the basic rate of income tax and *(b)* Government revenue from all taxation, adjusted for inflation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 11 February 1988]:* Following is the information:

	Basic rate of income tax (pence per pound)	*Total taxes and national insurance contributions (£ billion 1986-87 prices)*
1978-79	33	114·1
1979-80	30	121·6
1980-81	30	121·0
1981-82	30	131·4
1982-83	30	132·3
1983-84	30	135·3
1984-85	30	140·9
1985-86	30	143·3
1986-87	29	146·3
1987-88	27	[1]152·5
	[revalued at 1986-87 prices using GDP deflator]	

[1] As forecast in the 1987 Autumn Statement.

Sport and Recreation (Tax Exemption)

Mr. Squire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the net effect to the Exchequer in the current financial year of giving tax exemption without charitable status to the governing bodies of sport and recreation.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the net effect of granting tax exemption without charitable status to the governing bodies of sport and the umbrella representative organisations of such bodies.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answers 11 February 1988]:* I regret that this information is not available centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Persian Gulf

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further developments or action, in application of paragraph 3 of article VIII of the modified Brussels treaty, in geographical areas outside NATO will follow from the concerted action of Western European Union member countries on the Gulf crisis that started in summer 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The action taken by Western European Union member countries in the Gulf is a good example of the practical benefits which appropriate use of the organisation can bring to our security. Further such use of WEU should be considered whenever the right opportunity occurs.

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government in regard to the visit and search of unarmed merchant ships in international waters in the Persian Gulf.

Mr. Mellor: Under article 51 of the United Nations charter, a state actively engaged in armed conflict, such as Iran, is entitled in exercise of its inherent right of self-defence to stop and search a foreign merchant ship on the high seas if there is reasonable ground for suspecting that the ship is taking arms to the other side for use in the conflict. This is an exceptional right: if the suspicions prove to be unfounded and if the ship has not committed acts calculated to give rise to suspicion, then the ship's owners have a good claim for compensation for loss caused by the delay.

USSR

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the main developments in the Soviet Union's external policy which call for a reappraisal of Western European countries' relations with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Mellor: We have welcomed the improved atmosphere of East-West relations and practical achievements such as the intermediate nuclear forces treaty. We have also noted signs of a less aggressive Soviet approach in some foreign policy areas. But we shall judge by deeds not words, and are awaiting in particular full Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Atlantic Alliance

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the extent to which recent developments in the Atlantic Alliance make it essential to strengthen its European pillar; and what role the Western European Union will play in the organisation of strengthening this pillar.

Mr. Mellor: It has long been our objective to strengthen the European pillar of the Alliance. The Western European Union provides a forum for its members to concert a clear and distinctive contribution to the deliberations of the Alliance as a whole.

Bophuthatswana

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what occasions the South African Government have made representations to him, seeking United Kingdom recognition of Bophuthatswana; by whom such representations were made; and what precise form they took.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend has received no such representations in recent years.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, further to the answer of 5 February, if he will make a statement on the relevance of the history of the people of Bophuthatswana before 1977 to the formulation of United Kingdom policy towards Bophuthatswana.

Mrs. Chalker: As I explained in my answer of 8 February, at column 56, our policy is based on the fact that Bophuthatswana was created out of the Republic of South Africa, as a key element in the policy of separate development, to which we are wholly opposed.

Foreign Ministers Meeting (Lusaka)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why Her Majesty's Government were not represented at a meeting of eight Commonwealth Foreign Ministers in Lusaka on 1 February, to consider and review existing sanctions against the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: The United Kingdom is not one of the eight members of the committee.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made on resource assessment work in the Falkland Islands conservation zone.

Mr. Mellor: A data collection and biological research survey programme was instituted by the Falkland Islands Government's fisheries department on the establishment of the Falkland Islands interim conservation and management zone on 1 February 1987. The data is analysed with the assistance of the FIG's scientific advisers, the renewable resources assessment group at Imperial college, who submit regular reports.

Romania

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has received any requests to make representations to the Romanian Government over the planned and actual destruction of churches and other old monuments in the city of Bucharest; and whether he has made any such representations.

Mr. Mellor: We are aware of the strong concern which exists over the destruction of churches and other historic buildings in Bucharest, and over reports of further planned demolitions. My right hon. and learned Friend reflected this concern in his discussions with the Romanian Foreign Minister in London in November 1987.

EC (Border Controls)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on plans to end border controls in western Europe by 1992.

Mrs. Chalker: The Single European Act commits member states to work towards completing the single market by the end of 1992. We wish to see obstacles to the legitimate movement across frontiers of people, goods and services reduced as far as possible. This must be done in a way which preserves our ability to take measures to control immigration, combat terrorism, crime and drug trafficking and maintain essential safeguards for human, animal and plant health in accordance with the Single European Act.

PLO (Training)

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will institute an inquiry into the training of militamen from the Palestine Liberation Organisation in battleground communications, provided by Racal Ltd. in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Mellor: No. The question of the alleged sale of radio equipment by Racal Ltd. to the Palestine Liberation Organisation in 1981 is currently under investigation, as my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Corporate Affairs told the House on 2 February.

Northern Ireland (US Visits)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many locally and nationally elected United States politicians have been invited during each of the last 10 years to visit Northern Ireland at public expense; what positions they held; what was the full cost in each case; how many were involved in each party; how many brought their spouses or other relatives; and in those cases, who paid.

Mrs. Chalker: The table shows United States politicians who have visited Northern Ireland at the invitation and expense of the United Kingdom Government in each year from 1981 to 1987, and the number of relatives who are recorded as accompanying each one. In none of these cases were the expenses of a relative met by the United Kingdom Government. The total cost of all these visits, including travel between Belfast and London, hotel charges and meals, but excluding Government staff time and transport is estimated (at 1987 prices) at £9,000. It is likely that all the visits formed a part of a wider programme which covered other areas of the United Kingdom. The other information sought in the question is not available.

1981
—

1982
—

1983
The Hon. Thomas Hynes, Assessor of Cook County, Illinois.

1984
Mr. Richard Bauman, Member of the Oregon House of Representatives.

1985
Lieutenant Governor George Ryan of Illinois (with one relative).

1986
—

1987
The Hon. Michael Madigan, Speaker, Illinois House of Representatives (with one relative).
Mr. Jack Kubik, Member, Illinois House of Representatives.
Senator Royal Bolling, Senator, State of Massachusetts.

Heysel Stadium

Mr. Heffer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foriegn and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made, in the light of the expected duration of the case and the volume of evidence, of the adequacy of legal aid available in Belgium to assist the lawyers acting for the defendants extradited in the Heysel stadium case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The Belgium authorities have appointed lawyers to represent the detainees. British legal aid is not available oversees. British consular officers continue to monitor the case closely.

Hong Kong (Delegations)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the members of each delegation from Hong Kong that has been received by Ministers in his Department since May 1979, giving the dates of each such meeting.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 1 February 1988]:* Ministers have received the following Hong Kong delegations since May 1979:

October 1979:
Four members of the Urban Council:
Mrs. Elsie Elliot
Mr. Denny Mong-Hua Huang
Mr. Tsin Sai-Min
Miss Cecilia Lai-Yin Yeung

September 1982:
Five members of the Executive and Legislative Councils:
Sir S. Y. Cheung
Mr. R. H. Lobo
Mr. Li Fook-Wo
Miss Lydia Dunn
Mr. Chan Kam-Cheun

May 1984:
Delegation comprising:
Dr. L. K. Ding—Vice President Hong Kong Medical Association
Mr. Fund Wai-Kwong—Hong Kong Federation of Students
Mr. Fung Ho-Lup—Society for Community Organisation
Mr. Ma Kwok-Ming—"Meeting Point"
Mr. Andrew Tu—Association for the Protection of Public Justice
Mr. Fung Kin-Kee—Elected Urban Councillor
Mr. Lee Chik-Yuet—Elected Urban Councillor

May 1984:
Eleven members of the Executive and Legislative Councils:
Sir S. Y. Cheung
Mr. R. H. Lobo
Mr. T. S. Lo
Miss Maria Tam
Mr. Y. L. Cheung
Mr. Allen Lee
Mrs. Selina Chow
Mr. S. K. C. Cheong
Mr. Y. L. Chan
Mr. M. D. Sargent
Mr. O. V. Cheung

December 1984:
Twelve members of the Executive and Legislative Councils:
Sir S. Y. Cheung
Miss Lydia Dunn
Mr. R. H. Lobo
Mr. Q. W. Lee
Miss Maria Tam
Mr. Andrew So
Mr. Y. L. Cheung
Mrs. Selina Chow
Mr. Y. L. Chan
Mrs. Rita Fan
Mr. P. Poon
Mr. Allen Lee

January 1985:
Three members of the Executive and Legislative Councils:
Sir S. Y. Cheung
Miss Maria Tam
Mr. P. Wong

September 1986:
Ten members of the Executive and Legislative Councils:
Sir S. Y. Cheung
Miss Lydia Dunn
Mr. O. V. Cheung
Sir M. Sandberg
Mr. Q. W. Lee
Mr. S. L. Chen
Miss Maria Tam
Mr. Allen Lee
Mr. Donald Liao
Mr. E. P. Ho

January 1988:
Mr. Martin Lee (member of the Legislative Council)

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Family Planning

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further assistance the Government intend to provide for family planning projects in developing countries.

Mr. Chris Patten: I am ready to consider requests for assistance with family planning activities from developing country Governments and non-governmental organisations. The projects in India, Kenya and Pakistan listed in the answer which my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs gave the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) on 26 January at column *130* will include family planning activities.

In addition, subject to parliamentary approval, in 1988 we will contribute to the following multilateral organisations working in family planning:

	£ million
(i) International Planned Parenthood Federation	5·75
(ii) United Nations Fund for Population Activities	5·25
(iii) World Health Organisation Special Programme in Human Reproduction	2·20

Nicaragua

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will urgently consider aid to Nicaragua for the expansion of its education and health programmes.

Mr. Chris Patten: I am not proposing to provide additional Government-to-Government aid to Nicaragua at this time. The European Community provides substantial aid to central America, including Nicaragua.

Bophuthatswana

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what United Kingdom funds have been directed to projects in Bophuthatswana since 1977-78, expressed in cash terms and real terms and as a percentage increase or decrease on the first year when such funds were so directed.

Mr. Chris Patten: The figures are as follows. Those for the period before 1982-83 are not readily available. The projects in question are all non-governmental ones.

	Expenditure in cash terms	*Expenditure in real terms (1987-88 estimated prices)*	*Percentage increase/ decrease in real terms on 1983-84*
	£	*£*	*Per cent.*
1982-83	Nil	—	—
1983-84	227	270	—
1984-85	Nil	—	−100

	Expenditure in cash terms £	Expenditure in real terms (1987-88 estimated prices) £	Percentage increase/ decrease in real terms on 1983-84 Per cent.
1985-86	2,073	2,225	+725
1986-87	3,010	3,138	+1,063
1987-88 (forecast)	18,927	18,927	+6,913

Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list information available to him on the external debt, for the latest available year, for each of the member states of the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference.

Mr. Chris Patten: Total external debt, including the use of International Monetary Fund credits, outstanding at the end of 1986 for each of the SADCC countries is estimated to have been as follows:

Country	$US millions
Angola	1,544
Botswana	358
Lesotho	186
Malawi	1,114
Mozambique	1,390
Swaziland	232
Tanzania	3,955
Zambia	5,300
Zimbabwe	2,480

Sources: The World Bank World Debt Tables 1987-88, Vol. II, except for Angola and Mozambique for which OECD estimates have been provided.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list information available to him on the repayments of external debt, as a proportion of export earnings, for the latest available year, for each of the member states of the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference.

Mr. Chris Patten: Debt service payments (excluding those in respect of short term debt but including repayments to the International Monetary Fund) as a proportion of export earnings in 1986 for each of the SADCC countries is estimated to have been as follows:

Country	Per cent.
Angola	n/a
Botswana	5
Lesotho	50
Malawi	57
Mozambique	n/a
Swaziland	11
Tanzania	25
Zambia	38
Zimbabwe	29

Source: World Bank World Debt Tables 1987-1988, Vol. II.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list information available to him on the repayments of external debt, for the latest available year, of each of the member states of the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference.

Mr. Chris Patten: Repayments of principal and payments of interest on external debts (excluding short term debt but including repayments to the International Monetary Fund) in 1986 by each of the SADCC countries is estimated to have been as follows:

Country	$US millions
Angola	n/a
Botswana	44
Lesotho	14
Malawi	132
Mozambique	n/a
Swaziland	31
Tanzania	87
Zambia	268
Zimbabwe	397

Source: The World Bank World Debt Tables, 1987-1988, Vol. II.

Population Projects

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many requests for assistance with population projects or projects with a population component were received in January.

Mr. Chris Patten: None.

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total expenditure on population projects or projects with a population component in 1987.

Mr. Chris Patten: Figures for total expenditure on bilateral projects financed during 1987 are not yet available. Contributions to multilateral population programmes in 1987 totalled £13·2 million.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Derbyshire (Bids)

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, further to his reply of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *624*, if he will publish figures for the bids by Derbyshire county council; and what percentage this represents of the allowed capital expenditure on education.

Mr. Dunn: The information requested for the years 1981-82 to 1988-89 is set out in tables 1 and 2. Before 1981-82, local education authorities did not receive block allocations but were notified annually, in the context of a rolling programme, of a limit on the value of building starts in the following year.

The allocation in respect of prescribed expenditure does not represent my right hon. Friend's view of what an authority's capital expenditure on education should be. Authorities may use spending power from capital receipts and other flexibilities in the capital control system to supplement the allocations.

Table 1: Plans for and Allocations of Prescribed Capital Expenditure 1981-82—1988-89

Year	Derbyshire's Plans (Cash Prices)	Derbyshire's Allocation[2]	Allocation as per cent. of Plans
	£	£	
1988-89	15,025,000	10,777,000	72
1987-88	20,028,000	9,036,000	45
1986-87	13,942,000	7,202,000	52
1985-86	10,794,000	7,239,000	67
1984-85	9,885,000	6,546,000	66
1983-84[1]	—	6,848,710	n.a.
1982-83[1]	—	8,490,005	n.a.
1981-82[1]	—	8,750,830	n.a.

[1] Cash plans were not requested in these years.
[2] The allocations shown are those announced before the start of the financial year.

Table 2: Plans for and Allocations for Capital Expenditure by Governors of Aided Schools, 1981-82—1988-89 in Derbyshire

Year	Governors Plans for the Area of Derbyshire	Allocation[3]	Allocation as per cent. of Plans
	£	£	
1988-89	1,580,000	1,155,000	73
1987-88	900,000	685,000	76
1986-87	665,000	190,000	29
1985-86	455,000	375,000	82
1984-85	475,000	225,000	47
1983-84[1]	215,000	310,000	144
1982-83[1]	693,000	576,000	83
1981-82[2]	—	—	—

[1] The planned expenditure relates to new projects only but the allocations included allowances for on-going projects.
[2] Allocations for 1981-82 were made on a different basis from those for later years and have therefore been omitted.
[3] The allocations shown are those announced before the start of the financial year in question and do not include subsequent revisions. Allocations made may be greater than the planned expenditure shown in the table. The information provided on bids was sometimes incomplete and compensatory adjustments were made to allocations.

Medical Students

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of *(a)* women and *(b)* men students in all medical schools accepted for pre-clinical study in 1958, 1968, 1978 and 1988.

Mr. Jackson: The intake of pre-clinical medical students to United Kingdom medical schools is shown in the following table. 1960 is the first year for which information was collected.

	Academic year starting in			
	1960	1968	1978	[1]1987
Men	1,528	2,076	2,480	2,246
Women	492	721	1,499	1,874

[1] Provisional.

University Grants

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will publish tables showing *(a)* the volume of University Grants Committee grants to each university in Britain for each year since 1979-80, including planned expenditure to 1990-91, at constant 1987 prices and *(b)* the overall value of these grants at 1987 prices for each year since 1979-80, including planned expenditure to 1990-91, to (i) Scottish institutions, (ii) Welsh institutions, (iii) English institutions and (iv) British institutions as a whole; and if he will express as a percentage the change in real terms of these grants to (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) between 1979-80 and 1990-91, and 1987-88 and 1990-91;

(2) if he will publish a table showing for each year since 1979-80 to 1990-91 the value of Government grants to each university in Britain.

Mr. Jackson: For 1979-80, I refer the hon. Member to table 41 of "Statistics of Education 1979 Universities Vol. 6", and for 1980-81 to 1985-86 to table 3 of the respective annual editions of "University Statistics Volume 3 Finance". Copies of these documents are available in the Library. Comparable information is not available for later years. The figures may be converted to constant prices on an academic year basis by taking account of the following gross domestic product deflators:

Year	
1979-80	60·780
1980-81	69·625
1981-82	75·673
1982-83	80·309
1983-84	83·988
1984-85	88·275
1985-86	92·475
1986-87	95·825
1987-88	100·000

Student Grants

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what provisions he has made for the financial value of student grants to increase so that they will take into account students *(a)* liability for payment of the poll tax and *(b)* loss of housing benefit entitlement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Students' liability to pay the community charge, and eligibility to receive housing benefit, are among the many matters which will be taken into account in reaching decisions on future levels of student support from public funds. The main rates of grant for the 1988-89 academic year have already been announced, at column 759 on 18 December 1987.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects the student financial support review to report.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he now expects to publish the student financial support review.

Mr. Jackson: The work of the student support review is expected to be completed by the middle of this year.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will indicate for each year since 1977 the value of the maximum student grant, outside London, at constant 1987 prices.

Mr. Jackson: The information is as follows:

Academic Year	"Elsewhere" rate of grant in constant (1987-88) prices
1977-78	2,271
1978-79	2,294
1979-80	2,230
1980-81	2,210
1981-82	2,130
1982-83	2,063
1983-84	2,042
1984-85	2,017
1985-86	1,964
1986-87	1,980
1987-88	1,972

Notes:

1. Repricing is based on the RPI for September each year.
2. For the years 1977-78 to 1983-84 an adjustment has been made to take account of revised arrangements for travel expenses introduced in 1984-85.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will seek to compensate students through increases in their grant for *(a)* their loss of housing benefit and *(b)* their liability for at least 20 per cent. of the poll tax.

Mr. Jackson: All prospective changes in students' financial circumstances will be taken into account in determining future levels of student support.

ILEA

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what specific measures he will undertake to safeguard the standard of provision of nursery education in inner London, following the abolition of the Inner London education authority;

(2) what specific measures he will undertake to safeguard the standard of provision of adult education in inner London, following the abolition of the Inner London education authority;

(3) what specific measures he will undertake to safeguard the standard of provision of education for children with special needs in inner London, following the abolition of the Inner London education authority;

(4) what specific measures he will undertake to safeguard the standard of provision of the youth service in inner London, following the abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Dunn: Under the proposals announced by my right hon. Friend on 4 February, each Inner London council will become the local education authority for its own area. Councils will be required to publish in 1989 development plans setting out the service they expect to provide from April 1990. The Government will issue guidance on the subjects to be covered by these plans, which will include nursery education, provision for children with special educational needs, adult education and the youth service.

My right hon. Friend also explained that the Department of Education and Science will be discussing, with the Inner London councils, which services, if any, might be better provided by formal or informal co-operative arrangements.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Liaison Committees

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the frequency of meetings of police liaison committees; and if he will list *(a)* the 10 committees that meet most frequently and *(b)* the 10 committees that meet least often.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In accordance with section 106 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, the arrangements made in each police area for obtaining the views of the community on policing are the responsibility of individual police authorities, or, in the Metropolitan police district, the Commissioners of Police. I regret that information in the form requested is not available.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the number of times the police liaison committee has met on the Isle of Wight.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand that the police liaison committee for the Isle of Wight met five times in 1986 and once in 1987.

Football Games (Arrests)

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests have been made at or around English Football League grounds in the current season.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: 2,297 up to 31 October, the latest date for which figures are available.

Child Murder

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table showing the numbers of *(a)* homicides made known to the police in each of the past 10 years which involved the death of a child under 16 years of age and over the age of one year, and *(b)* infanticides made known to the police in the past 10 years, indicating the numbers of such cases where the child or infant was sexually abused.

Mr. John Patten: The available information is published in chapter 4, "Homicide", of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1986", Cm. 233, copies of which are in the Library.

Remand Prisoners (Police Cells)

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many juveniles have spent time on remand, or convicted, in police cells in the last six months, and how many of those were removed from the region in which they appeared in court in order to be held in police cells;

(2) how many 17 to 20-year-olds have spent time on remand, or convicted, in police cells in the last six months; and how many of these were removed from the region in which they appeared in court in order to be held in police cells.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Information is not available in the form requested. Records do not distinguish between juveniles and other under-21s or between convicted and

unconvicted prisoners. The available information relates to persons aged under 21 years held in police cells in England and Wales on any day. The following table lists this information for each Friday between 7 August 1987 and 5 February this year:

Date	Number
7 August	86
14 August	77
21 August	41
28 August	16
4 September	179
11 September	213
18 September	190
25 September	193
2 October	272
9 October	272
16 October	249
23 October	273
30 October	181
6 November	203
13 November	203
20 November	152
27 November	201
4 December	238
11 December	218
18 December	213
25 December	179
1 January	216
8 January	255
15 January	257
22 January	238
29 January	247
5 February	236

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will authorise Her Majesty's Inspector of Prisons to carry out an investigation into the situation in police cells which are regularly used for the detention of prisoners on remand; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. The role of the Chief Inspector of Prisons is to report on prison matters, whereas care and custody of prioners in police cells are the responsibility of chief officers of police.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners on remand were being detained in police cells on the most recent date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On Friday 12 February, 985 prisoners were held in police cells, in England and Wales, most of whom would have been on remand.

Hampshire Constabulary

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the Hampshire police authority, or other interested parties, about increasing the establishment of the Hampshire constabulary.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Hampshire police authority sought an increase in its force establishment of 23 posts in 1987-88. Representations in support of the application have been received from a number of my hon. Friends whose constituencies lie within the force area and from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley).

My right hon. Friend was unable to approve the application for 1987-88 but the authority has been informed that further consideration will be given to it in 1988-89.

Nuclear Power Stations (Fires)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many instances have occurred since 1979 where access to a nuclear power station has been denied to fire officers when a known fire has taken place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the Question from the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) on 22 January at column 869.

Charity Law

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any proposals for the reform of the law on charities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend announced on 21 January, in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), at column 1089, that the Government intend to bring forward legislation to implement the recommendations of Sir Philip Woodfield's efficiency scrutiny for the supervision of charities.

Police Ancillary Services (Privatisation)

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what ancillary services to the Metropolitan police have been privatised since 1979.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the following services have been contracted out in whole or in part since 1979, although a few may have been contracted out to some extent before then:

- vehicle servicing and repairs
- boat and aircraft repairs
- radio repairs
- vehicle wheelclamping
- design and organisation of building works
- design and installation of electrical, mechanical and public health services in buildings
- maintenance, alterations and improvements to buildings
- quantity surveying
- cleaning of buildings
- laundering
- security of buildings
- computer services
- publishing and bookbinding
- recovery of vehicles

From 15 February 1988, the removal of storage of illegally parked vehicles in three areas of London will also be contracted out.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set up an independent review body to examine evidence in relation to the Birmingham pub bombings that was inadmissible before the Court of Appeal.

Mr. Hurd: No. The Court of Appeal has carefully reviewed the convictions in this case and has concluded that they are safe. I am not aware of any evidence which

the court was unable to consider and which merits further inquiry. In particular, having studied reports of what the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) has said to my hon. and learned Friend, the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), to Home Office officials and to the police, I have found no grounds for further action on the basis of his statements.

Correspondence

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many letters he has received from residents of the London borough of Tower Hamlets in the last two years; and what were their subject matters.

Mr. Hurd: Correspondence is not recorded in a way which enables this information to be obtained.

Palestine Liberation Organisation (Training)

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on what basis his Department gave permission for the entry of members of the Palestine Liberation Organisation to be trained at Racal training college, Heckfield place;

(2) when applications were made by members of the Palestine Liberation Organisation to enter the United Kingdom for the purpose of training in battlefield communications by Racal Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Without full particulars of the individuals concerned we have been unable to trace these applications, which were apparently made some years ago.

Leicester (Officials' Visit)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the purpose of the visit by his Department's officials to Leicester on 16 February; what are *(a)* the names of the officials concerned; *(b)* the criteria used to select those organisations attending the meeting and *(c)* the names of the other cities to be visited in similar fashion; why hon. Members for Leicester have not been informed of the visits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: As is the normal practice, I wrote to the hon. Members for Leicester on 11 February notifying them and explaining the purpose of the visit by officials from the immigration and nationality department to Leicester on 16 February. The officials concerned are Mr. R. M. Morris; Mr. R. Fries; Mr. G. Treadwell; Mr. R. Weekes; and Mr. B. Leslie. Leicester county council was responsible for issuing invitations, but the meeting is open to the public. Similar visits have been made to Birmingham and Blackburn, and one to Haringey is also planned.

Wedding (Prison)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why Sister Sarah Clarke has been denied permission to attend the wedding of Paul Hill and Marian Sarah Seravalli at Her Majesty's prison Long Largin on 12 February.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Sister Clarke is not on Mr. Hill's list of approved visitors and the decision to deny her permission to attend the wedding ceremony was made in accordance with the rules governing visits to category A prisoners.

Immigration

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) in what proportion of cases in which he received a recommendation from the appellate authorities in respect of individuals appealing against refusal to vary leave to remain in the United Kingdom, the adjudicators have *(a)* refused to hear or consider compassionate grounds and *(b)* made no recommendation that he should exercise his discretion to consider compassionate grounds;

(2) how many recommendations he has received from the appellate authorities in respect of individuals appealing against refusal to vary leave to remain in the United Kingdom during each of the last three years; in how many of those cases the adjudicator recommended that he should consider compassionate circumstances; and in how many of those cases he did exercise discretion on compassionate circumstances.

Mr. Renton: No central record of these recommendations is held.

Prisons

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on prison overcrowding.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On Friday 12 February, nearly 48,700 prisoners were held in prison service establishments in England and Wales. They were held in accommodation designed for 42,400. A further 985 prisoners were held in police cells, and the total population was some 1,500 higher than a year ago. We are tackling the rapid population increase by measures designed to reduce demand by building up convincing alternatives to custodial sentences and remands in custody, and by increasing the supply of prison places. Our building programme will deliver four new prisons this year.

Heysel Stadium

Mr. Heffer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will take steps to grant financial aid to the lawyers who are assisting the Belgian lawyers defending those involved in the Heysel stadium case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: There is no provision for such expenditure. On the question whether legal aid could be available for this case, I would refer the hon. Member to the reply to his question being given today by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General.

Dr. Frank Skuse

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the light of Dr. Skuse's evidence before the Court of Appeal, he will give the data of the first recorded expression of doubt about Dr. Skuse's competence; and what form it took.

Mr. John Patten: It is not the practice to disclose details of this nature about individual members of staff.

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases in which Dr. Frank Skuse gave evidence as a Home Office forensic scientist the defendant entered a not guilty plea.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* The forensic science service does not keep records of the pleas entered by defendants in cases which it investigates.

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of cases, year by year, in which Dr. Frank Skuse gave evidence as a Home Office forensic scientist.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* The information is not available in the form requested.

Dr. Alan Clift

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the dates when Dr. Alan Clift worked at his Department's forensic science laboratory at Chorley.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Dr. Clift worked at the forensic science laboratory at Chorley, formerly located at Preston, from 1 January 1955 until 28 June 1974.

Fixed Penalty Fines

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the total number of foreign offenders imprisoned for each of the last five years; and if he will express the figures as a percentage of *(a)* the total number of prisoners and *(b)* the total number of foreign prisoners imprisoned for road traffic offences;

(2) if he will list, by country of origin, the total number of offenders imprisoned for road traffic offences for each of the last five years, who were using foreign-registered vehicles.

Dr. Douglas Hogg [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 February and 8 February 1988]: It is regretted that the figures given in the reply were inaccurate. The correct information requested appears in the following table:

Receptions under sentence[1] into Prison Department establishments in England and Wales: by type of offence and citizenship, 1986

Number of persons

Citizenship	*Motoring*	*Other*	*All*
British, British Overseas, British Dependent Territories, Commonwealth countries, Pakistan and the Republic of Ireland	10,010	74,910	84,920
Other Foreign nationalities of which:	90	930	1,020
Belgium/Luxembourg	1	—	—
France	1	—	—
German Federal Republic	13	—	—
Greece	3	—	—
Holland	1	—	—
Hungary	3	—	—
Italy	8	—	—
Poland	6	—	—
Spain	2	—	—
Other Europe	10	—	—
United States of America	9	—	—
South Africa	3	—	—
Burma	2	—	—
Peoples' Republic of China	1	—	—
Iran	4	—	—
Israel	1	—	—
Turkey	5	—	—
USSR	1	—	—
Rest of the World	12	—	—
Not recorded	50	170	210
All	10,140	76,010	86,150

[1] Including fine defaulters. Based on records held centrally which are approximate.

Royal Observer Corps

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish figures for the number of persons currently enrolled in and for the numbers of persons entering and leaving the Royal Observer Corps in each of the years 1979 to 1987; and whether the shortage of personnel is affecting the Royal Observer Corps' ability to perform its operational role.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Home Department. The total strength of the Royal Observer Corps as at 31 December 1987 was 10,404. The numbers of persons entering and leaving the corps in each of the years 1979 to 1987 are as follows. There is no evidence to suggest that the current shortfall is having a serious effect on the corps' ability to perform its operational role, although effort continues to be put in to the recruitment of spare-time observers.

Year	*Entering*	*Leaving*
1979	1,223	1,364
1980	2,193	1,260
1981	1,943	1,535
1982	1,617	1,588
1983	1,434	1,747
1984	1,567	1,636
1985	1,334	1,454
1986	1,278	1,585
1987	1,399	1,542

NORTHERN IRELAND

Discrimination

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of alleged discrimination have come before the courts in the last five years; and what was the decision on each case, listing the organisations involved.

Mr. Viggers: Twenty-one appeals against findings by the Fair Employment Agency, concerning discrimination on grounds of religious or political belief under the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1976, have come before the courts in Northern Ireland within the five years ending 31 January 1988. These are as follows, together with the decision where known. The decision in every case cannot be obtained without disproportionate effort and cost.

Table 1
Appeals to County Court under section 28(3) of the Fair Employment (NI) Act 1976

Date appeal lodged	Complainant		Respondent organisation	Outcome of appeal
April 1984	Stoneman	v	Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway	Not known
July 1984	McLaughlin	v	Department of the Environment	Dismissed
October 1984	Sterritt	v	F. A. Wellworth Co. Ltd.	Dismissed
February 1985	Timoney	v	University of Ulster	Withdrawn
January 1985	Wilson	v	Anglo Irish Meats	Allowed
May 1985	King	v	Eastern Health Board (2 cases)	Not known
November 1985	Boyle	v	Short Brothers plc	Dismissed
April 1986	Carlin	v	NI Postal Board	Dismissed
April 1987	McFetridge	v	Cookstown Community Project	Not known
July 1987	Herald	v	Harland and Wolff	Not known
November 1987	Brewster	v	Western Education and Library Board	Not known

Appeals to County Court by respondents under section 28(2) of the Fair Employment (NI) Act 1976: from 1983

Date appeal lodged	Organisation involved	Outcome of appeal
January 1983	Maghera High School Management Committee	Settled at court
December 1984	Southern Health and Social Services Board (2 cases)	Allowed
April 1985	Northern Ireland Electricity Service	Allowed
April 1985	Derry City Council	Allowed
February 1986	Department of Environment (NI)	Allowed
November 1986	The Village Inn (2 cases)	Dismissed
May 1987	Ministry of Defence	Dismissed

Murders

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many murders were committed in the constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone in each year since 1970; what information he has as to how many of these murders have been committed by the Irish Republican Army; and for how many there have been convictions;

(2) how many murders were committed in each county in Northern Ireland in each year since 1970; what information he has as to how many of these murders have been committed by the Irish Republican Army;and for how many there have been convictions;

(3) how many murders were committed in Northern Ireland in each year since 1970; what information he has as to how many of these murders have been committed by the Irish Republican Army; and for how many there have been convictions.

Mr. Stanley *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

London City Action Team

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will describe the remit, record of activity, and objectives of the London City Action Team.

Mr. Atkins: The city action teams, set up in April 1985, bring together my Department, the Department of Employment and the Department of the Environment. These are the Departments most responsible for boosting business confidence and development, improving training and the built environment, and encouraging small businesses. The teams co-ordinate Government programmes, which, for example in the Inner London partnership authorities of Hackney, Islington and Lambeth are estimated to amount to over £300 million of expenditure this year. They target those programmes more effectively on the needs of the inner city. They also aim to encourage private sector action for cities and investment in them.

Particular objectives of the London team are to encourage enterprise, promote tourism and address employment difficulties covered by the mismatch between demand and the availability of jobs and skills. Since April 1987, the team has had an extra £1 million to help meet these aims, especially through joint projects with the private sector, for example through two local purchasing initiatives in south, north and east London in association with the south London business initiative and Business in the Community. The team's contribution of £82,000 is matched by £85,000 from the private sector; by contributing around £89,000 for a mobile training and technology unit for small clothing firms in the east end and elsewhere in association with private support of at least £75,000; by supporting a multi-purpose training centre in Lewisham designed to help reduce the mismatch of skills and job opportunities in London. The team is contributing £55,000 alongside private sector support from TEAM Greyfriars Ltd of £87,000.

I am satisfied that the team is working well, meeting its objectives and making London a better place in which to live and work.

Retail Sales

Mr. Wells: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his estimate, taking into account the relevant figures for December 1987, of the rate at which retail sales are rising on an annual basis; and what was the figure a year earlier.

Mr. Butcher: The final estimate of the annual rise in the volume of retail sales in 1987 was 5·8 per cent; the corresponding figure a year earlier was 5·4 per cent.

ECGD (Tender to Contract Scheme)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will review the Export Credits Guarantee Department tender to contract scheme, in view

of the rates and conditions offered by the foreign exchange market for currency options and the minimal take-up rate for the scheme in the past three years.

Mr. Alan Clark: The tender to contract scheme has been reviewed twice in recent years. In view of the heavy losses incurred under the scheme in 1984 premium rates were raised, the minimum contract value was increased to £10 million and it became a requirement that applicants should demonstrate a genuine need to commit a firm foreign currency tender. Although the reduction in applications is probably partly due to these changes, it also reflects the worldwide decline in project business.

Following a further comprehensive review in 1986, I concluded that the scheme could still play a useful role in helping exporters compete for new business and that experience indicated that the terms of the scheme were sound if the remit to contain costs was to be met. That remit was endorsed by the Committee of Public Accounts in its second report for the 1987-88 Session which followed the transfer of the scheme to the public expenditure account. However to meet a major criticism of exporters, from 1 April 1987 the non-refundable initial premium paid when cover is issued was halved.

The scheme is a minor one supplementing the protection available from the foreign exchange market and of some value to British exporters. However, it is important to continue to contain potential claims on public expenditure. In view of this, I do not consider that a further review should be carried out, although of course the scheme will continue to be monitored.

British Telecom

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will refer to the Director General of Oftel British Telecom's practice of supplying subscribers' names, addresses and telephone numbers to other companies for use in unsolicited mail and telephone calls; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The Director General of Telecommunications has a duty under section 49 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 to consider any matter which relates to telecommunication services or apparatus which is the subject of a representation by or on behalf of a person who has an interest in that matter. The director general will consider the hon. Member's question and write to him.

Consumer Credit Act 1974

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will seek to amend the Consumer Credit Act 1974 so as to stop the practice whereby files supplied by a credit reference agency under section 184(1) of the Act may in some circumstances include information about people other than the particular consumer involved.

Mr. Maude: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to section 158(1) of the Consumer Credit Act. I have no plans to change this provision of the Act. I am aware, however, of the concern about certain commercial practices of credit reference agencies. The Director General of Fair Trading has a statutory responsibility in this area, and I know that he is considering this issue.

Airbus

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, columns *608-10*, if in his recent talks with British Aerospace he discussed possible Government subsidies to compensate the company for losses incurred on Airbus in consequence of dollar rate fluctuations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I have nothing to add to the answer which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster gave the hon. Member on 2 February 1988 at column *608* about his recent talks with British Aerospace.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his policy on the proposal of the continental partners of Airbus that subsidies should be given to Airbus Industrie to compensate for fluctuations in the dollar; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I am not aware of such a proposal.

Member's Questions

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster why information contained in a press release from his Department dated 1 February could not be given in answer to parliamentary questions from the hon. Member for Great Grimsby on Monday 8 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Member's questions of 8 February, at column 148, referred to the appointment of underwriters, an advertising agency and stockbrokers. My replies explained that Rowe and Pitman Ltd had been appointed stockbroking advisers for the flotation, but that no decisions had yet been taken on underwriting or advertising. This remains the position.

My Department's press release of 1 February related to the appointment of merchant bank advisers, stockbrokers and reporting accountants. Had the hon. Member asked in his questions of 8 February about merchant bank advisers or reporting accountants, I would have been pleased to give him that information.

Rover Group (Job Vetting)

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will call for a report from the chairman of the Rover Group on the vetting of job applicants in conjunction with the Economic League; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) on 11 February at column 307.

DEFENCE

AWRE Aldermaston

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 26 January, *Official Report*, column *163*, what is the current full establishment of AWRE Aldermaston; and what is the current complement of staff.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is not our practice to disclose the numbers of staff employed on the nuclear warhead programme.

Service Personnel (Medical Treatment)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers are currently receiving electroconvulsive therapy for depression.

Mr. Freeman: There are no case currently being treated by the Army medical services.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers who have applied to leave Her Majesty's forces over the past 12 months have been found to be suffering from depression and received medical treatment as a result.

Mr. Freeman: No cases of depression have been found specifically as a result of soldiers applying to leave the Army over the past 12 months. However, within that period there have been 13 cases of soldiers in service being found to be suffering from severe depression who were subsequently medically discharged following counselling and treatment.

Thames House, Millbank

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to locate any unit of his Department in Thames house, Millbank.

Mr. Freeman: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) on 20 January 1988, at column 764.

Civil Servants (Numbers)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give for each year since 1980 the number of civil servants employed by his Department, excluding those employed on construction, in *(a)* Greater London, *(b)* England excluding Greater London, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Scotland and *(e)* Northern Ireland.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is not possible to distinguish Ministry of Defence employees employed on construction, but the number of full-time equivalent civilian staff, excluding casual staff, employed on January for each year since 1980 was as follows:

Date	*Greater London*	*Rest of England*	*Wales*	*Scotland*	*Northern Ireland*
1 January 1980	29,763·0	154,087·0	7,363·5	19,467·5	3,231·0
1 January 1981	27,742·5	147,904·0	7,514·5	19,292·5	3,086·5
1 January 1982	26,694·5	140,339·0	7,222·5	18,655·5	2,946·5
1 January 1983	25,074·5	132,877·0	7,059·5	18,335·0	2,825·0
1 January 1984	24,721·5	126,221·0	6,834·0	18,594·0	2,760·5
1 January 1985	22,332·0	120,922·0	6,631·0	18,398·5	2,708·5
1 January 1986	21,090·5	117,966·0	6,338·0	18,032·5	2,693·0
1 January 1987	20,373·0	114,038·0	6,137·5	18,130·5	2,621·0
1 January 1988	19,268·5	99,518·0	5,759·5	12,268·0	2,618·0

For the purposes of consistency and comparability the above figures exclude personnel employed at royal ordnance factories, which changed to independent Companies Act status on 2 January 1985.

Some 10,800 of the reduction in numbers in the rest of England between January 1987 and January 1988 was due to the transfer of royal dockyard staff to commercial management on 6 April 1987, and some 5,700 of the reduction in Scotland between the same dates was due to the similar transfer of Royal Dockyard Rosyth staff.

Diego Garcia

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the military facilities available to the United States armed forces on Diego Garcia.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The United States Government operate a United States navy support facility on Diego Garcia, in accordance with the provisions of the 1976 Exchange of Notes, Cmnd. 6413.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of *(a)* United States personnel and *(b)* United States aircraft based on Diego Garcia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: There has been no material change in the numbers of United States service personnel on Diego Garcia since the reply of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Mr. Stanley) to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 19 January 1987 at column 452. As for the deployment of United States military resources, it is not our usual practice to comment on details.

Merchant Ships (Hong Kong)

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what date Hong Kong-registered merchant ships were added to the list of those ships covered by the information and notification and accompaniment system applied in the Persian Gulf.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Armilla patrol has been accompanying merchant ships since early 1987. Hong Kong and dependent territory registered merchant ships have been eligible for protection from the Armilla patrol ever since it was established in 1980.

Ships (Lost Components)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list each occasion since 1979 on which large components or prefabricated sections of ships being built under contract for his Department have been lost at sea and at what locations; what was the total cost of the losses; how much was recovered from the contractors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: There have been no previous losses at sea since 1979 of large components or prefabricated sections of ships being built under contract for the MOD.

Trident Submarine

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department proposes to take to prevent a recurrence of the loss of the bow section of a Trident submarine off the Mull of Galloway on 5 February; what discussions have taken place with the relevant contractors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The MOD has informed the company dealing with a shipment due next week of the importance of giving careful attention to the shipping arrangements. In the longer term, recommendations from the inquiries into the recent incident will be taken up, as appropriate.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the implications for the timing and cost of the Trident programme of the loss at sea on 5 February of the bow section of a Trident submarine; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which the bow section of a Trident submarine rolled off the dock of the ship transporting it from Glasgow to Barrow-in-Furness on 5 February; whether any casualties were involved; if he will give the precise location of the bow section; at what depth of water it is lying; what steps will be taken to mark the spot; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will order an immediate inquiry into the loss of the bow section of a Trident submarine off the Mull of Galloway on 5 February; if there are any penalty clauses in the contract with the fabricator which can be invoked in these circumstances; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what estimate is available to him of the value of the bow section of a Trident submarine lost off the Mull of Galloway on 5 February; what attempts will be made to salvage this item and at whose expense; and if he will make a statement;

(5) what is his assessment of the risk of the Trident bow section lost at sea on 5 February falling into the hands of a hostile foreign power; what steps his Department is taking to avert this risk; what resources are being devoted to this task; and if he will make a statement;

(6) what assessment he has made of the risk posed to other sea traffic by *(a)* the presence off the Mull of Galloway of an unsecured Trident bow section and *(b)* his Department's attempts to recover it or prevent it falling into unauthorised hands; and if he will make a statement;

(7) what steps his Department has taken to warn *(a)* fishing vessels and *(b)* other marine craft of the presence off the Mull of Galloway of an unsecured Trident bow section; whether other vessels will be informed of the precise location of the item; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The loss of a forward dome structure for a Vanguard class submarine occurred on 5 February off the coast of South Galloway whilst it was being transferred from the Clyde to Barrow on the cargo vessel "Skellig Rock". The item, valued at some £¼ million, is in a water depth of 55 m.

Later on that same voyage, on 6 February, more sections of Vanguard class submarine structure were lost overboard near Walney Island. These items also valued at some £¼ million, are in a water depth of 16 m. We have had no notification of any casualties involved in these incidents.

The detailed circumstances of these incidents are the subject of inquiries currently being undertaken by the Shipbuilder (VSEL) and the sub-contractor (Motherwell Bridge Engineering). My Department is represented at these inquiries, which will be additional to the insurers' inquiries. There is a liquidated damages clause in the contract with the fabricators (MBE).

The consequences of these incidents are a matter for the shipbuilder and his sub-contractor to make good. Our present view is that there will be no effect on the overall United Kingdom Trident programme.

Attempts will be made to recover all the lost items; however, no estimate of the expense to the parties concerned of such salvage is available at present. In the meantime, Hydrographer has issued the appropriate warnings to shipping and the coastguard is aware of the incidents. Neither location has been marked, but Motherwell Bridge Engineering has been formally requested to provide picket boat surveillance over the forward dome structure whilst the coastguard is keeping watch over the other items.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department takes to monitor the arrangements for transporting components and prefabricated sections for the Trident submarines; whether any representative of his Department accompanies such cargoes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department is not required to approve the transport arrangements, as these are the responsibility of the shipbuilder and his sub-contractor.

Binary Munitions (NATO)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to the answer, *Official Report*, 26 January, column *186*, the new binary munitions will be assigned for use by NATO.

Mr. Ian Stewart: No.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to his answer, *Official Report*, 26 January, column *165*, the new United States binary chemical weapons will also remain solely for the use of the United States forces.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Yes.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met his United States counterpart to discuss chemical weapons.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I have nothing to add to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to the hon. Member on 26 January 1988 at column *164*.

Armilla Patrol

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria are laid down on the ownership of British foreign-flagged ships to qualify them for accompaniment by the Armilla patrol in the Persian Gulf.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave the hon. Member on 1 February 1988 at column *445*.

Maintenance and Affiliation Orders

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average time the Army Board of the Defence Councils takes to deal with an appeal under section 180 of the Army Act 1955.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* Typically, the time taken from submission to the conclusion of an appeal varies between three to six months depending on the complexity of the case, and the amount of preparatory work which needs to be done before presentation to the Army Board.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Staff (Clocking-on)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, how many staff of the House *(a)* are and *(b)* are not obliged to clock on for work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Beith: Two hundred and twenty two staff of the House are required to clock on for work and 695 are not required to do so. The former are industrial staff employed in the Refreshment Department. The requirement for these staff to clock on reflects the provisions of the House of Commons (Administration) Act 1978 under which conditions of staff of the House are kept broadly in line with those in the Civil Service, where industrial staff are required to record their hours of work. It also facilitates the calculation of overtime pay for those staff who are required to work shifts and who have varied starting and finishing times.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, when clocking-on for Refreshment Department staff was first introduced; under what conditions as to its duration; and if he has any plans to end the practice.

Mr. Beith: Clocking-on for industrial staff in the Refreshment Department was introduced as a permanent arrangement in 1967 on the advice of a consultant engaged by the Department. The old system of clock cards was discontinued in the latter part of 1986 and replaced,after consultation with the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA), by a modern electronic system. When the system was first introduced there was no official trade union representation in the Refreshment Department. Consultation did take place, however, when the system was upgraded in 1986. After allowing a settling-in period in which to gain experience, it was decided to review the system. A consultant has been engaged, through the CCTA, who will report to management. The future of the present system will then be considered.

Visitors

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council when the last review of the procedures for allocating tickets, special permits and guides for parties of visitors to the House took place; and if he will make a statement on the streamlining of current procedures.

Mr. Wakeham: Arrangements for Members' parties on the line of route were last reviewed by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee of the Services Committee in January 1987. If the hon. Gentleman has any particular points to raise, I suggest that in the first instance he should write to the Serjeant at Arms.

TRANSPORT

Severn Bridge

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, pursuant to his answer of 14 December 1987, *Official Report*, column *421*, he will estimate the percentage rise in tolls on the Severn bridge to achieve the objective laid down in the Severn Bridge Tolls Act 1965 should any rise be deferred for *(a)* one year, *(b)* two years and *(c)* five years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On the basis of assumptions contained in my reply of 29 January, at columns *403-4*, current projections indicate *(a)* 90 per cent., *(b)* 100 per cent., and *(c)* 140 per cent.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, columns *403-4*, his projections of the required level of tolls increase at the Severn bridge to achieve the objectives of the Severn Bridge Tolls Act 1965 take into account the effect of a second Severn bridge on traffic flows over the original bridge.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No.

Highway Maintenance

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the information on local authority expenditure on highway maintenance given in his reply to the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson), *Official Report*, 27 January, columns *260-2*, included expenditure on public rights of way; and if he will list for each shire county for the years 1984-85, 1985-86 and 1986-87, the expenditure on maintenance of rights of way.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Expenditure on the maintenance of public rights of way will generally be included as part of local highway authorities' total expenditure on highway maintenance. Figures are available only for expenditure on the maintenance of "footways, cycle tracks and other rights of way" by shire counties in 1984-85, 1985-86 and 1986-87. These are shown in the following table. No further disaggregation of these figures is possible.

Local authority highway maintenance expenditure
Footways, Cycle tracks and other rights of way

£ million

County	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Avon	3·101	3·115	3·311
Bedfordshire	0·696	0·783	0·752
Berkshire	0·920	1·152	1·350
Buckinghamshire	1·711	2·000	1·956
Cambridgeshire	1·058	0·646	1·606
Cheshire	1·646	2·411	2·467
Cleveland	1·048	0·347	0·355

County	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87
Cornwall	1·485	1·303	1·850
Cumbria	0·953	0·303	0·945
Derbyshire	1·941	2·017	2·548
Devon	2·021	2·646	2·612
Dorset	0·700	0·870	0·890
Durham	2·725	2·175	1·955
East Sussex	0·869	1·197	1·814
Essex	4·312	4·948	5·641
Gloucestershire	0·951	1·028	1·310
Hampshire	1·407	1·364	1·383
Hereford and Worcestershire	1·122	1·311	1·492
Hertfordshire	2·239	2·372	1·679
Humberside	2·687	2·581	3·045
Isle of Wight	0·384	0·126	0·129
Kent	3·084	3·200	3·219
Lancashire	1·719	1·974	1·904
Leicestershire	1·631	3·033	3·265
Lincolnshire	2·363	2·549	3·075
Norfolk	1·445	1·657	1·696
Northamptonshire	1·283	0·987	1·131
Northumberland	0·196	0·248	0·254
North Yorkshire	0·431	0·473	0·499
Nottinghamshire	3·686	4·073	3·654
Oxfordshire	1·064	1·052	1·092
Shropshire	0·183	0·080	0·104
Somerset	0·850	0·389	0·527
Staffordshire	1·303	1·897	0·877
Suffolk	1·192	1·462	2·043
Surrey	1·608	1·959	2·109
Warwickshire	0·654	1·178	1·377
West Sussex	1·718	1·909	2·715
Wiltshire	0·252	0·581	1·427

Source: Local Authority Maintenance Outturn Forms.

The Countryside Commission is currently carrying out a survey of spending on footpaths, bridleways and other public rights of way. Their provisional figure for maintenance spending by shire counties as a whole for 1986-87 is in the region of £3 million.

Bypasses

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many bypasses were built in 1987.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Twelve bypasses or relief roads were completed in 1987. Other road improvements which are not primarily bypasses also relieve communities of traffic.

Bus Stops (Obstruction)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the road safety implications of the obstruction of bus stops by parked vehicles; and what action he proposes to take.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Vehicles parked illegally at bus stops cause inconvenience to passengers and create delays and congestion for buses and other traffic. Road safety implications are not easily assessed. Police and traffic wardens are responsible for taking appropriate enforcement action. Technical information on the design of bus stops is contained in "Roads and Traffic in Urban Areas". (HMSO 1987).

London Regional Transport Act 1984

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans to introduce legislation to amend section 40 of the London Regional Transport Act 1984.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have no plans to do so at present.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the consultation procedures adopted by London Regional Transport in respect of schemes under section 3(2) of the London Regional Transport Act 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: We have received one letter in addition to one of 8 February from my hon. Friend. The statutory requirement for consultation applies to proposals by London Regional Transport to introduce a new London bus service, or vary or discontinue an existing one, whether or not the service is procured under section 3(2) of the London Regional Transport Act 1984. I am satisfied that those arrangements work adequately in practice.

Ashbourne Bypass

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current position on the plans for the Ashbourne bypass; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Preliminary investigations by our consulting engineers into possible routes are now complete. We expect to be able to consult the public on alternatives in April this year and to make an announcement about this in March. A preferred route will be announced after we have fully considered the comments received. Future progress will depend on the results of further investigations and the completion of statutory procedures. At this early stage we do not expect construction work to start until late 1992.

Leisure Drives (Cheshire)

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the cost of advertising and signposting leisure drives in Cheshire in the last year for which figures are available; how many people he estimates use the designated routes who would not otherwise use them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Leisure drive signing is entirely a matter for Cheshire county council as local highway authority. My hon. Friend may wish to contact the council.

London Regional Transport

Mr. John Marshall To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of London Regional Transport; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last met Sir Keith Bright on 4 February. They discussed the tragic fire at King's Cross and other matters relating to London Regional Transport.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give an estimate of the number of vehicles currently in use on the road without road fund licences; and what was the number of prosecutions for 1986 and 1987 for not being in possession of a currently valid road fund licence.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The most recent estimate of vehicle excise duty (VED) evasion in Great Britain, based

on a national survey in June 1984, indicated that some 1·1 million unlicensed vehicles are in use on the road. In 1986, 342,513 evaders were prosecuted or agreed to pay a penalty in out-of-court settlements; and enforcement action induced a further 271,492 to relicense. The comparable figures for 1987 were 339,458 and 253,708, respectively.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, in the light of the Civil Aviation Authority's statement in a press release dated 8 February about increased pressure on the air traffic control system, he will make it his policy not to approve any increase in the use of Heathrow airport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No. The Civil Aviation Authority, which has responsibility for air traffic control at Heathrow airport, has not recommended against increased use of Heathrow airport.

Section 8 Grants

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column 690, if he will publish the number of applications received by his Department for section 8 grants, the number of grants made and total expenditure in 1985-86 and 1986-87; and if he will make a statement on the operation of the section 8 grant system.

Mr. David Mitchell: The information requested is as listed:

Year	*Number of applications*	*Number of grants made*	*Expenditure £ million*
1985-86	9	13	6·9
1986-87	4	1	5·5

The number of applications received and awards made fluctuate from year to year.

There is no direct correlation, in any particular year, between the number of applications received, grants made and expenditure incurred.

I am satisfied with the operation (although less so with the number of applicants) of the section 8 grant scheme, although we continue to see whether there are ways of streamlining the administration of these grants.

Rail Closures

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the current closure of the Sudbury to Bures section of the Sudbury to Colchester railway line and the likely date for reopening; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I understand that the board is currently working to clear the bank slip which, recently closed the line between Sudbury and Marks Tey, and that it hopes to reopen the line as soon as possible. In the meantime, a bus shuttle service is in operation.

Railway Termini (Platforms)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column 695, he will give the number of platforms at each principal rail terminus in the capitals of each of the countries of Great Britain; and how many of these would have to be lengthened to add an extra coach to trains leaving at peak hours.

Mr. David Mitchell: The length of platforms at termini is not the only consideration. The length of platforms at intermediate stations is equally important. It is not generally possible to add single coaches to EMUs and DMUs, which form the majority of commuter trains, because they are normally made up in permanently-coupled sets of two, three or four. There can also be problems of signalling and timetabling and at maintenance depots. NSE is already planning to lengthen some platforms to allow longer trains to run where this will solve acute overcrowding problems.

Thelwall Viaduct

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements he intends to make to ease congestion during the reconstruction of the Thelwall viaduct on the M6.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We shall make every effort to keep three lanes open in each direction during construction of the new viaduct and the reconstruction of the existing structure.

British Rail

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the external financing limit for British Rail for the current financial year.

Mr. Channon: I am able to announce that it has been possible to reduce the board's external financing limit for 1987-88 by £121 million from £751 million to £630 million.

This reduction, which will have no effect on British Rail's investment programme, has been made possible by increased property sales and improved receipts. BR will therefore be able to reduce its borrowing requirement.

London Regional Passengers Committee

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the role and composition of the London regional passengers committee.

Mr. Butcher: I have been asked to reply.

None.

National Dock Labour Scheme

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the principles and objectives of the national dock labour scheme; and if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on the scheme.

Mr. Nicholls: I have been asked to reply.

The scheme, known formally as the Dock Workers Employment Scheme 1967, is set out in full in schedule 2 to the Dock Workers (Regulation of Employment) (Amendment) Order 1967. Clause 1(2) states that

"the objects of the scheme are to ensure greater regularity of employment for dock workers and to secure that an adequate number of dock workers is available for the efficient performance of dock work."

The Government's position with regard to the scheme remains as stated in an earlier reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on 17 November 1987, at column 915.

Dockers

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many persons were employed as registered dockers on the most recent date for which figures are available; and what was the comparable number 10 years previously.

Mr. Nicholls: I have been asked to reply.

There were 10,455 registered dock workers at the end of December 1987 compared with 29,168 at the end of December 1977. The latest available figure, for week ending 9 February 1988, is 9,873.

ENVIRONMENT

Planning Appeals

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the operation of the present planning appeal system.

Mr. Waldegrave: The planning appeals system is generally well regarded by appellants, but hon. Members and others are rightly concerned about delays in reaching decisions in many cases.

The number of appeals has risen by some 60 per cent., from 13,700 in 1983-84 to an estimated 22,000 in 1987-88. The main factors in this increase appear to be the increase in the proportion of planning applications refused by local planning authorities and, lately an increase in the volume of applications.

In order to deal with the volume of appeals and reduce decision times, we have increased the number of inspectors and administrative staff; and are introducing new procedures and information technology.

Rating Reform

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next proposes to update his estimate of the number of individual gainers and losers under his community charge proposals.

Mr. Howard: On 13 January 1988, I placed a note in the Library which showed my latest estimate of the number of gainers and losers from the community charge proposals. This replaced the estimates published in the Green Paper "Paying for Local Government" (Cmnd. 9714) in January 1986. No further update is presently proposed.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received any proposals to replace the present domestic rating system with a system of rates based on capital values plus a local income tax; and what was his response.

Mr. Howard: Of those who responded to the Green Paper "Paying for Local Government", 48 advocated a combination of rates and local income tax, compared with 283 who supported the community charge. The Government have consistently drawn attention to the short-comings of domestic rates and of LIT. In combination, they would fail to provide accountability, be very volatile, produce big changes in bills, and be extremely complicated and expensive to administer.

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has now come to a decision as to the percentage of the cost of implementing the community charge which the Government intend to contribute to local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: These are matters under discussion with local authority associations. The cost of the community charge will be taken account of in the 1989-90 RSG settlement.

Mr. Ashdown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the total benefit to the Exchequer as a result of charging overseas students the full community charge; and what would be the difference in the returns to the Exchequer between charging overseas students the full poll tax and treating them in the same way as other students.

Mr. Howard: Overseas students on full-time courses in this country will have to pay only 20 per cent. of the community charge, under the provisions of clause 12 of the Local Government Finance Bill, in common with other full-time students.

Skilled Workers (Rented Property)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any specific proposals to increase the supply of rented property for skilled workers in areas of housing stress; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rae: An increase in the supply of rented accommodation is the central objective of the deregulation proposals in the Housing Bill. Such an increase should have an impact both in the relief of housing stress and in facilitating job mobility.

More specifically, the Housing Corporation gives priority to a number of groups, including key workers, with its conventional funding programme and can support schemes aimed specifically at helping young people to move to take up employment under its mixed funding programme, which is being increased to £58 million for the coming financial year.

The Local Government Bill includes an explicit new power for local authorities to assist in the provision of privately let accommodation, subject to my right hon. Friend's consent. The new power could be used to help provide accommodation such as that described by the hon. Member.

New Building Programmes

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what incentive there is for *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* private landlords to invest in new building programmes to house homeless and low income families.

Mrs. Rae: Subsidies are payable to local authorities' housing revenue accounts, and to registered housing associations through housing association grants. In each case, our policy is that subsidies should be paid only where rents would be insufficient to cover costs. In the allocation of resources, local authorities and the Housing Corporation give priority to areas of housing shortage.

Powers in the Local Government Bill will also enable local authorities to provide subsidies to private landlords. Low-income families are of course eligible for housing benefit.

Improvement Grants

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to reduce the age qualification of a property for which one can apply for an improvement grant; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Roe: The consultation paper on home improvement policy, published last November, included a proposal that age limits for improvement grants might be replaced by more flexible arrangements which would allow local authorities to make grants for all but the most recently built properties. We are currently considering the comments received with a view to reforming the improvement grant legislation at the next suitable opportunity.

Uniform Business Rate

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the amount of the aggregate annual relief to business chargepayers benefiting from the concession in each of the relevant years if the uniform business rate proposed in the Local Authority Finance Bill were phased in with an upper limit on the extent of any increase *(a)* of 20 per cent. and *(b)* of 10 per cent. in any years, assuming currently estimated rates of inflation of rateable values.

Mr. Howard: It is not yet possible to make an accurate estimate of the cost of setting the proposed ceiling on year-on-year rate increases at any given level. The ceiling will apply both to increases resulting from the introduction of the uniform business rate, and to those resulting from the non-domestic revaluation in 1990; and detailed forecasts of the distribution of charges in rateable value on revaluation are not yet available.

Skiers (Deaths)

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has an estimate of the number of deaths of skiers at British ski resorts which could have been avoided by wearing safety helmets, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: The Government have no such estimate. In th 1986-87 season there were five deaths at ski resorts in Britain. Only one of these was from a fall in which head and other injuries were sustained. It is not possible to say whether this death could have been prevented by the wearing of a safey helmet.

Caravan Sites Act 1968

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of all county councils in England and Wales that have applied for designation under the provisions of the Caravan Sites Act 1968; and how many have been so designated.

Mrs. Roe: Following is the list of all authorities in England that are designated, or are in the process of designation, or whose applications for designation are under consideration. Designation in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

S.12 Caravan Sites Act 1968 as amended:
Designated authorities

Type of authority	*Made*	*Laid before Parliament*	*Coming into operation*
London boroughs			
Barking	13 March 1973	21 March 1973	1 June 1973
Bexley	17 April 1975	25 April 1975	1 July 1975
Camden[1]	27 April 1981	6 May 1981	27 May 1981
Croydon	28 May 1974	7 June 1974	1 August 1974
Enfield	4 March 1975	13 March 1975	1 June 1975
Greenwich	28 May 1974	7 June 1974	1 August 1974
Hammersmith and Fulham	1 July 1975	10 July 1975	1 August 1975
Havering	13 March 1973	21 March 1973	1 June 1973
Hillingdon	15 August 1984	15 August 1984	17 August 1984
Islington[1]	27 April 1981	6 May 1981	27 May 1981
Kensington and Chelsea[1]	17 April 1975	25 April 1975	1 June 1975
Kingston upon Thames	10 January 1984	19 January 1984	10 February 1984
Lambeth	3 April 1979	5 April 1979	26 April 1979
Lewisham	3 April 1979	5 April 1979	26 April 1979
Merton	8 May 1973	16 May 1973	1 August 1973
Newham	13 March 1973	21 March 1973	1 June 1973
Redbridge	13 March 1973	21 March 1973	1 June 1973
Richmond-upon-Thames	13 December 1972	21 December 1972	1 April 1973
Sutton	28 May 1974	7 June 1974	1 August 1974
Waltham Forest	13 March 1973	21 March 1973	1 June 1973
Wandsworth	5 November 1981	16 November 1981	7 December 1981
Westminster[1]	30 October 1974	7 November 1974	1 January 1975
Former county boroughs			
Bolton	2 January 1974	17 January 1974	31 March 1974
Bury	8 May 1973	16 May 1973	1 August 1973
Leeds	8 May 1973	16 May 1973	1 August 1973
Lincoln	2 January 1974	17 January 1974	31 March 1974
Manchester	13 December 1972	21 December 1972	1 April 1973

Type of authority	Made	Laid before Parliament	Coming into operation
Oxford	28 May 1974	7 June 1974	1 August 1974
Plymouth	25 September 1972	4 October 1972	1 January 1973
St. Helens	25 September 1972	4 October 1972	1 January 1973
Stoke-on-Trent	25 September 1972	4 October 1972	1 January 1973
Wolverhampton	13 December 1972	21 December 1972	1 April 1973
County and district councils			
Dorset CC. Aylesbury Vale	17 August 1978	25 August 1978	21 September 1978
Chiltern, South Bucks, Buckinghamshire	16 September 1981	23 September 1981	14 October 1981
West Sussex CC	25 January 1982	3 February 1982	24 February 1982
High Peak, Derbyshire[1]	25 January 1982	3 February 1982	24 February 1982
Kennet; North Wiltshire; Thamesdown; West Wiltshire, Wiltshire	25 January 1982	3 February 1982	24 February 1982
Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire	1 September 1982	13 September 1982	5 October 1982
Dartford, Kent	21 October 1982	4 November 1982	26 November 1982
South Bedfordshire	1 November 1982	11 November 1982	3 December 1982
Oswestry, Shropshire	13 December 1982	22 December 1982	13 January 1983
Nuneaton and Bedworth, Warwickshire	11 March 1983	23 March 1983	14 April 1983
Oldham	11 March 1983	24 March 1983	14 April 1983
Hyndburn, Lancashire	15 March 1983	24 March 1983	15 April 1983
Luton, Bedfordshire	5 August 1983	17 August 1983	8 September 1983
Trafford	5 September 1983	—	—
Ashford, Kent	13 September 1983	22 September 1983	14 October 1983
Salisbury, Wiltshire	13 September 1983	22 September 1983	14 October 1983
Gravesham, Kent	22 December 1983	12 January 1984	3 February 1984
Rochdale	23 Februrary 1984	5 March 1984	27 March 1984
South Derbyshire	11 July 1984	19 July 1984	13 August 1984
Boston, Lincolnshire	12 September 1984	20 September 1984	12 October 1984
West Lindsey, Lincolnshire	14 November 1984	23 November 1984	15 December 1984
Selby, North Yorkshire	19 November 1984	29 November 1984	21 December 1984
Huntingdonshire; Cambridgeshire	14 December 1984	4 January 1985	26 January 1985
Wealden; Rother; Eastbourne; Hastings; East Sussex	17 December 1984	4 January 1985	26 January 1985
Chester, Cheshire	14 December 1984	4 January 1985	26 January 1985
Middlesbrough, Cleveland[1]	5 March 1985	14 March 1985	5 April 1985
Northampton; Wellingborough; South Northamptonshire, Northamptonshire	12 March 1985	21 March 1985	12 April 1985
Epsom and Ewell, Surrey	15 March 1985	22 March 1985	13 April 1985
Tonbridge and Malling, Kent[1]	26 June 1985	5 July 1985	27 July 1985
Babergh; Ipswich; Mid-Suffolk; Suffolk Coastal, Suffolk	29 October 1985	7 November 1985	28 November 1985
Peterborough, Cambridgeshire[1]	15 November 1985	25 November 1985	16 December 1985
Windsor and Maidenhead, Berkshire	20 November 1985	28 November 1985	19 December 1985
Hartlepool; Stockton-on-Tees; Cleveland[1]	3 December 1985	12 December 1985	2 January 1986
Chesterfield; Bolsover; North East Derbyshire, Derbyshire	12 December 1985	20 December 1985	10 January 1986
Broxbourne, Hertfordshire	9 April 1986	18 April 1986	9 May 1986
Canterbury, Kent	8 July 1986	18 July 1986	8 August 1986
Ryedale, North Yorkshire	8 July 1986	18 July 1986	8 August 1986
Darlington; Chester-le-Street; Derwentside; Easington; Sedgefield; Teesdale; Wear Valley; Durham	8 September 1986	19 September 1986	10 October 1986
East Northamptonshire	27 November 1986	5 December 1986	26 December 1986
Watford, Hertfordshire[1]	17 December 1986	8 January 1987	29 January 1987
Maidstone, Kent	21 January 1987	30 January 1987	20 February 1987
Lancaster	26 March 1987	2 April 1987	23 April 1987
Cherwell, Oxfordshire	15 September 1987	24 September 1987	15 October 1987
Kettering, Northants	15 September 1987	24 September 1987	15 October 1987
Northumberland	15 September 1987	24 September 1987	15 October 1987
Great Yarmouth	28 September 1987	7 October 1987	28 October 1987
Mid Bedfordshire			
North Bedfordshire	12 January 1988	20 January 1988	10 February 1988

[1] Designated on the grounds that it is not necessary and/or expedient to make adequate provision.

Designated Orders in preparation
Gateshead MDC.
Shepway, Kent.

Applications for designation under consideration
Dacorum, Hertfordshire.
Dover, Kent.
Hinkley and Bosworth; Oadby and Wigston; Blaby, Leicestershire.
Runnymede, Surrey.
Stratford on Avon, Warwickshire.
Vale of White Horse, Oxfordshire.
Wyre Forest, Hereford and Worcestershire.

"Water and Sewerage Law"

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his intention regarding implementing the proposals outlined in the discussion Paper "Water and Sewerage Law" chapter 1, paragraphs 1.25 to paragraphs 1.41, published by his Department.

Mrs. Roe: Final decisions have still to be taken on the proposals in the consultation paper. An announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Local Authority Services

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he intends to take to prevent local authorities from evading competition by forming their direct labour organisations into separate companies.

Mr. Ridley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on Wednesday 10 February at column *291*.

Water Industry

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to publish a White Paper on his proposals to privatise the water industry.

Mrs. Roe: No.

Rural Areas

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to increase the assistance for rural areas in England, through the Development Commission, to ensure equality on a per capita basis with the rural development programmes for Scotland and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Roe: Provision for expenditure by the Development Commission in 1988-89 has been increased by £2·5 million over previous plans in order to allow the Commission to respond to the increased demand for its established programmes, and carry forward the new initiatives which formed part of the Government's rural enterprise package. Because of differences in definitions and in administrative arrangements, it is not possible to make direct comparisons between the assistance per capita given to rural areas in England, Scotland and Wales.

Euratom

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information has been provided by *(a)* British Nuclear Fuels Ltd., *(b)* the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, *(c)* the Central Electricity Generating Board and *(d)* the South of Scotland Electricity Board to the European Commission under article 37 of the Euratom treaty on nuclear waste disposal since May 1979; and if he will list by date all submissions made by each of the nuclear facility operators to Euratom under article 37 of the Euratom treaty since each organisation has had a requirement to make available such data.

Mrs. Roe: Under article 37 of the Euratom treaty, responsibility for making submissions to the European Commission concerning plans for the disposal of radioactive waste rests with Her Majesty's Government, not the operators of nuclear installations.

The information, which is supplied by the Department of the Environment on behalf of the nuclear site operators to the Commission under article 37 of the Euratom treaty, conforms to the regulations laid down by the Commission in the *Official Journal of the European Community* dated 29 March 1982 (ref. No. L 83/15), a copy of which will be placed in the House of Commons Library. The following submissions have been made to the Commission since May 1979:

	Date
(a) British Nuclear Fuels plc:	
Capenhurst—Uranium Enrichment Plants	May 1981
Sellafield—Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant	June 1984
(b) United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority	
Dounreay—PFR Fuel Reprocessing Plant	November 1979
(c) Central Electricity Generating Board	
Heysham 1—Nuclear Power Station	May 1980
Heysham 2—Nuclear Power Station	January 1986
Sizewell "B"—Nuclear Power Station	November 1987
(d) South of Scotland Electricity Board	
Torness Power Station	February 1986

Submissions made Prior to May 1979 under Article 37 are as follows:

	Date
Central Electricity Generating Board	
Hinkley Point "B" Power Station	1974
Dungeness "B" Power Station	1975
Hartlepool Power Station	1978
South of Scotland Electricity Board	
Hunterston "B" Power Station	1974

Environmental Protection

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will initiate a review of all statements made by Ministers in his Department to the House or in predecessor Departments with responsibility for environmental protection that may require revision in the light of official information made public under the 30-year rule on 1 January.

Mrs. Roe: No.

Agricultural Buildings

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the total saving annually to the agriculture industry of not levying rates on agricultural buildings.

Mr. Chope: I estimate that the amount that would be raised if agricultural land and buildings were rated is between £400 million and £500 million.

Portable Discount Schemes

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to the reply of 9 November 1987, *Official Report*, column 13, to the hon. Member for Gloucester, he has completed his study of portable discount schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are still considering the results of the studies of the schemes operated by the London boroughs of Brent and Bromley.

WALES

Housing (Alyn and Deeside)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to improve housing provision in Alyn and Deeside; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: Alyn and Deeside district council receive an appropriate share of the capital allocations which my right hon. Friend makes to housing authorities. Similarly, housing associations active in the Alyn and Deeside area will receive an appropriate share of Government funding made to the Housing Corporation.

Education (Clwyd)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to improve educational facilities in Clwyd; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Clwyd education authority receives its share of the Welsh rate support grant as determined by the agreed formula. It is also receiving support under the education support grant scheme in respect of expenditure of about £500,000 in 1987-88 and £1 million in 1988-89; together with grant under the in-service training grant scheme against expenditure of £1·8 million in 1988-89.

Additionally the county receives moneys under the training and vocational education initiative from the Manpower Services Commission.

Pig Farmers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he proposes to assist pig farmers in Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: It remains our objective to remove monetary compensatory amounts from the pigmeat sector and we shall continue to pursue this in future negotiations. This would help Welsh pig farmers as will the private storage aids scheme to be reintroduced with effect from 15 February.

Ophthalmic Waiting Lists

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps are being taken to monitor the effect of charges for eye testing on ophthalmic waiting lists in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: It is not anticipated that a reduction in the availability of free sight tests will effect the rate of detection of abnormalities nor the work load of the hospital eye service. Statistics on waiting lists are collected and published on a routine basis and are always studied with care.

Congenital Cardiac Malformation

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has or intends to gather in Wales about congenital cardiac malformation after the first week of life.

Mr. Grist: Health authorities in Wales are asked to provide the Welsh Office with information in respect of each in-patient and day patient discharged from hospital, including information relating to congenital cardiac malformation. Officials of the Department are presently exploring with those of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, which collates information on congenital malformation during the first week of life, the potential use of the child health computer system to provide data on congenital cardiac and other malformation after the first week of life.

Dental Treatment

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps are being taken to monitor the effect of charges for dental treatment on dental care in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: Dental health surveys of adults and children are conducted periodically and the results reported to the House. The general household survey also monitors dental health. These surveys show that the nation's dental health has shown dramatic improvement in recent years. I believe that this trend will continue.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Less Intensive Farming Methods

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the research projects his Department is conducting and funding into less intensive farming methods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My Department is conducting and funding a wide range of research and development on less intensive farming methods. This includes work aimed at reducing chemical inputs in respect of crops and increasing the use of forage as an alternative to intensive feeding systems for livestock. We are also studying the production of beef and sheepmeat in hill areas and the more general environmental effects of less intensive production methods.

Canthaxanthin

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if it is Her Majesty's Government's intention to ban the use of canthaxanthin in the production of fish farm feeding stuffs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The use of canthaxanthin in fish feed in the United Kingdom is permitted under European Community directive and I am not aware of any proposals to change that. In its recent report on colouring matter in food, the Food Advisory Committee endorsed a recommendation from the Committee on Toxicology that the use of canthaxanthin should be restricted to feed prepared for farmed salmon and farmed trout only. Representations on the report were invited and I shall be making a further statement on the report when all the representations have been fully considered.

Farming

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many persons were in business as farmers on the most recent date for which figures are available; and what was the comparable number 10 years previously.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The information requested is set out in table 5 in the "Annual Review of Agriculture 1988" (Cmnd. 299) and in table 4 in the "Annual review of Agriculture 1982" (Cmnd. 8491). Copies of these documents are in the Library of the House.

Subsidies

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his latest estimate of the total

annual cost of subsidies and other payments made by his Department to agriculture; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The latest estimates of total annual expenditure on agriculture by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are published in table 4·1 of the White Paper, "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1988-89 to 1990-91" (Com. 288-II).

Cereals, Rape and Grass

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will update the information in the reply to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North of 30 January 1987, *Official Report*, column *462*, about the total acreage *(a)* in cereals and rape and *(b)* in grass in 1987 and the forecast for 1988 and about the increase or decrease in each case since 1979 in actual and percentage terms.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The areas for 1987 and 1979 are as set out.

The 1988 area cannot be accurately forecast.

England

	Thousand Hectares			
	1979	*1987*	*Actual change*	*Per cent. change 1987-79*
Total area of cereals (excluding maize plus rape grown for oilseed)	3,322	3,637	+315	+9·5
Total area of grassland (excluding rough grazing)	4,295	3,941	[1]355	−8·2

[1] The actual change does not agree because of rounding.

Radioactive Caesium

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will estimate the length of time that radioactive caesium will continue to be available for uptake from the soil by vegetation in the restricted areas set up after the Chernobyl accident; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 12 February 1988]*: My Department has set in hand a substantial programme of research to enable the best possible estimate to be made. I am not willing to make any predictions before studying the results of this work which should start to become available later this year.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list details of the research projects his Department is funding or has funded into the uptake of radioactive caesium in upland sites; when the results will be completed; and if he will publish interim results.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 12 February 1988]*: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to him on 8 February 1988 at column *62*.

CIVIL SERVICE

Civil Servants (Guidance)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what representations he has received from the Association of First Division Civil Servants about those aspects of the recently issued revised note of guidance to civil servants which impinge on the ethics of the Civil Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: None.

THE ARTS

Public Libraries

39. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what information he has on the level of loans from public libraries in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Luce: The latest available information indicates that in 1985-86 English public libraries loaned 540 million books. Loans of items other than books are estimated to have been about 14 million.

Education Reform

43. **Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what discussions he has had with the Arts Council about the role of the arts in the national curriculum.

Mr. Luce: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) earlier today.

Museums (Co-operation)

44. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he will meet the director of the British Museum to discuss the level of co-operation between that museum and regional museums.

Mr. Luce: I am keen to encourage co-operation between the national museums and galleries I sponsor and regional museums and galleries. The British museum's good record in this area is illustrated in the trustees' triennial report, a copy of which is in the Library.

45. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what plans he has to widen co-operation between national and regional museums.

Mr. Luce: I am keen to encourage co-operation between national and regional museums. One of the principal functions of the Museums and Galleries Commission, which is funded from the central Government arts programme, is to promote co-operation between sectors of the museums community.

"Percentage for Arts" Schemes

46. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what information he has on the effectiveness of "Percentage for Arts" schemes.

49. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what is his policy towards the introduction of "Percentage for Arts" schemes.

Mr. Luce: I am actively encouraging putting art in public and private buildings. I am glad to see that there is much effective co-operation between the owners of buildings, developers, and artists in devising schemes which have enriched the environment.

National Museum of Photography

47. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Minister for the Arts how many people visited the National Museum of Photography in Bradford in each of the last three years.

Mr. Luce: The attendance figures for the last three years are as follows:

	Number
1985	546,894
1986	677,530
1987	706,319

Opera (Ministerial Visit)

50. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he last paid an official visit to an opera performance.

Mr. Luce: I last paid an official visit to the opera on Tuesday 2 February. I attended a performance of Puccini's "Madam Butterfly" by the English National Opera.

Pensioners and Young People

51. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what plans he has to encourage access to the arts by pensioners and young people.

Mr. Luce: The Arts Council, the Scottish and Welsh arts councils and the regional arts associations encourage a variety of schemes to increase accessibility to the arts. I am very much in favour of this.

Industrial Museums

52. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what financial support has been given in the last three years to industrial museums.

Mr. Luce: Two major museums devoted to science and industry receive grant-in-aid from central Government, the Science museum and the Greater Manchester museum of science and industry. The sums provided as grant-in-aid of these museums in the last three years were as follows:

£'000

	1985-86	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
Science Museum	8,954	9,171	9,589
Greater Manchester Museum of Science and Industry	[1]	1,075	1,252

[1] Funded by the Greater Manchester Council.

Museums in the public and private sectors are eligible for grants administered by the Museums and Galleries Commission and the area museum councils. The value of such grants made to industrial museums is not readily available.

Artists (Arts and Music Education)

53. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what information he has as to the current proportion of artists who received arts or music education at school; and what estimate he has of the proportion in future years.

Mr. Luce: This information is not held centrally.

Museums and Galleries (Trustees)

54. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he last met the chairmen of trustees of the national museums and galleries; and what was discussed.

Mr. Luce: I meet the chairmen of particular national museums and galleries from time to time to discuss matters of mutual interest.

South Bank Complex

Mr. Butler: To ask the Minister for the Arts what information he has on the recent increase in turnover in the shops in the South Bank complex.

Mr. Luce: I am pleased to note that turnover at the shops in the Royal Festival Hall has increased by 47 per cent. in the last 12 months.

Subsidised Arts Bodies

Mr. Chapman: To ask the Minister for the Arts what proportion of moneys raised by subsidised arts bodies will have to be returned to him or the Arts Council.

Mr. Luce: None at all. No arts body will be penalised for increasing its income from other sources. On the contrary, I am providing incentives for arts organisations to seek and retain income from the private sector.

Art Collections (Obscenity)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister for the Arts what advice he has given to trustees of national art collections on the display of works that might be regarded by the public as obscene.

Mr. Luce: I have issued no specific advice on this. If, however, an institution goes beyond what I regard as acceptable I have no hesitation in making this clear to them.

EMPLOYMENT

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate

60. **Mr. Sackville:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many inspectors have been recruited by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate in the current year.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive has recruited 19 inspectors to the nuclear installations inspectorate since 1 April 1987. A further three inspectors are expected to take up appointment in early March.

MSC Training Schemes

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people there are on Manpower Services Commission training schemes in *(a)* the

Northwich travel-to-work area, *(b)* the Chester travel-to-work area and *(c)* the Runcorn travel-to-work area; and what were the figures on the same date in each of the past five years.

Mr. Cope: The information is not available in the form requested. The following table gives the number of people in training on some Manpower Services Commission training schemes in Cheshire on the same date over the past three years:

Numbers on MSC Training Schemes[1] in Cheshire[2] at 31 December

	1985[3]	*1986*	*1987*
YTS[4]	5,684	7,120	8,676
The New Job Training Scheme[5]	—	—	287

[1] Figures for the numbers in training on any given date are not available for other adult training schemes.
[2] Figures are not available for Northwich, Chester and Runcorn travel-to-work areas.
[3] Figures for earlier years are not readily available.
[4] One year YTS in 1985 and two years in 1986 and 1987.
[5] The New Job Training Scheme has operated nationally since April 1987.

Fraud Investigators

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many fraud investigators are at present operating in the Seaham and Peterlee area of his Department;

(2) what is the cost to his Department of the benefit fraud investigators who are operating in the Seaham and Peterlee offices; and if he will make a statement on their cost-effectiveness.

Mr. Lee: Two members of staff of my Department are engaged in fraud investigation work in offices covering the Seaham and Peterlee areas. Both are of executive officer grade and receive the appropriate salaries and allowances. I am quite satisfied that both officers operate cost-effectively.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what evaluation his Department has made of the experiment of having extra staff at job centres to work on outreach to ethnic minorities.

Mr. Lee: My Department plans to complete an initial evaluation of the experiment by spring of this year.

Restart

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the cost of each restart interview.

Mr. Lee: The cost of each restart interview in 1987-88 is estimated at around £13.

YTS

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many trainees are participating in the pilot YTS scheme in his Department; and how many are from ethnic minorities.

Mr. Cope: There are presently 84 trainees participating in the Department of Employment group YTS scheme, of whom 17 are from ethnic minorities.

Electricity Charges

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from pottery, brick and tile manufacturers and other concerned industrialists about the effect of increased electricity charges on jobs in those industries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: I am not aware of any representations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on this matter.

Wages (Underpayment)

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many cases of underpayment the Wages Inspectorate investigated in the north-west division in each of the past five years; how many were the results of complaints by staff; how many were the results of routine spot checks; and what were the outcomes.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested for 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986 is given in the table. I shall arrange for the figures for 1987 to be published in the *Official Report* when they become available. The table cannot be taken as indicating the general level of compliance with wages council orders in the north-west division, because the inspectorate tends to concentrate its visits on establishments where underpayments appear more likely to be found.

Outcome of checks of pay carried out at establishments in north-west division, 1983-1986

	Checked by visit (routine)	*Found to be underpaying*	*Checked by visit (complaint)*	*Found to be underpaying*
1983	2,097	741	1,031	754
1984	2,062	744	1,054	703
1985	2,055	590	1,048	743
1986[1]	2,529	617	1,040	780

[1] North Wales became part of north-west division in 1986.

Parental Leave

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the provisions for parental leave *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in other European Community countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Provision for parental leave in the United Kingdom is on a voluntary basis. I understand that other member states of the EC have a statutory basis for parental leave, but that there are fundamental variations in the range and scope of these provisions.

Benefit (Scotland)

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will give the total number of claimants in Scotland who have been refused unemployment benefit pursuant to the recommendations of claims investigators; and if he will break this figure down according to the reasons for withdrawal of benefit, for each year from 1979 to 1987;

(2) if he will give the total number of unemployment benefit claimants referred to claims investigators for each of the unemployment benefit offices in Scotland for each year from 1979 to 1987;

(3) if he will give the total number of unemployment benefit claimants referred to claims investigators in Scotland; and if he will break this figure down according to the reasons given for referral, for each year from 1979;

(4) what was the total number of unemployment benefit claimants referred to claims investigators in Scotland for each year from 1979.

Mr. Lee: It is unclear from the hon. Member's questions which officials he is referring to as "claims investigators" and I am unable, therefore, to provide the information requested. If the hon. Member would like to write to me with further details, I should be happy to try to respond.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current ratio of persons in employment to those not in employment but available for work; and what has been the saving at the same date in each of the past five years in *(a)* the Northwich travel-to-work area, *(b)* the Chester travel-to-work area and *(c)* the Runcorn travel-to-work area.

Mr. Lee: Following is the available information. Employee estimates for travel-to-work areas are derived from censuses of employment, the latest of which relates to September 1984. The table shows the total numbers of employees in employment (excluding self-employed people and members of Her Majesty's Forces), and the numbers of unemployed claimants in September 1984 in each of the requested travel-to-work areas, and also the ratio of employees in employment to unemployed claimants.

September 1984

Travel-to-work area	*Employees in employment*	*Unemployed claimants*	*Ratio*
Northwich	41,852	6,627	6·3:1
Wirral and Chester	167,559	39,726	4·2:1
Widnes and Runcorn	47,839	12,010	4·0:1

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in the Blyth Valley constituency at 1 January for each year between 1979 and 1987 had been unemployed *(a)* for less than six months, *(b)* for between six months and one year, *(c)* for between one and two years and *(d)* for over two years.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. The table shows the number of unemployed claimants in the Blyth Valley parliamentary constituency at the closest date to 1 January of each year from 1984 to 1987 for which figures are available, for each of the durations requested. The comparison is affected by the change in the compilation of unemployment figures in March 1986. Statistics for parliamentary constituencies are derived from the ward-based system and are available only from June 1983.

Blyth Valley Parliamentary Constituency

Unemployed	*Less than six months*	*Six months to a year*	*One to two years*	*Over two years*
12 January 1984	2,235	858	817	734
10 January 1985	2,176	977	779	920
9 January 1986	2,555	988	811	1,023
8 January 1987	2,400	979	946	1,057

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the rate of unemployment for the York travel-to-work area, in January of each year from 1978-79.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. Unemployment figures are not comparable over the whole period because of changes in the coverage of the count, and in the boundary definitions of the travel-to-work areas. The table shows the number of unemployed registrants in the York travel-to-work area as defined in 1978, at January of each year from 1979 to 1982, the number of unemployed claimants in that area at January 1983, and the number of unemployed claimants in the travel-to-work area as defined in 1984 for January of each year from 1984-87, expressed as a percentage of employees in employment and the unemployed.

	Unemployment rate Per cent.
York travel-to-work area, 1978 definition	
Unemployed Registrants	
January 1979	4·2
January 1980	3·8
January 1981	6·4
January 1982	7·8
Unemployed Claimants	
January 1983	8·5
York travel-to-work area, 1984 definition	
Unemployed Claimants	
January 1984	8·5
January 1985	10·9
January 1986	11·3
January 1987	11·2

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the rate of unemployment for the Barrow travel-to-work area, in January of each year from 1978-79.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. Unemployment figures are not comparable over the whole period because of changes in the coverage of the count, and in the boundary definitions of the travel-to-work areas. The table shows the number of unemployed registrants in the Furness travel-to-work area as defined in 1978, at January of each year from 1979 to 1982, the number of unemployed claimants in the Barrow in Furness travel-to-work area as defined in 1984 for January of each year from 1984-1987, expressed as a percentage of employees in employment and the unemployed.

	Unemployment Rate per cent.
Furness travel-to-work area, 1978 definition	
Unemployed Registrants	
January 1979	6·1
January 1980	5·9
January 1981	9·9
January 1982	10·4
Unemployed Claimants	
January 1983	11·3
Barrow in Furness travel-to-work area, 1984 definition	
Unemployed Claimants	
January 1984	10·8
January 1985	10·9
January 1986	11·2
January 1987	12·1

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the rate of unemployment for the Stafford travel-to-work area, in January of each year from 1978-79.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. Unemployment figures are not comparable over the whole period because of changes in the coverage of the count, and in the boundary definitions of the travel-to-work areas. The table shows the number of unemployed registrants in the Stafford travel-to-work area as defined in 1978, at January of each year from 1979 to 1982, the number of unemployed claimants in that area at January 1983, and the number of unemployed claimants in the travel-to-work area as defined in 1984 for January of each year from 1984-1987, expressed as a percentage of employees in employment and the unemployed.

	Unemployment Rate per cent.
Stafford travel-to-work area, 1978 definition	
Unemployed Registrants	
January 1979	3·3
January 1980	3·8
January 1981	6·9
January 1982	8·8
Unemployed Claimants	
January 1983	9·8
Stafford travel-to-work area, 1984 definition	
Unemployed claimants	
January 1984	8·8
January 1985	9·4
January 1986	10·1
January 1987	9·6

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the rate of unemployment for the Lincoln travel-to-work area, in January of each year from 1978-79.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. Unemployment figures are not comparable over the whole period because of changes in the coverage of the count, and in the boundary definitions of the travel-to-work areas. The table shows the number of unemployed registrants in the Lincoln travel-to-work area as defined in 1978, at January of each year from 1979 to 1982, the number of unemployed claimants in that area at January 1983, and the number of unemployed claimants in the travel-to-work area as defined in 1984 for January of each year from 1984 to 1987, expressed as a percentage of employees in employment and the unemployed.

	Unemployment rate per cent.
Lincoln travel-to-work area, 1978 definition	
Unemployed registrants	
January 1979	6·3
January 1980	6·7
January 1981	10·4
January 1982	12·8
Unemployed claimants	
January 1983	12·7
Lincoln travel-to-work area, 1984 definition	
Unemployed claimants	
January 1984	12·8
January 1985	12·9
January 1986	13·2
January 1987	13·2

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the rate of unemployment for the Preston travel-to-work area, in January of each year from 1978-79.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. Unemployment figures are not comparable over the whole period because of changes in the coverage of the count, and in the boundary definitions of the travel-to-work areas. The table shows the number of unemployed registrants in the Preston travel-to-work area as defined in 1978, at January of each year from 1979 to 1982, the number of unemployed claimants in that area at January 1983, and the number of unemployed claimants in the travel-to-work area as defined in 1984 for January of each year from 1984 to 1987, expressed as a percentage of employees in employment and the unemployed.

	Unemployment rate per cent.
Preston travel-to-work area, 1978 definition	
Unemployed registrants	
January 1979	5·2
January 1980	5·4
January 1981	9·7

	Unemployment rate per cent.
January 1982	12·3
Unemployed claimants	
January 1983	12·2
Preston travel-to-work area, 1984 definition	
Unemployed claimants	
January 1984	11·9
January 1985	12·6
January 1986	12·7
January 1987	11·8

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will produce a table in the *Official Report* showing the number of men and women unemployed in the Houghton and Washington constituency for *(a)* under one year *(b)* one to two years *(c)* two to five years and *(d)* over five years.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. The table shows the number of male and female unemployed claimants in the Houghton and Washington parliamentary constituency on 10 October 1987, the latest date for which information is available, for each of the durations requested.

Houghton and Washington Parliamentary Constituency
10 October 1987

Unemployed	Male	Female
Under one year	2,750	1,390
One to two years	858	242
Two to five years	1,088	234
Over 5 years	617	137

SCOTLAND

Gaming Machines

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to review the law on the installation of gambling or gaming machines in premises open to minors.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The need for such a review will be considered following the assessment of the findings of a recently completed research project into the use of which young people make of such machines.

Tourism

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much public money has been spent in Angus, Scotland, to promote tourism in 1984, 1985 and 1986.

Mr. Lang: The main source of public sector support for tourism in Angus are the Scottish Tourist Board and Angus district council. Figures for expenditure in the financial years 1984-85, 1985-86 and 1986-87 were £118,999, £205,000 and £240,000 respectively. They include public sector assistance for the Angus tourist board.

EC (Grants and Loans)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of EEC grants and loans which have been allocated for projects in Angus, Scotland, in 1984, 1985 and 1986.

Mr. Lang: There is no record of any EEC loan for projects in Angus in the years specified and no information is available in the form requested for grants under the European social fund. Details of other grants awarded are set out in the table.

Scheme	1984 £	1985 £	1986 £
European Regional Development Fund	1,142,000	—	24,000
European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Scheme			
Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance	186,277	199,698	283,353
Suckler Cow Premium	125,045	116,155	105,679
Sheep Annual Premium	332,451	537,979	384,338
EC Processing and Marketing Regulation 355/77	60,365	221,936	176,218
Capital Grants s.c. (only part EC funded)	1,278,648	853,306	396,118
	3,124,786	1,929,074	1,289,706

Notes:

1. Information on agricultural capital grants is not kept on a region or county basis. However, the figures provided are for the area covered by the DAFS office in Dundee, which corresponds closely with the former County of Angus.
2. It is not possible to provide a breakdown of refunds from the EC, but over the three years in question refunds in respect of agricultural capital grants and so on paid by DAFS average some 21 per cent. of the assistance paid in Scotland.

Student Grants

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimates he has made of the financial effect of indexing maintenance grants for each category of student.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am afraid that we are unable to provide the information requested, since the cost would depend on the index concerned and the date from which grants were assumed to be adjusted in line with such an index. The hon. Member will be aware that, for Session 1988-89, the main rates of student grant are to be increased broadly in line with inflation.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the student financial support review will be completed.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) on 12 February 1988, at column *371*.

Legal Aid

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about applications for legal aid made under the Advice and Assistance (Scotland) Regulations 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Legal Aid Board has recommended that failure to send the board a copy of the client's application within 14 days (as required by regulation 10) should render the grant ineffective for the purpose of payment of the account; and that, where a second solicitor is to act in the same matter, he or she should be required to sign the application. I am preparing amending regulations which will give effect to these proposals.

Foreign Language Teaching

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what level of resources has been allocated to foreign language teaching in Scottish schools in each of the past five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The numbers of teachers in education authority secondary schools in Scotland in 1984 whose main teaching subject was a foreign language was 2,105 (7·6 per cent. of all teachers). Information for the other years requested is not readily available.

A74 (Upgrading)

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what he estimates will be the total cost of upgrading the A74 to motorway standard; and what sums towards this have been included in the expenditure totals for roads expenditure for the years 1988-89 to 1990-91 published in table 16.1 of Cm. 288-II.

Mr. Rifkind: A clear estimate of the costs of the A74 upgrading will be available only when feasibility studies are completed at the end of this year. When that information is available, I will be in a position to consider the implications for future reviews of expenditure plans.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects construction work to start on upgrading the A74 to motorway standard; and when he now expects this to be completed.

Mr. Rifkind: I attach a high priority to an early start to this project, but the precise timetable depends on the results of the detailed feasibility studies which are under way.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if a decision has been taken as to whether the upgraded A74 motorway will follow the line of the present road or will be on a separate line of route.

Mr. Rifkind: Decisions on the preferred line of the new motorway will not be taken until feasibility studies have been completed later this year.

Rating Reform

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce legislation to amend the Abolition of Domestic Rates etc. (Scotland) Act 1987, so as to incorporate those features of the Local Government Finance Bill which impose less onerous obligations on poll tax payers in England and Wales than are contained in the legislation already in force in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The Local Government Finance Bill embodies essentially the same system of community charges as is contained in the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987. The 1987 Act was fully debated by Parliament and we have no plans to make any fundamental changes to it. If, however, Parliament decides that refinements should be made to the proposals contained in the Local Government Finance Bill, we shall of course look carefully at what is decided and consider whether any parallel changes need to be made to the 1987 Act.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether poll tax registration officers will be required to omit from the published version of the register the name of any individual who satisfies them that he or she may suffer physical injury if his or her name is listed; and whether in cases where this would result in an address being listed with no corresponding name, the address would also be omitted, thus ensuring that attention is not drawn to properties where people at risk are residers.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend is considering this matter.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether or not residents of women's refuges will be exempted from the poll tax.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend intends that women's refuges should give rise to liability for the collective community charge.

Residents of such premises will be exempt from personal community charge liability but will, under section 11(11) of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987, be liable to pay a collective community charge contribution to the landlord of the premises at the same daily level as the personal community charge.

Young Offenders

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of initial police reports on children for crimes and offences in *(a)* the Tayside region and *(b)* the Dundee area on the latest available date for each year since 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is given in the table:

Initial Police Reports on Children for Crimes and Offences

Year	*City of Dundee District*	*Tayside Region*
1979	1,460	2,222
1980	1,486	2,312
1981	1,603	2,602
1982	1,254	2,110

Year	City of Dundee District	Tayside Region
1983	1,261	2,752
1984	1,074	2,133
1985	1,027	2,044
1986	1,013	1,917

YTS

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate what proportion of the people who have participated in YTS went on to get work for each year since the scheme began.

Mr. Lang: Of those who left YTS in Scotland in the period June 1984 to March 1985 (the earliest information available) 50 per cent. were in employment three months after leaving the scheme. The comparable figures for those who left between April 1985 to March 1986 and between April 1986 to August 1987 were 50 and 49 per cent. respectively.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in the Dundee district authority area are on YTS at the latest available date; and what are the corresponding figures for each month since the scheme began.

Mr. Lang: As at 10 February 1988 there were 1,605 people on locally run YTS schemes in city of Dundee district. Comparable figures for the same date are 1,252 in 1987 and 1,371 in 1986 (the earliest information available). Monthly figures are not available except at disproportionate cost. The numbers on schemes administered by the Manpower Services Commission large company unit are not broken down to local level.

NHS (Ancillary Services)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the expenditure on ancillary services in the National Health Service in each year since 1983, at constant 1983 prices.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Total recurrent expenditure by health boards on catering, domestic, laundry, transport and portering services has been as follows:

	£ thousand at 1983-84 prices (using GDP deflator)
1983-84	174,739
1984-85	173,413
1985-86	169,367
1986-87	167,909

Nurses

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will instruct health boards in Scotland not to offer voluntary redundancy to nurses.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No. It is for health boards as employers to apply the NHS redundancy provisions having regard to their manpower requirements.

Scottish Development Agency

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much public money has been spent by the Scottish Development Agency task force in Clydebank since its inception.

Mr. Lang: Since inception of the Clydebank task force in March 1980, the Scottish Development Agency has spent £31 million in Clydebank.

Afforestation

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what acreage of *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales was afforested with conifers in 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985 and 1987.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information is not available for 1970 or 1975.

Figures for the subsequent years are set out in the following table:

Area of Productive Coniferous Woodland (Hectares)

Year (at 31 march)	England	Scotland	Wales
1980	407,000	781,000	167,000
1985	395,000	871,000	174,000
1987	396,000	918,000	176,000

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what acreage of *(a)* the Northumberland national park, *(b)* Northumberland, *(c)* the Borders region and *(d)* Dumfries and Galloway, was afforested with conifers in 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985 and 1987.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the following table:

Area of Productive Coniferous Woodland (Hectares)

Year (at 31 March)	Northumberland National Park	Northumberland County	Borders Region	Dumfries and Galloway Region
1970	17,000	52,000	31,000	82,000
1975	19,000	55,000	(not available)	(not available)
1980	21,000	58,000	59,000	125,000
1985	22,000	59,000	63,000	138,000
1987	22,000	60,000	64,000	139,000

Primary Schools

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many primary schools there are in Scotland; and if he will list them.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There were 2,418 education authority primary schools and departments at September 1987. I shall write to the hon. Member to provide a list of schools.

Education Expenditure

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total expenditure on education, primary and secondary, in Scotland for each year since 1975, in 1986 money; and what are the estimates for 1988-89 and 1989-90.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is given in the following table:

£ million

	Primary	*Secondary*
1974-75	437·1	547·2
1975-76	456·3	549·9
1976-77	465·1	567·4
1977-78	442·7	526·9
1978-79	466·2	535·9
1979-80	457·3	554·1
1980-81	471·6	587·0
1981-82	461·4	617·8
1982-83	459·0	604·8
1983-84	451·1	609·8
1984-85	438·4	600·1
1985-86	412·6	568·4
1986-87	457·0	625·0
1987-88	480·6	629·3
1988-89	458·0	582·9
1989-90	447·9	572·0

Notes:
1. The figures shown cover current expenditure by local authorities only; information on capital expenditure covers all education sectors and cannot be split between primary and secondary.
2. Figures up to 1986-87 are outturn or estimated outturn; 1987-88 is the total of local authority budgets; 1988-89 is the total of service provision within the rate support grant settlement (and excludes any attribution of the education unallocated margin of £90 million); and the 1989-90 figure is a provisional planning figure subject to review later this year.
3. The figures reflect constant prices determined by application of GDP deflator, base year 1986-87.

Education Statistics

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total number of *(a)* pupils and *(b)* teachers in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The provisional estimates are 430,900 pupils and 21,340 teachers in primary schools and departments, and 327,300 pupils and 25,290 teachers in secondary schools in September 1987.

Hospitals

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give figures showing the number of new hospitals opened in Scotland for every year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Details of all hospital developments are not held centrally, as minor capital projects are delegated to health boards. The information for capital projects costing over £1 million is as follows:

Year	*Number of Hospitals*
1979	2
1980	10
1981	6
1982	5
1983	10
1984	6
1985	4
1986	4
1987	4
TOTAL	51

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the latest figure for the National Health Service in-patient waiting list for Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is published in "Scottish Health Statistics 1986/87" (table 6.5), copies of which are held in the Library.

Hip-replacement Operations

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give figures showing the number of people waiting for hip-replacement operations in Scotland; and if he will provide the relevant figures for every year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not available centrally.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give figures showing the total number of hospital beds available in Scotland for each year since 1979; if he will provide a breakdown of these figures for each health board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The average available staffed beds in each year ending 30 September in National Health Service hospitals in Scotland are as follows:

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*[1]1986*	*[1,2]1987*
Scotland	58,501	58,208	58,028	57,440	57,295	57,216	56,334	55,757	55,338
Argyll and Clyde	4,599	4,523	4,488	4,472	4,438	4,445	4,415	4,367	4,312
Ayrshire and Arran	2,837	2,822	2,827	2,794	2,918	3,059	3,001	2,974	2,951
Borders	898	897	943	928	928	931	927	939	944
Dumfries and Galloway	1,676	1,595	1,571	1,548	1,540	1,542	1,531	1,507	1,493
Fife	2,953	2,913	2,929	2,989	3,026	3,161	3,152	3,262	3,290

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	[1]1986	[1] [2]1987
Forth Valley	3,611	3,616	3,583	3,498	3,446	3,436	3,407	3,417	3,410
Grampian	5,392	5,391	5,393	5,462	5,486	5,595	5,558	5,575	5,513
Greater Glasgow	14,045	14,084	14,032	13,547	13,355	13,166	12,907	12,691	12,559
Highland	2,455	2,422	2,427	2,347	2,290	2,277	2,220	2,149	2,165
Lanarkshire	5,517	5,536	5,538	5,528	5,491	5,404	5,283	5,164	5,042
Lothian	8,374	8,389	8,397	8,452	8,522	8,451	8,279	8,089	8,047
Orkney	119	126	131	131	131	132	129	131	131
Shetland	160	159	160	160	160	161	157	160	158
Tayside	5,648	5,522	5,408	5,377	5,354	5,248	5,158	5,120	5,109
Western Isles	216	212	202	207	210	208	211	212	216

[1] Provisional.
[2] Year ended 31 March.

Industrial Development Grant

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research he has undertaken, and what information is available to him, about the effects of withdrawal of industrial development grant status on areas close to enterprise zones.

Mr. Lang: I am not aware of any research directed to this specific topic. An evaluation of enterprise zones (including those in Scotland) was undertaken for the Department of the Environment by PA Cambridge Economic Consultants, and a copy of their report has been placed in the Library of the House of Commons. Additionally, a research study by Messrs. S. McDowall and H. Begg on the "Impact of Regional Policy Regradings in Scotland" is nearing completion.

Cancer Screening

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the currently envisaged locations and operating dates for all 10 breast cancer screening facilities in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind *[holding answer 12 February 1988]:* We have announced that the first four centres will be established at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee. We expect the Glasgow centre to begin operation in May, the Edinburgh centre in June and the Aberdeen and Dundee centres to begin operation later in 1988. The location of the remaining centres and the mix of static and mobile units is currently being considered by the Advisory Group on Breast Cancer Screening in Scotland, under the chairmanship of Sir Patrick Forrest. All 10 centres will be in operation by 1991.

Regional Aid

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total expenditure on regional aid to industry in *(a)* Dundee and *(b)* Tayside in each differing catagory of aid in each financial year since 1978-79, both at current and outturn prices.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* Total payments of regional selective assistance (RSA) under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 to firms in Dundee city and Tayside region are set out in table 1 at both current (synonymous with outturn) and constant (1986-87) prices. Total payments under the revised regional development grant scheme (RDG2) to firms in Dundee city and Tayside region are set out in table 2.

Information on the old RDG scheme is available only by local employment office area (EOA) for payments exceeding £25,000 to individual firms in any quarter. The total of such payments to firms in the Dundee EOA (which approximates to Dundee city local authority district) and the Arbroath, Blairgowrie, Brechin, Dundee, Forfar, Montrose and Perth EOAs (which approximate to Tayside region) are give in table 3.

Table 1 Payments of RSA (£ million)

Year	Dundee city		Tayside region	
	Current prices	Constant (1986-87) prices	Current prices	Constant (1986-87) prices
1978-79	0·3	0·6	0·7	1·4
1979-80	0·7	1·1	0·9	1·5
1980-81	1·2	1·6	1·5	2·1
1981-82	1·4	1·8	1·6	2·1
1982-83	1·2	1·4	1·4	1·7
1983-84	2·2	2·5	2·5	2·8
1984-85	2·5	2·7	3·0	3·3
1985-86	2·0	2·1	2·3	2·4
1986-87	2·7	2·7	2·9	2·9

Table 2 Revised RDG payments (£ million)

Year	Dundee city		Tayside region	
	Current prices	Constant (1986-87) prices	Current prices [1]	Constant (1986-87) prices
1984-85	—	—	—	—
1985-86	0·4	0·4	0·7	0·7
1986-87	2·3	2·3	3·1	3·1

Table 3 Payments of old RDG (£ million)

Year	Dundee EOA		EOAs lying wholly or mainly in Tayside Region	
	Current prices	Constant (1986-87) prices	Current prices	Constant (1986-87) prices
1978-79	1·0	2·0	2·2	4·2
1979-80	1·2	1·9	1·8	3·1
1980-81	1·4	1·9	2·7	3·8
1981-82	1·8	2·3	3·6	4·7
1982-83	2·8	3·3	3·6	4·3
1983-84	4·3	4·9	4·7	5·3
1984-85	5·5	6·0	6·1	6·6
1985-86	3·4	3·5	3·9	4·0
1986-87	4·4	4·4	5·1	5·1

SOCIAL SERVICES

Community Care

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what further consideration he has given to the recommendation of the Select Committee on Social Services in its Second Report on community care, Session 1984-85, that the lessons from other countries of hasty change in closing down one set of facilities before firmly established alternatives exist need further examination; and if he will identify what action has been taken since the publication of the Government's response to that report, Cmnd. 9674.

Mr. Newton: Professional and other staff have continued to study a wide range of research and other reports fom other countries, which contain a number of useful lessons for ourselves. Our response to the Select Committee report clearly affirmed the view that, in the words of the policy paper attached to the response and circulated to health authorities, "New facilities must be available before old facilities are dispensed with." Since that time, after studying reports from other countries, we have funded research studies designed to demonstrate whether models of community care which have been found beneficial in those countries can be successful here.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* details of all schemes which his Department has arranged with private health service companies as part of its initiative to reduce hospital waiting lists.

Mr. Newton: A list of the projects currently being funded from regional health authorities' allocations from the waiting list fund for 1987-88 which make use of facilities in the private sector is as follows:

Yorkshire RHA
Scunthorpe DHA: ENT—70 cases
Huddersfield DHA: Breast Surgery—90 cases
Pontefract DHA: ENT/Gynaecology—306 cases
Hull DHA: ENT—150 cases

East Anglian RHA
Cambridge DHA: Plastic surgery—50 cases

North West Thames RHA
South Bedfordshire DHA: ENT—25 cases
Hounslow and Spelthorne DHA:
Surgery—226 cases
Ophthalmology—50 cases

North East Thames RHA
City and Hackney DHA: ENT—242 cases (2 projects)
Southend DHA: Gynaecology—241 cases

South West Thames RHA
West Surrey/North East Hants DHA: Urology—12 cases

Trent RHA
Leicestershire DHA: 10 CABGs
South Lincolnshire DHA:
Orthopaedics—88 cases
Orthopaedics—460 cases
Southern Derbyshire DHA: Gynaecology—54 cases
Central Notts DHA: Orthopaedics—160 cases
Barnsley DHA: Gynaecology/Radiology—202 cases
Doncaster DHA:
General Surgery—170 cases
ENT—270 cases
Gynaecology—115 cases
Rotherham DHA: Surgery 67 cases
Sheffield DHA:
10 CABGs
General Surgery—20 cases
Surgery—92 cases

South East Thames RHA
Dartford and Gravesham DHA:
Urology—130 cases
General Surgery—40 cases
Bromley DHA: Orthopaedics—22 hips
In addition some post-operative nursing care has been purchased in the private sector for projects in Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone and Brighton DHAs.

Wessex RHA
East Dorset DHA: Orthopaedics—20 cases
Portsmouth and South East Hants DHA: Orthopaedics—100 hips

West Midlands RHA
South East Staffordshire DHA: Orthopaedics—80 cases
North Staffordshire DHA: Gynaecology—20 cases
Shropshire DHA: General surgery—100 cases

Oxford RHA
Milton Keynes DHA: Gynaecology—30 cases
Aylesbury DHA: Plastic surgery—250 cases

Mersey RHA
Crewe DHA: Gynaecology: 107 cases

North Western RHA
Blackburn DHA: Orthopaedics—33 hips
Burnley DHA:
ENT—181 cases
Orthopaedics—100 hips
Bolton DHA: Ophthalmology—175 cases
Bury DHA: ENT—225 cases
Stockport DHA: Urology—42 cases

Medical Professionals

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has received any representations from individuals in the Nottingham district health authority regarding the integration of medical professionals into the general management system.

Mr. Newton: I have received one letter about the principle of combining general managerial responsibilities with continuing clinical practice, but not from a member of the Nottingham district health authority.

Mentally Ill People

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make it his policy that in regions where health authority assessments of the local needs of the mentally ill have not been made, he will withhold approval of further reductions in mental hospital beds and if plans for the closure of such hospitals until assessments of their needs have been made and alternative services to meet the needs provided.

Mr. Newton: We have already emphasised that no closure of a mental illness hospital should go ahead until a carefull assessment of all the existing patients' needs has been made and alternative services appropriate to those needs have been provided. The closure of hospitals should be a consequence of the former residents being suitably accommodated elsewhere, and not a reason for them to be placed in unsuitable accommodation.

Nurses

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to recruit and retain nurses within the National Health Service.

Mr. Newton: We have taken a number of steps recently designed in whole or in part to improve nurse recruitment and retention in the National Health Service. For example, we announced before Christmas the special mortgage scheme with the Nationwide Anglia building society and agreement has been reached on a new grading structure for nurses which will mean that the skills of nurses in key specialisms will be reflected in their grading and therefore in their pay. Other central initiatives include the recently completed consultations on new nurse training proposals (Project 2000) and a new support worker grade for nursing; the feasibility study on the use of the youth training scheme as a means of recruiting to nurse training and to the support worker grade, on which a report has recently been published; a study commissioned by RHA chairmen to examine factors influencing recruitment and retention and suggest improvements; a career development project group established to examine the scope for attractive career goals for nurses; and in NHS/DHSS working group on equal opportunities for women which will in particular make recommendations for management of the career break.

Action at national level can only be effective if it is matched by action by local management. Health authorities have been asked to improve recruitment and retention by making greater efforts to recruit mature entrants; organising "Back to Nursing" campaigns including refresher training; increasing male recruitment; establishing nurse banks; giving more opportunities for flexible working and job sharing.

Treatment Costs

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the average cost of treating a patient in hospital in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what information he has as to the range of such costs in district health authorities.

Mrs. Currie: The average cost of treating a patient in a major acute hospital in 1985-86 was £724. At the level of district health authorities, average costs ranged from £467 (35 per cent. below the national average) to £1,231 (70 per cent. above the national average). A large part of this variation may be attributed to different types of cases and different lengths of stay. If allowance is made for these factors by estimating what district costs would have been if their case mix and lengths of stay were equal to the national averages, districts' actual costs vary from 21 per cent. under to 23 per cent. over such estimated costs. To illustrate the variations that can arise a special study in one health authority has shown that the cost of a bronchoscopy is £125 plus £227 per day, while the cost of implanting a cardiac defibrillator is £10,500 plus £227 per day.

Expenditure Statistics

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* the proportion of United Kingdom gross domestic product spending on *(a)* the National Health Service as a whole, *(b)* hospital and community health services and *(c)* family practitioner services, for each year from 1970 until the latest year in which figures are available.

Mr. Newton: NHS expenditure in the United Kingdom as a percentage of gross domestic product in each year since 1970 is shown in the following table. These estimates are derived from Central Statistical Office national accounts. These accounts, however, do not identify separately expenditure on the hospital and community health services or on family practitioner services. The figures used in the table for these services are estimates derived from departmental records, which are compiled on a financial year basis. Comparable data for the United Kingdom for years before 1978-79 are not readily available.

Percentage of GDP spent

Year	NHS	[1][2]HCHS	FPS
1970	3·8	—	—
1971	3·8	—	—
1972	4·0	—	—
1973	3·9	—	—
1974	4·8	—	—
1975	5·1	—	—
1976	5·0	—	—
1977	4·9	—	—
1978	4·8	—	—
1979	4·8	[3]—	[3]—
1980	5·3	[4]4·2	1·1
1981	5·5	4·3	1·2
1982	5·4	4·2	1·2
1983	5·7	4·5	1·2
1984	5·5	4·2	1·3
1985	5·4	4·2	1·2
1986	5·5	4·3	1·2

[1] Including expenditure on central health and miscellaneous services (separate figures for United Kingdom not readily available).
[2] The adjustment from financial year data to calendar year has been estimated using Departmental records.
[3] Comparable data for 1979 and earlier years are not readily available.
[4] Estimated.

Hospital and Community Health Services (Staff Targets)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* his Department's staff targets for the hospital and community health services for each year since 1981 up to the latest year for which figures are available and similarly actual staff in post, all broken down by staff type.

Mr. Newton: A manpower control system was introduced in 1983 and the first manpower targets were given for March 1984. The distribution of approved targets between staff groups is a matter for regional decision.

The table therefore gives overall total comparisons of the 14 regions as at 31 March.

NHS Directly Employed Staff at 31 March
Total 14 Regional Health Authorities

Year	Targets	Staff in post
1984	802,700	796,000
1985	802,700	792,600
1986	796,000	775,300
1987	789,500	767,300
1988	781,300	Not available

Source: DHSS Annual Censuses of NHS Medical and Non-Medical Manpower.

Notes: 1. Excludes staff at the Dental Estimates Board, Prescription Pricing Authority and London Post-Graduate Special Health Authorities.

2. Excludes Medical and Dental Locum Staff, Hospital Practitioners, Clinical Assistants and Agency Nursing and Midwifery staff.

3. All figures are independently rounded to the nearest hundred (100) whole-time equivalents.

Health Authority Waiting Lists

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to seek to discover the reasons why certain health authorities have waiting lists of over one year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We asked regional health authorities to submit comprehensive reports on the nature and causes of their waiting lists and time in July 1986 when we launched our waiting list/times initiative. The reports demonstrated that the causes of excessive waiting times varied from district to district and specialty to specialty. Many of the problems were able to be tackled within existing resources but others did require additional funding. We therefore set up a special £25 million waiting list fund for 1987/88 and aim to have treated some 100,000 additional cases by the end of March.

For 1988/89 we have increased the fund to £30 million and have asked health authorities to make reductions in waiting times their top priority in making bids against the fund.

Progress on projects supported from the fund and health authorities' progress within the initiative generally are monitored regularly.

Laboratory Workers (HIV Infection)

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, and in the absence of regular testing, he will give his reasons for stating that the risk of HIV infection to laboratory workers is extremely remote.

Mr. Newton: Published scientific literature illustrates that more than 2,000 recorded incidents of direct exposure to HIV contamination have resulted in very few occupationally acquired infections worldwide. The incidence of HIV infection in health care workers in general both in the United States and in this country closely matches that of the general population despite in some cases, multiple and daily encounters with AIDS patients and others who are HIV-positive.

In the United Kingdom, more than 190 incidents of exposure to the HIV virus involving health care workers and including accidental direct innoculations have been recorded since 1985 with no evidence of infection. A single instance of sero-conversion in a British nurse was reported earlier in 1984.

Some laboratory workers in this country engaged in work with the virus have volunteered to be tested, but none has been found to have contracted the infection.

Income Support Scheme

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how much of the £225 million extra expenditure planned for the income support scheme is attributable to compensation for the payment of 20 per cent. of rates.

Mr. Scott: Including transitional protection, the planned level of expenditure on income support in 1988-89 is some £420 million higher than it would have been if the supplementary benefit scheme had continued with a normal uprating. This includes expenditure of £280 million to compensate for the 20 per cent. rates contribution.

Social Fund

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the level of loans that will be written off each year under the social fund in the figures in the Government's expenditure plans 1988-89.

Mr. Scott: Social fund loans will seldom be written off. The net expenditure figures for loans which underlie the figures in the Government's expenditure plans 1988-89 assume that a proportion of loan repayments will remain outstanding at the end of each accounting period, but do not contain specific assumptions about the level of loans which are written off.

Consultants

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied that consultants employed on contract by regional health authorities adhere to the conditions set out in them; if he will detail the management procedures to ensure that the terms of the contracts are followed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I am satisfied that, in general, consultants carry out their contractual duties in a proper and responsible manner. Regional health authorities and the district health authorities in which the consultants actually work are together responsible for devising arrangements to ensure that consultants adhere to the terms of their contracts.

Grimsby Health Authority

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many residential units for National Health Service staff there have been in the Grimsby district health authority in each year since 1979.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that this information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to write to the chairman of Grimsby health authority for the information he is seeking.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many consultants are employed by the Grimsby district health authority on contracts; and how many of these work full time and part time for the National Health Service;

(2) what is the annual cost of consultants contracts for the Grimsby district health authority.

Mrs. Currie: Information on the number of consultants in non-teaching districts such as Grimsby is not available centrally, as such staff are employed by regional health authorities. Some information on costs is available from District accounts. In 1986-87, Grimsby's total expenditure on salaries and wages of medical consultants was

£1,451,000 and on dental consultants £56,000. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Yorkshire regional health authority for any further information which he requires.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the bed availability at the Grimsby district health authority as at the latest date; and if he will give similar figures for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Currie: The requested information is given in the table, together with throughput.

Average daily number of available beds in Grimsby District Health Authority

Year	Average daily number of available beds	Throughput[1]
1979	797	22·7
1980	800	23·4
1981	806	24·9
1982	800	25·0
1983	807	26·4
1984	800	27·9
1985	957	24·9
1986	970	25·2

[1] Number of cases per available bed.

Notes:

Caistor hospital (mental handicap) was transferred to Grimsby district health authority from North Lincolnshire district health authority on 1 April 1985.

Figures for years before 1982 relate to Grimsby's predecessor district within Humberside area health authority.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many appointments he has made to the Grimsby health authority since 1983.

Mrs. Currie: The Secretary of State reappointed Mr. R. Blair as Chairman of Grimsby health authority on 1 April 1986.

The appointment of members to Grimsby district health authority is the responsibility of the Yorkshire regional health authority and certain local authorities

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many nurses have left the Grimsby district health authority since 1979; how many have been reinstated; what is the present number; and what it was in 1979.

Mrs. Currie: Staff in post figures are shown in the table. Because of the 1982 National Health Service reorganisation, figures on a consistent basis are not held centrally for the years prior to 1982.

Information on staff who have "left" or been "reinstated" is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the Grimsby district health authority for this information.

National Health Service and midwifery staff in post[1] Grimsby district health authority at 30 September

Year	[2]Whole time equivalents
1982	1,190
1986	1,390

[1] Includes agency staff.

[2] Figures independently rounded off to nearest ten (10) whole time equivalents.

Source: DHSS Annual Census of National Health Service Non-medical Manpower

927

Severe Weather Payments (Grimsby)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total of severe weather payments paid by benefit offices within the Grimsby constituency in 1986-87; if he will break down this figure by week of payment; and if he will estimate the number of claimants involved.

Mr. Scott: The Grimsby constituency is situated within the area covered by the Grimsby local office, although the boundaries are not conterminous. The total and weekly number of exceptionally cold weather payments made by the Grimsby office last winter is given in the table. Figures are not available for the number of individuals receiving payment but the great majority of successful claimants will have received £5 in respect of each of the two weeks for which help was available in the Grimsby area. The number of successful claimants is therefore approximately half the total number of £5 payments made.

Number of exceptionally cold weather payments made by the Grimsby local office by week of payment in the winter of 1986/87.

Payment made in week ending	Number of £5 weekly payments made
20 January 1987	155
27 January 1987	4,174
3 February 1987	2,005
10 February 1987	852
17 February 1987	279
24 February 1987	304
3 March 1987	103
10 March 1987	50
17 March 1987	76
24 March 1987	74
31 March 1987	38
7 April 1987	54
14 April 1987	36
21 April 1987	2
28 April 1987	4
TOTAL	8,206

Nurses (Special Duty Payments)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how much has been paid in the last eight years on special duty payments for nurses in the Grimsby health authority.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that the information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Grimsby health authority for the information he is seeking.

Benefit Fraud Investigators

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the cost to his Department of the benefit fraud investigators who are operating in the Peterlee and Seaham area; and if he will make a statement on their cost-effectiveness.

Mr. Portillo: The estimated cost to the Department, in terms of salaries and expenses, of the three benefit fraud investigators currently operating in the Peterlee and Seaham area is of the order of £3,800 per month. I am completely satisfied that these staff fulful their duties in a cost-effective manner.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether invalid care allowance paid to a mother looking after hanidicapped dependants and therefore unable to work continues after the said mother reaches pensionable age of 60 years.

Mr. Scott: If the qualifying conditions are satisfied, entitlement to an invalid care allowance continues after pension age, but the amount payable may be reduced or extinguished on account of the payment of a retirement pension or other social security benefits.

Supplementary Benefit (Caseload)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the reply of 26 January, *Official Report*, columns *200-214*, what is the nature of the evidence he has relating to activity on the supplementary benefit caseload of benefit offices.

Mr. Portillo: The staffing levels of local social security offices are established by their proportionate share of the forecast national workloads (for example, the number of unemployed supplementary benefit claimants) and the average time spent on each of these workloads. The information on average times is obtained from periodic activity sampling exercises. The latest such exercise was held from August 1986 to July 1987.

Dogs (Northumberland)

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people in Northumberland health authority *(a)* received hospital treatment as a result of attacks by dogs, *(b)* died as a result of such attacks and *(c)* received hospital treatment for dog-borne diseases, including toxocara canis, as a result of contact with dogs or dog excrement, for the last year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie: There were no deaths of usual residents of Northumberland district health authority registered in 1986 where the underlying cause of death was due to injury caused by dogs. I regret that the remaining information requested is not available centrally.

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women in the northern region have died from cervical cancer in the last five years for which figures are available, expressed per thousand women.

Mrs. Currie: The information is shown in the table.

Number of deaths to women usually resident in Northern Regional Health Authority with underlying cause as malignant neoplasm of cervix uteri (ICD(9)[1]180), and rates per thousand resident women. 1982 to 1986

Year	Number of deaths	Rate per 1,000 women
1982	153	0·096
1983	155	0·097
1984	134	0·084
1985	147	0·093
1986	145	0·092

[1] International Classification of Diseases 9th revision.

Worth House Children's Home

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what inquiries the Social Services Inspectorate has made of the Kent constabulary at Herne Bay relating to the operation of Worth House children's home.

Mrs. Currie: It is not the Inspectorate's normal practice to make inquiries of the police in the conduct of its inspections, and none was made on this occasion.

Benefits (RPI Error)

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to the statement by the Minister of State of 18 December 1987, *Official Report*, column 1376, he will now update the estimate of the total amount of underpayment due to the miscalculation of the retail prices index in relation to social security benefits; and what was the total amount actually paid out in special lump-sum payments during the week started 1 February.

Mr. Scott: It is estimated that the underspend on social security will be £109 million between April 1987 and April 1989. £98 million of this was allocated to the first stage of the special payments exercise, for those entitled to benefit during the week commencing 1 February. Not all these special payments will actually have been made during that week, as many beneficiaries are paid monthly or quarterly or will cash their order book foils for that week at a later date. Consequently, no firm figures for the total spending on this stage of the special payments will be known for several weeks. Special payments will also be made to people whose entitlement arises between 8 February and 8 October, and to certain categories of people whose losses on weekly benefit as a result of the error were significantly more than £8.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to the statement of 18 December 1987, *Official Report*, column 1376, he will explain the precise basis on which the figures of £8 and £7·85 were calculated in relation to the underpayment in benefit as a result of an error in computing the retail prices index.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) on 10 February at column *274*.

War Widows' Pensions

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make it his policy to lower the age limit for the age allowance in war widows' pensions from 65 to 60 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The age allowances currently paid are £5·50 at age 65, increasing to £11 at 70 and £13·85 at 80. They are paid in addition to the standard war widow's pension of £51·35 a week, which is itself 30 per cent. higher than the national insurance widow's pension. These allowances are unique to the war widow's pension scheme and are intended to recognise the additional needs of elderly war widows as they grow older. There is no reason to reduce the age at which they are paid to 60.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make it his policy to implement the request made by the War Widows Association of Great

Britain to increase the additional sums paid in age allowances related to war widows' pensions by £2 a week; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The request stems from proposals made in 1986 by a joint working group of officials and representatives of ex-service organisations to abolish some of the out-of-date provisions of the war pensions scheme and use the resources released to increase war widows' age allowances by £2 a week. The Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions rejected the proposals. That remains the position.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number of outstanding claims for supplementary benefit in the Dundee, East and Dundee, West offices of his Department on the latest available date; and what were the corresponding figures in each month since January 1982.

Mr. Portillo: Details of the number of outstanding claims to supplementary benefit at Dundee, East and Dundee, West offices are shown in the following table:

Date	*Dundee East*	*Dundee West*
11 May 1982	72	51
8 June 1982	80	60
6 July 1982	215	103
3 August 1982	77	78
31 August 1982	120	100
28 September 1982	101	59
26 October 1982	70	52
23 November 1982	56	39
21 December 1982	123	54
18 January 1983	275	57
15 February 1983	175	48
16 March 1983	209	56
12 April 1983	339	92
10 May 1983	226	48
7 June 1983	256	74
5 July 1983	550	93
2 August 1983	460	95
30 August 1983	349	65
27 September 1983	443	144
25 October 1983	292	64
22 November 1983	238	51
20 December 1983	260	58
17 January 1984	169	56
14 February 1984	130	64
13 March 84	177	55
10 April 1984	201	68
8 April 1984	137	107
5 June 1984	118	57
2 July 1984	289	83
31 July 1984	225	23
28 August 1984	251	115
25 September 1984	221	98
23 October 1984	181	84
20 November 1984	122	60
8 December 1984	166	74
16 January 1985	172	91
12 February 1985	110	100
12 March 1985	76	61
9 April 1985	129	104
7 May 1985	83	104
4 June 1985	128	142
2 July 1985	324	203
30 July 1985	187	131
27 August 1985	187	223
24 September 1985	214	206
22 October 1985	201	155
19 November 1985	180	182
17 December 1985	232	220
14 January 1986	245	273
11 February 1986	167	180
11 March 1986	198	257
8 April 1986	217	212
6 May 1986	172	116
3 June 1986	189	134
1 July 1986	344	275
29 July 1986	232	164
26 August 1986	307	174
23 September 1986	267	151
21 October 1986	141	110
18 November 1986	78	106
16 December 1986	86	102
13 January 1987	127	160
10 February 1987	138	184
10 March 1987	119	255
7 April 1987	157	168
5 May 1987	157	133
2 June 1987	113	153
30 June 1987	184	226
28 July 1987	276	141
25 August 1987	213	122
22 September 1987	270	145
20 October 1987	192	121
17 November 1987	92	105
15 December 1987	113	120
12 January 1988	165	122

There are no figures held prior to May 1982.

NHS (Ancillary Services)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the expenditure on ancillary services in the National Health Service in each year since 1983, at constant 1983 prices.

Mrs. Currie: Information derived from the annual accounts of health authorities in England is shown in the table,

The savings which authorities have achieved largely reflects the success of the Department's policy requiring them to subject their arrangements for catering, domestic/cleaning and laundry services to competitive tendering procedures.

Hospital and Community Health Services[1]—Expenditure on Ancillary Services

	Per annual accounts £ million	*At 1983-84 prices £ million*
1983-84	1,151	1,151
1984-85	1,143	1,094
1985-86	1,142	1,032
1986-87	1,133	992

[1] Includes ambulance, blood transfusion and other services.

Source: Annual accounts of regional and district health authorities and those of the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.

Notes:

1. Expenditure on ancillary services lacks a precise definition but has been taken as total current expenditure on catering, domestic/cleaning, portering, laundry, linen and non-ambulance transport services.

2. The figures have been expressed at 1983-84 prices by the use of the Gross Domestic Product deflator.

Radiotherapy Unit, Southend

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many letters he has now received from the general public about the proposal by the North East

Thames regional health authority to close the radiotherapy unit at Southend general hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: We have received tens of thousands of representations from members of the public about the proposals. The matter has now come to the Secretary of State for a final decision which will be made shortly.

National Health Service Staff (Pay)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if *(a)* medical laboratory technicians, *(b)* physiotherapists, *(c)* occupational therapists, *(d)* speech therapists, *(e)* medical physicists, *(f)* radiographers and *(g)* radiologists have received pay rises equal to the rise in the retail prices index in each year since 1983.

Mr. Newton: The percentage pay settlements for these groups in the National Health Service from 1983-84 to 1986-87 (1 August to 31 July) together with the annual rise in the retail prices index (July to July) are set out in the table.

Pay round year	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
(a) medical laboratory scientific officers	4·5	4·7	6·0	5·0
(b) Physiotherapists	7·8	[1]12·1	8·2	9·1
(c) occupational therapists	7·8	[1]12·1	8·2	9·1
(d) speech therapists	4·5	4·7	6·0	[2]—
(e) medical physics technicians	4·5	4·7	6·0	5·0
(f) radiographers	7·8	[1]12·1	8·2	9·1
(g) radiologists	6·9	6·3	7·6	8·25
Retail Prices Index annual movement July to July	4·5	6·9	2·4	4·4

[1] Staged award, final part paid with effect from 1.2.86
[2] Settlement provided £450 lump sum and introduced revised grading definitions from 1 January 1988 (average increase estimated as approximately 9·0 per cent.)

Birmingham Children's Hospital

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to increase funds to provide for the specialist and standard nursing levels which would be required to reduce the waiting list for heart operations at Birmingham children's hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The recent problems at the Birmingham children's hospital are primarily the result of a shortage of trained nurses. The chairman of the West Midlands regional health authority has recently announced six areas of action intended to ensure that in future children do not wait for long periods for cardiac surgery. A number of measures are already being taken to improve the recruitment and retention of trained nurses including the proposal for a new paediatric intensive care course in Birmingham later this year.

NHS (Private Patients)

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if decisions have been taken on the central reference lists of model charges for National Health Service private patients for the year from 1 April.

Mr. Newton: As from 1 April 1987, health authorities have had the function of determining the charges they will apply to their private patient facilities. Each authority must set its charges annually from 1 April each year. They will do so either by setting their own charges to recover costs or by adopting a centrally calculated list of model charges.

The central reference lists of model charges for private in-patients and private out-patients for the year from 1 April are given in the tables.

For private in-patients, the model charges for 1988-89 are on average 6·3 per cent. higher than those for 1987-88. The model charges are inclusive daily amounts based on the cost of providing accommodation and services for all patients. The figures take account of increased costs (including capital depreciation) and as last year also reflect the fact that private patients have shorter lengths of stay than NHS patients. The figures also take account of the fact that a number of authorities have set their own in-patient charges; where this has happened the hospitals concerned have been removed from the model list calculations. As a result, charges in one category have gone down, and model charges are no longer needed for another category.

For private out-patients, the model charges for 1988-89 are on average 6·5 per cent. higher than for 1987-88. Charges for amenity beds are unchanged.

All private resident charges 1988-89

Charge class	*Not separate arrangements*						*Separate arrangements*					
	Single rooms			*Shared accommodation*			*Single rooms*			*Shared accommodation*		
	1987-88	*1988-89*	*Per cent. increase*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*Per cent. increase*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*Per cent. increase*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*Per cent. increase*
Long stay (A)	83	93	12·0	75	84	12·0	78	87	11·5	71	79	11·3
Psychiatric (B)	70	85	21·4	64	77	20·3	66	80	21·2	60	73	21·7
Mainly acute (C1)	138	142	2·9	125	129	3·2	130	134	3·1	118	122	3·4
Acute (C2)	157	169	7·6	142	154	8·5	148	160	8·1	134	145	8·2
London Teaching (D)	219	226	3·2	199	206	3·5	206	214	3·9	187	194	3·7
Provincial Teaching (E)	174	182	4·6	158	166	5·1	164	172	4·9	149	156	4·7
London PG SHAs (F)	238	197	−17·2	217	179	−17·5	225	186	−17·3	204	169	−17·2
Sick children and National Heart and Chest (G)	335	n/a	n/a	305	n/a	n/a	316	n/a	n/a	287	n/a	n/a

Average (unweighted) per cent. increase: 5·9.
Average weighted per cent. increase: 6·3.

Private non-resident charges 1988-89

Item of Service	Class A to E 1987-88	Class A to E 1988-89	Class A to E Percentage change	Class F + G 1987-88	Class F + G 1988-89	Class F + G Percentage change
1. Consultation	6·50	7·00	+7·7	12·00	13·00	+8·3
2. (i) Day cases	26·50	28·50	+7·5	27·50	29·50	+7·3
(ii) Day patients	31·00	34·00	+9·7	32·00	35·00	+9·4
3. Pathology	7·00	7·50	+7·1	13·50	15·00	+11·1
4. Radiography						
(i) Per unit value	0·78	n.a.	n.a.	1·00	n.a.	n.a.
(ii) Minimum charge	12·50	13·50	+8·0	16·00	18·50	+15·6
(iii) CT scanning	96·00	96·00	no change	115·00	115·00	no change
5. Radiotherapy	18·00	18·00	no change	44·50	44·50	no change
6. Physiotherapy	5·00	5·50	+10·0	9·00	11·50	+27·8
7. Occupational Therapy	7·00	8·50	+21·4	10·00	10·00	no change
8. Other diagnostic procedures						
(i) Audiometry	5·00	5·00	no change	5·00	5·00	no change
(ii) ECG	9·00	9·50	+5·6	16·50	17·50	+6·1
(iii) EEG	37·00	38·50	+4·1	72·50	83·50	+15·2
(iv) EMG	23·00	24·00	+4·3	44·50	50·50	+13·5
9. Use of Operating theatres						
(i) Less than 10 minutes	22·00	22·50	+2·3	27·00	28·00	+3·7
(ii) 10-30 minutes	42·50	44·00	+3·5	54·00	56·00	+3·7
(iii) More than 30 minutes	64·50	67·00	+3·9	81·00	84·00	+3·7

AIDS

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will indicate, for the current financial year and for the past two financial years, the funds devoted by the Government specifically to respond to the AIDS crisis, broken down into funds spent on *(a)* public education, *(b)* health care and treatment, *(c)* provision of drugs, *(d)* research and *(e)* other actions.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 26 October 1987]:* It is not possible to give a comprehensive three-year breakdown of funding devoted to all aspects of the Government's response to the challenge posed by HIV infection and AIDS. Much of the expenditure on care and treatment of people with HIV and AIDS, and the provision of drugs, comes from health authorities' and boards' general allocations and is not identifiable separately. This is also the case with the Ministry of Defence's Defence Medical Services where any expenditure on AIDS is subsumed within their overall allocation.

The table sets out the money expended for the United Kingdom (figures rounded to the nearest £000) over and above the resources devoted to AIDS services by health authorities and boards from their general allocations. The figures must be read in conjunction with the notes.

£'000s

	1985-86	1986-87	[1] [2] 1987-88
(a) Public education[3]	548	7,303	12,578
(b) Health care and treatment[4]	1,169	3,189	21,556
(c) Provision of drugs	—	—	[5] 1,600
(d) Research	470	1,050	9,010
(e) Other[6]	1,148	2,372	16,300

[1] 1987-88 figures include estimates based on likely expenditure at end of 1987-88 financial year.
[2] Excludes £125,000 of the Welsh Health Promotion Authority's budget, to support the work of the Welsh AIDS Campaign.
[3] Excludes educational material aimed at specific groups, included under *(e)* Other.
[4] Amounts shown are specific extra allocations made to health authorities as a contribution towards these costs. Other care and treatment costs are met from health authorities' general allocations, and are not separately identifiable.
[5] Central allocation to health authorities for Retrovir (AZT). Health authorities' and boards' expenditure on drugs otherwise met from other allocations and not separately identifiable.
[6] For example: overseas aid, funding of voluntary organisations, advice and guidance to specific groups (such as schools and the education service, employers and the police), and the Public Health Laboratory Service AIDS programme.

Single Payments (North-East)

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many supplementary benefit single payments were made, and what was the cost thereof, for 1983-84, 1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87 and the latest figures for 1987-88, for *(a)* Cleveland, *(b)* Durham, *(c)* Northumbria and *(d)* Tyne and Wear;

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* The information requested is given in the table.

The Department has 28 offices within the four areas mentioned in the question. However, the boundaries of the local offices and those of the county/administrative district are not conterminous.

Number and cost of single payments made by DHSS local offices in (a) Cleveland, (b) Durham, (c) Northumberland and (d) Tyne and Wear

(a) Cleveland
This area includes the offices of Eston, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Stockton

Year	Number of awards	Cost £
April 1983 to April 1984	46,244	4,114,983
April 1984 to April 1985	96,503	5,678,783
April 1985 to April 1986	111,615	7,901,695
April 1986 to April 1987	93,332	6,585,497
April 1987 to 12 January 1988[1]	40,596	2,615,608

(b) Durham

This area includes the offices of Bishop Auckland, Chester-le-Street, Darlington, Durham, Peterlee, Seaham and Stanley

Year	Number of awards	Cost £
April 1983 to April 1984	28,394	1,621,120
April 1984 to April 1985	48,963	2,529,882
April 1985 to April 1986	69,501	3,589,559
April 1986 to April 1987	69,720	3,217,527
April 1987 to 12 January 1988[1]	31,449	2,149,397

(c) Northumberland

This area includes the offices of Ashington, Berwick, Blyth and Hexham

Year	Number of awards	Cost £
April 1983 to April 1984	7,458	487,381
April 1984 to April 1985	12,496	785,649
April 1985 to April 1986	16,590	1,146,094
April 1986 to April 1987	14,121	1,021,046
April 1987 to 12 January 1988[1]	8,599	578,295

(d) Tyne and Wear

This area includes the offices of Gateshead, Houghton le Spring, Jarrow, Newcastle on Tyne (St. James'), Newcastle on Tyne (East), Newcastle on Tyne (West), North Shields, South Shields, Sunderland (North) and Sunderland (South)

Year	Number of awards	Cost £
April 1983 to April 1984	88,185	5,840,421
April 1984 to April 1985	154,735	9,156,968
April 1985 to April 1986	196,630	13,101,212
April 1986 to April 1987	162,021	11,646,645
April 1987 to 12 January 1988[1]	76,698	5,339,385

[1] The figures for April 1987 to 12 January 1988 are provisional and subject to amendment.

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many supplementary benefit single payments were made, and what was the cost thereof, for 1983-84, 1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87 and the latest figures for 1987-88 for his Department's local offices at *(a)* Darlington, *(b)* Bishop Auckland and *(c)* Peterlee.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 8 February 1988]*: The information requested is given in the table.

Number and Cost of Single Payments Made by DHSS Local Offices at (a) Darlington, (b) Bishop Auckland and (c) Peterlee

(a) Darlington

Year	Number of Awards	Cost £
April 1983 to April 1984	6,197	258,450
April 1984 to April 1985	10,513	611,790
April 1985 to April 1986	15,944	790,037
April 1986 to April 1987	14,995	791,343
April 1987 to 12 January 1988[1]	8,088	552,056

(b) Bishop Auckland

Year	Number of Awards	Cost £
April 1983 to April 1984	6,642	378,301
April 1984 to April 1985	11,625	691,649
April 1985 to April 1986	16,557	1,212,728
April 1986 to April 1987	13,080	917,386
April 1987 to 12 January 1988[1]	5,921	436,251

(c) Peterlee

Year	Number of Awards	Cost £
April 1983 to April 1984	3,091	221,976
April 1984 to April 1985	5,979	436,178
April 1985 to April 1986	6,248	433,083
April 1986 to April 1987	5,752	417,003
April 1987 to 12 January 1988[1]	2,833	197,736

[1] The figures for April 1987 to 12 January 1988 are provisional and subject to amendment.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services in what circumstances an individual ambulance authority raises charges from another authority for mutual assistance or services; and whether the financing of such mutual services is balanced.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 11 February 1988]*: It is for the regional health authority to agree the circumstances in which such charges should be raised. Where the boundaries of an area served by a particular ambulance authority are not coterminous with regional health authority boundaries, an appropriate adjustment is made to the resource allocation targets of the health authorities concerned.

National Health Service Beds

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the total number of National Health Service beds and the number of acute beds per head of population.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 11 February 1988]*: The requested information is given in the table.

Average daily number of available beds in the National Health Service (England) 1986

	Number
Total beds	315,714
Total acute beds	131,332
Total beds per 1,000 population	6·7
Total acute beds per 1,000 population	2·8

Figures for Scotland and Wales are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Benefits

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people were receiving supplementary benefit in 1983-84, 1984-85, 1985-86 and 1986-87 and the latest figures for 1987-88 in *(a)* Scotland *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Greenock and Port Glasgow.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 12 February 1988]*: The table sets out the information requested. The Strathclyde area is served by 31 local offices, including Greenock and Port Glasgow, although the boundaries are not coterminous.

Region/ local office	Number of supplementary benefit claimants				
	2 August 1983	31 July 1984	31 July 1985	13 August 1986	29 July 1987
Scotland	469,871	507,785	531,176	545,621	563,047
Strathclyde	266,818	290,618	305,744	313,911	323,033
Greenock	9,936	10,740	11,101	11,868	12,672
Port Glasgow	4,235	4,723	5,006	5,376	5,275

Source: 100 per cent. count of cases in action.

Private Patients

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give for 1985, 1986 and 1987 *(a)* the number of pay beds, *(b)* the number of discharges and deaths of private patients, *(c)* the average number of pay beds occupied by private patients daily and *(d)* the percentage occupancy for each district health authority and special health authority.

Mrs. Currie *[pursuant to her reply, 1 February 1988]:* The information that is available has now been placed in the Library.

Health Statistics

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list by district health authority the number of people on waiting lists for urgent and non-urgent operations for December of each year since 1982.

Mr. Newton *[pursuant to his reply, 2 February 1988]:* I regret I cannot provide the hon. Member with all the information he seeks. The table gives the figures for March 1986 and March 1987 as the December figures do not separately identify urgent and non-urgent cases. Figures for earlier years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In-patient waiting list for surgical specialties, 31 March 1986 and 31 March 1987

	1986		1987	
	Urgent cases	Non-urgent cases	Urgent cases	Non-urgent cases
Northern RHA				
Hartlepool	40	1,336	36	1,625
North Tees	0	796	0	922
South Tees	171	5,923	134	5,330
East Cumbria	0	3,003	0	3,769
South Cumbria	14	1,321	0	1,191
West Cumbria	33	1,316	39	1,357
Darlington	5	2,280	5	2,392
Durham	22	741	39	997
North West Durham	4	660	0	683
South West Durham	0	446	0	903
Northumberland	142	1,558	37	1,522
Gateshead	28	1,053	43	1,277
Newcastle	997	7,851	1,069	7,580
North Tyneside	21	1,186	11	1,812
South Tyneside	0	686	0	712
Sunderland	167	3,643	152	3,485
Yorkshire RHA				
Hull	0	6,615	0	6,908
East Yorkshire	0	1,101	0	1,410
Grimsby	8	1,237	27	1,373
Scunthorpe	0	2,850	0	2,832
Northallerton	0	419	0	679
York	9	2,856	11	2,522
Scarborough	43	1,541	83	1,621
Harrogate	35	1,604	36	1,827
Bradford	181	6,102	146	6,925
Airedale	101	2,537	75	1,990
Wharfedale	0	1,000	0	1,000
Calderdale	1	985	5	991
Huddersfield	0	2,097	0	2,175
Dewsbury	4	652	2	427
Leeds Western	555	3,650	343	3,989
Leeds Eastern	595	4,939	445	5,523
Wakefield	39	2,122	47	2,131
Pontefract	588	1,671	311	1,788
Trent RHA				
North Derbyshire	187	2,405	n.a.	†2,489
South Derbyshire	168	6,281	n.a.	4,937
Leicestershire	787	6,788	n.a.	7,962
North Lincolnshire	111	3,033	n.a.	2,782
South Lincolnshire	61	3,870	n.a.	4,166
Bassetlaw	26	785	n.a.	535
Central Nottinghamshire	76	5,292	n.a.	4,936
Nottingham	160	7,994	n.a.	6,594
Barnsley	90	2,350	n.a.	2,384
Doncaster	401	4,172	n.a.	4,625
Rotherham	113	4,060	n.a.	4,435
Sheffield	1,112	10,300	n.a.	10,146
East Anglia RHA				
Cambridge	585	4,402	605	4,087
Peterborough	40	3,199	300	4,073
West Suffolk	61	2,549	73	2,648
East Suffolk	112	2,884	114	3,286
Norwich	1,264	5,586	1,171	5,182
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	358	3,040	290	2,893
West Norfolk and Wisbech	120	1,886	6	2,094
Huntingdon	14	727	63	729
North West Thames RHA				
North Bedfordshire	0	2,251	0	2,419
South Bedfordshire	0	2,107	5	2,366
North Hertfordshire	1	2,873	61	3,194
East Hertfordshire	8	1,296	9	1,307
North West Hertfordshire	0	1,821	0	1,501
South West Hertfordshire	160	1,735	105	1,970
Barnet	464	3,568	266	3,152
Harrow	8	951	7	941
Hillingdon	624	6,838	769	7,055
Hounslow and Spelthorne	498	4,652	330	5,513
Ealing	276	1,830	142	1,263
Brent	15	1,957	36	1,808
Paddington and North Kensington	95	2,807	109	3,183
Riverside	752	4,696	827	4,519
North East Thames RHA				
Basildon and Thurrock	881	5,100	828	5,640
Mid Essex	23	3,535	210	4,430
North East Essex	399	3,883	289	2,977
West Essex	60	4,787	190	4,406
Southend	584	2,560	711	3,046
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	183	6,232	143	6,208
Hampstead	40	1,939	n.a.	n.a.
Bloomsbury	569	13,074	432	12,089
Islington	314	2,092	464	2,338
City and Hackney	1,839	3,766	2,095	4,583
Newham	60	1,051	79	1,488
Tower Hamlets	1,473	5,604	1,518	5,855

	1986		1987	
	Urgent cases	Non-urgent cases	Urgent cases	Non-urgent cases
Enfield	32	2,782	29	2,792
Haringey	160	1,065	156	848
Redbridge	47	1,553	69	2,266
Waltham Forest	190	4,151	224	4,279
South East Thames RHA				
Brighton	241	3,627	135	3,839
Eastbourne	43	2,638	118	3,177
Hastings	109	2,419	151	2,731
South East Kent	19	2,620	3	2,538
Canterbury and Thanet	364	4,213	364	4,460
Dartford and Gravesham	23	4,388	46	4,793
Maidstone	91	2,056	113	2,340
Medway	194	1,893	364	2,974
Tunbridge Wells	395	4,469	289	4,363
Bexley	0	1,493	0	1,842
Greenwich	0	2,486	32	2,516
Bromley	6	1,863	74	2,130
West Lambeth	641	5,109	1,554	6,054
Camberwell	129	2,487	212	2,493
Lewisham and North Southwark	686	6,914	840	7,918
South West Thames RHA				
North West Surrey	76	2,987	25	2,890
West Surrey and North East Hants	1,425	3,262	2,329	3,375
South West Surrey	101	3,083	83	3,092
Mid Surrey	131	2,162	66	2,094
East Surrey	141	1,483	156	2,053
Chichester	146	2,249	73	2,368
Mid Downs	98	2,064	113	2,097
Worthing	364	3,068	250	2,785
Croydon	179	2,087	119	2,312
Kingston and Esher	246	2,295	176	2,213
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehdington	289	3,042	145	2,346
Wandsworth	429	1,720	279	2,248
Merton and Sutton	286	2,676	149	2,741
Wessex RHA				
East Dorset	955	4,159	1,098	4,183
West Dorset	240	1,786	283	1,490
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	294	5,847	315	7,244
Southampton and South West Hampshire	1,046	6,977	1,339	6,543
Winchester	109	2,215	139	2,710
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	134	3,446	66	2,343
Salisbury	286	4,173	177	4,506
Swindon	54	2,975	91	3,057
Bath	430	4,907	507	4,855
Isle of Wight	27	1,817	7	1,331
Oxford RHA				
East Berkshire	528	6,815	509	7,233
West Berkshire	83	4,469	81	3,859
Aylesbury Vale	68	3,324	18	3,168
Wycombe	7	1,864	0	1,311
Milton Keynes	41	2,080	69	2,545
Kettering	21	2,757	70	3,474
Northampton	703	4,373	613	3,452
Oxfordshire	79	5,426	40	5,639
South Western RHA				
Bristol and Weston	471	7,328	486	7,539
Frenchay	81	3,376	77	3,362
Southmead	48	2,090	62	1,309
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	254	4,363	188	4,174
Exeter	101	4,513	143	4,501
North Devon	1	1,351	15	1,678
Plymouth	286	5,041	332	5,442
Torbay	89	1,679	41	1,561
Cheltenham	6	2,180	4	2,153
Gloucester	321	4,003	300	3,838
Somerset	503	4,312	896	4,581
West Midlands RHA				
Bromsgrove and Redditch	41	2,007	44	1,940
Herefordshire	98	2,536	56	2,069
Kidderminster and District	13	1,203	19	1,566
Worcester and District	33	3,333	50	3,407
Shropshire	293	7,202	401	8,341
Mid Staffordshire	53	1,625	88	1,520
North Staffordshire	943	7,912	1,057	7,826
South East Staffordshire	14	2,346	38	2,628
Rugby	0	528	0	659
North Warwickshire	39	1,786	66	2,507
South Warwickshire	16	3,192	13	2,512
Central Birmingham	755	4,178	736	4,315
East Birmingham	231	3,052	282	2,460
North Birmingham	61	2,296	65	1,235
South Birmingham	788	6,503	991	6,668
West Birmingham	75	3,294	69	4,520
Coventry	664	5,309	491	4,220
Dudley	161	4,054	138	3,746
Sandwell	0	1,288	0	1,728
Solihull	0	1,967	74	1,504
Walsall	9	2,847	26	2,716
Wolverhampton	133	3,901	174	4,585
Mersey RHA				
Chester	51	1,736	0	2,736
Crewe	479	4,198	251	3,258
Halton	4	387	0	123
Macclesfield	158	1,001	61	691
Warrington	0	2,626	0	1,862
Liverpool	571	7,086	355	6,874
St. Helens and Knowsley	8	3,846	33	4,016
Southport and Formby	0	1,103	0	1,331
South Sefton	37	3,338	58	3,177
Wirral	195	2,937	136	3,416
North Western RHA				
Lancaster	118	1,957	19	2,269
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	442	3,625	511	3,816
Preston	69	4,581	29	4,462
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	8	2,915	9	2,387
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	276	2,191	255	1,812
West Lancashire	28	1,892	16	2,431
Chorley and South Ribble	0	764	0	770
Bolton	40	2,788	119	3,013
Bury	6	729	0	731
North Manchester	168	2,454	82	2,331
Central Manchester	337	4,643	291	6,870
South Manchester	682	4,933	439	5,529
Oldham	321	4,058	447	4,475
Rochdale	122	2,911	118	2,815
Salford	120	3,708	219	4,517
Stockport	403	3,648	290	3,794
Tameside and Glossop	100	1,533	60	1,526
Trafford	25	1,476	5	1,528
Wigan	74	4,281	40	4,410

[1] Total cases in 1987 for Trent RHA districts.

ENERGY

Electricity Prices

4. **Mr. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on his policy towards competitive electricity pricing in the light of the results of

the survey on international electricity pricing organised by National Utility Services, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Michael Spicer: United Kingdom domestic electricity prices are among the lowest in Europe and will continue to be among the lowest after the increase in April. United Kingdom electricity prices will continue to compare favourably with world electricity prices.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received from pottery, brick and tile manufacturers and other concerned industrialists about the effect of proposed electricity price increases on their industry; what information he has of the effect on industries highly dependent on energy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have received a small number of representations from pottery, brick and tile manufacturers. The increase in electricity tariffs this April is likely to represent only about one quarter of 1 per cent. of their gross output. United Kingdom electricity tariffs for industry will remain highly competitive with those overseas even after April, and intensive users will have the continued benefit of contracted load management schemes and the qualifying industrial consumers' scheme (QUICS).

Pit Closures

12. **Mr. Loftheuse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many pit closures the chairman of British Coal has advised him will be likely to take place in the current year.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Pit closures are the responsibility of British Coal management under a procedure agreed with the unions.

Fast Breeder Reactors

14. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest assessment of progress on the fast breeder reactor research programme.

Mr. Parkinson: Significant design improvements have been achieved in recent years making use of the results of the R and D programme. Effort is now being concentrated on a common European design.

Electricity Industry

15. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what recent discussions he has had with the chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board and area electricity boards concerning privatisation of the electricity supply industry.

Mr. Parkinson: I met the chairman of the area boards as a group last month and I meet Lord Marshall, chairman of the CEGB, regularly to discuss privatisation of the electricity supply industry.

19. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the implications of the Government's policy of privatisation of the electricity generation industry for the nuclear component of that industry.

Mr. Parkinson: Proposals for the privatisation of the electricity supply industry are still under consideration. The Government will announce their plans for the industry, including the implications for nuclear generation, in due course.

22. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a further statement on his plans for the privatisation of electricity.

32. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a further statement on the progress of Government plans to privatise the electricity industry.

Mr. Parkinson: Proposals for privatisation are still under consideration and no final decisions have been taken. The Government will announce their plans for the electricity supply industry in due course.

28. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has as to the cost to the taxpayer of the present advertising campaign by the electricity supply industry for electricity; and if he will seek to limit expenditure on such advertising during the approach to privatisation.

Mr. Parkinson: This is a matter for the industry; I have asked the chairman of the Electricity Council to write to the hon. Member.

31. **Mr. Rost:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to publish his White Paper on electricity privatisation.

Mr. Parkinson: The Government are still considering whether to publish a White Paper.

33. **Mr. Prescott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the Central Electricity Generating Board chairman; and what decision he has reached on the board's advice on the privatisation of the electricity supply industry.

Mr. Parkinson: I meet Lord Marshall, chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board, regularly to discuss privatisation of the electricity supply industry. No final decisions have been taken on the privatisation of the industry.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when and in what form he now expects to announce his proposals for the privatisation of the electricity industry.

Mr. Haynes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to announce his plans for electricity privatisation, in the light of his recent public statement.

Mr. Parkinson: The Government will announce their plans for privatisation of the electricity supply industry in due course.

British Coal

16. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of British Coal; and what matters were discussed.

37. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of British Coal; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Parkinson: I meet the chairman of British Coal at regular intervals to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has as to how the £25 million investment plan recently announced for the north-east area for British Coal will be apportioned as between *(a)* Murton Howthorn, *(b)* Vane Tempest-Seaham, *(c)* Easington, *(d)* Dawdon, *(e)* Wearnmouth and *(f)* Westho.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The allocation of capital to individual collieries is a management matter for British Coal and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he intends to privatise British Coal engineering workshops, transport, and canteen services.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Decisions on the appropriate balance between in-house and bought-in services are management matters for the British Coal Corporation.

British Nuclear Fuels Ltd.

17. **Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next expects to meet the chairman of British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. to discuss the commercial future of Sellafield.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I meet the chairman of British Nuclear Fuels from time to time.

Sir Phillip Jones

18. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the new terms of reference of Sir Philip Jones on his reappointment as chairman of the Electricity Council.

Mr. Parkinson: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) on 21 January at columns *858-59*.

Coal-fired Power Stations

20. **Mr. Wyn Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to meet the chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board in the near future to discuss plans for coal-fired power stations.

Mr. Parkinson: I meet the chairman of the CEGB regularly and discuss a wide range of subjects of mutual interest. The hon. Member will be aware that I received applications from the CEGB for consent to construct two new coal-fired power stations at West Burton and Fawley earlier this month.

Hinkley Point

21. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate is expected to report on the Central Electricity Generating Board proposal to build a pressurised water reactor at Hinkley Point.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate assessed generic safety features of the pressurised water reactor as part of its consideration of the Central Electricity Generating Board safety case for Sizewell B. Its views were reported in depth at the Sizewell inquiry.

The Health and Safety Executive informs me that the Central Electricity Generating Board is currently submitting to the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate its detailed safety case for Hinkley Point C. It expects to be in a position to make a statement on the licensability of the station in June.

Electricity Generation

23. **Mr. Forth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his current estimate of the proportion of electricity generation he expects to come from nuclear power by 1990.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I am advised that Central Electricity Generating Board nuclear plants are expected to contribute 18·4 per cent. (46·9 TWh) of total electricity generation in England and Wales in the financial year 1990-91.

Oil Fabrication Industry

24. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a further statement on the level of activity in the United Kingdom oil fabrication industry.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The contract tonnages awarded to United Kingdom construction yards from current offshore developments are around 136,000 tonnes.

Offshore Fabrication Industry

35. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next expects to meet representatives of the United Kingdom offshore oil industries to discuss the health of the offshore fabrication industry.

Mr. Peter Morrison: As chairman of the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee (OILCO) which represents the United Kingdom offshore supplies industry, I expect to meet committee members this summer to discuss the health of the offshore fabrication industry. Apart from that meeting, I see representatives of all sides of the offshore industries regularly.

Nuclear Power Stations

25. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the current series of tests at nuclear power stations.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The CEGB has decided to postpone the natural circulation test scheduled for 12 February at Trawsfynydd nuclear power station. Any new proposal for a test is a matter for the board, subject to the agreement of the Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate.

27. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he was consulted by the Central Electricity Generating Board about the specific selection of locations for the cooling tests to be performed at Trawsfynydd and Wylfa nuclear power stations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This is a operational matter for the CEGB. No test can go ahead unless the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate is satisfied that it is safe.

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will invite a safety team from the International Energy operations safety review team to

evaluate the safety of any planned tests or experiments at Trawsfynydd nuclear plant or any other nuclear establishment before they are undertaken.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) on 11 February 1988 at column *347*.

Staff Dispersal

26. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many divisions within his Department have been relocated out of London since 1979; what plans he has for further such relocation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Parkinson: None. I have no plans for any such relocation.

Coal Industry (New Pits)

31. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what criteria he uses in considering applications from British Coal relating to proposed new pit sinkings.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Investment decisions in respect of new mines, like other capital expenditure, are for the British Coal Corporation. Under long-standing arrangements it consults my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State as to the public interest before reaching its decision.

The criteria to be applied by nationalised industries to capital expenditure are set out in Cmnd. 7131.

34. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next intends to meet representatives of the National Union of Mineworkers to discuss the future of British Coal.

Mr. Parkinson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) on 11 February at column *346*.

CEGB Chaplains

36. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next plans to meet the Central Electricity Generating Board chaplains.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend and I have no such plans.

Colliery Waste Disposal

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what information he has on the cost per colliery of waste disposal at *(a)* Murton-Hawthorn, *(b)* Vane Tempest-Seaham, *(c)* Dawdon and *(d)* Easington for the last five years;

(2) what information he has on the cost per tonne of coal, and the cost per colliery for subsidence, at the following collieries for the last five years: *(a)* Murton-Hawthorn, *(b)* Easington, *(c)* Vane Tempest-Seaham and *(d)* Dawdon.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This is a matter for the British Coal Corporation. I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Colliery Linkings

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he has received an application from British Coal for reimbursement of the cost of linking Murton, Hawthorn colliery to Seaham, Vane Tempest colliery;

(2) if he has received an application from British Coal for reimbursement of the cost of linking Dawdon and Easington collieries through underground drifting for the purposes of winning and transporting coal.

Mr. Michael Spicer: British Coal does not submit claims for reimbursement of any capital costs. Such costs form part of the corporation's overall expenditure limit which is discussed and agreed with the corporation in the annual investment and financing review.

Mining Machinery

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the expenditure of British Coal in purchasing mining machinery made in Great Britain during the last five years.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The purchase of mining machinery is a management matter for British Coal, and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

British Coal, Nottinghamshire

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he has any plans to privatise the road transport section operations of British Coal in Nottinghamshire; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he has any plans to privatise the workshops, including national workshops of British Coal's operation in Nottinghamshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Decisions on the appropriate balance between in-house and bought-in services are management matters for the British Coal Corporation.

Nuclear Power Sites

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps he has taken to ensure that access to nuclear power station sites is afforded to fire officers in the execution of their duties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I am advised that arrangements are in place at all nuclear power station sites to afford the fire services full access, should their presence be required to carry out fire-fighting or rescue duties.

Fawley A Power Station

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the average output of electricity from the Fawley A oil-fired power station in the last year in relation to its designated capacity; and what was the anticipated output at the time when planning permission was given to the Central Electricity Generating Board under section 2 of the Electric Lighting Act 1909.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This is an operating matter for the CEGB. I have asked the chairman to write to my hon. Friend.

Nuclear Energy Policy

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received from the Irish Government regarding nuclear energy policy.

Mr. Parkinson: Nuclear energy matters were discussed when I last met the Irish Minister for Energy in September 1987. We have since corresponded on nuclear issues of topical interest.

Industry (Energy Requirements)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about the current energy requirements of British industry.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The table gives the latest available figures for the energy requirements of British industry for each fuel, and all fuels combined.

Table 2
Supply and use of fuels

Million therms

	1985	1986	Per cent. change	1985 4th quarter	1986 1st quarter	1986 2nd quarter	1986 3rd quarter	1986 4th quarter	[1]1987 1st quarter	1987 2nd quarter	1987 3rd quarter	[6]Per cent. change
Final consumption by use[2]												
Iron and steel industry												
Coal	7	6	−14·3	3	3	2	1	2	2	1	1	—
Other solid fuel[3]	1,756	1,565	−10·9	412	447	348	332	439	464	464	404	+22·0
Other coal derived fuels[4]	286	283	−1·0	70	73	72	67	71	69	72	77	+14·9
Gas	484	453	−6·7	124	123	105	87	119	132	114	98	+13·1
Electricity	265	251	−5·3	66	68	65	55	63	68	67	60	+8·1
Petroleum	286	276	−3·5	65	68	66	75	87	70	64	50	−23·6
Total	3,063	2,834	−0·1	739	782	658	617	781	805	782	698	+13·1
Other industries[5]												
Coal	1,862	2,075	+11·4	566	512	468	546	549	479	532	472	−13·6
Other solid fuel[3]	116	105	−9·5	27	27	24	27	27	13	11	22	−18·5
Other coal derived fuels[4]	25	20	−20·0	8	5	6	4	6	9	10	8	(+)
Gas[5]	5,462	4,946	−9·4	1,496	1,476	1,097	954	1,419	1,603	1,212	1,073	+12·5
Electricity	2,649	2,479	+1·2	618	657	613	579	630	660	605	596	+3·0
Petroleum	3,565	3,789	+6·3	865	1,156	929	822	882	1,036	726	685	−16·6
Total	13,470	13,414	−0·5	3,578	3,833	3,137	2,932	3,513	3,844	3,096	2,856	−2·6

[1] Provisional.
[2] Deliveries are used as a proxy for consumption, except for gas, electricity, and the iron and steel industry use of solid fuels.
[3] Other solid fuel—coke and other manufactured solid fuels.
[4] Other coal derived fuels—coke oven gas and creosote/pitch mixtures.
[5] Gas—natural gas (supplied direct), and town gas.
[6] The final column shows the per cent. change on the same quarter in the previous year.
[7] 'Industry'—broadly manufacturing plus construction.

Electricité De France

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information was available to him about the profitability of Electricité De France when he made his most recent statement to the House about the alleged price advantage enjoyed by French electricity consumers.

Mr. Michael Spicer: According to the 1986 annual report of Electricité De France (EdF), EdF's profit in that year was FF. 1·3 billion. EdF's annual report for 1987 has not yet been published.

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what has been the direct gross funding of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority by the Government since 1958 to 1987-88 by year, in both cash prices and 1986 prices;

(2) what has been the net funding received by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority from the Government since 1958 to 1987-88 by year, after deducting income.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The following table gives the gross expenditure of the United Kingdom Energy Authority from 1958-59 to 1987-88. It also gives the expenditure by the Department of Energy (and its predecessors) with the UKAEA during that period.

	£ million (cash)		£ million (1986-87 prices)	
	UKAEA Gross expenditure	Department of Energy Expenditure	UKAEA Gross expenditure	Department of Energy Expenditure
1958-59	106·2	95·6	880·9	793·0
1959-60	115·3	88·1	945·9	722·7
1960-61	112·2	87·5	902·4	703·7
1961-62	107·0	71·7	832·5	557·8
1962-63	101·0	60·8	762·1	458·8
1963-64	107·7	53·0	794·0	390·7
1964-65	119·6	36·1	844·0	254·8
1965-66	80·6	23·7	543·7	159·9
1966-67	75·7	26·7	488·6	172·3
1967-68	74·9	18·2	470·8	114·4

	£ million (cash)		£ million (1986-87 prices)	
	UKAEA Gross expenditure	*Department of Energy Expenditure*	*UKAEA Gross expenditure*	*Department of Energy Expenditure*
1968-69	91·8	27·4	549·0	163·9
1969-70	90·6	20·2	515·5	114·9
1970-71	95·7	37·1	503·3	195·1
1971-72	96·3	44·3	463·4	213·2
1972-73	93·1	52·4	415·2	233·7
1973-74	91·0	47·5	378·8	197·7
1974-75	106·6	61·6	371·9	214·9
1975-76	152·5	93·4	423·4	259·3
1976-77	174·9	110·0	429·0	269·8
1977-78	186·1	100·1	400·8	215·6
1978-79	213·4	127·4	415·2	247·9
1979-80	251·2	145·5	418·2	242·2
1980-81	323·3	186·2	453·9	261·4
1981-82	355·7	205·4	454·9	262·7
1982-83	380·4	214·8	453·8	256·2
1983-84	404·6	203·8	461·4	232·4
1984-85	399·7	196·1	436·6	214·2
1985-86	424·0	189·6	436·8	195·3
1986-87	416·6	183·9	416·6	183·9
1987-88	445·3	172·3	427·1	165·3

Nuclear Fuel

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment has been made by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* consultants to his Department and *(c)* research scientists at the Central Electricity Generating Board, British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. and United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority of the increase in neptunium-237 produced by recycling of uranium-236 from Magnox fuel for the production of advanced gas-cooled reactor nuclear fuel, compared with the use of natural uranium in advanced gas-cooled reactor fuel fabrication; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* I am informed that assessments have been made of the use of recycled uranium rather than natural uranium in advanced gas-cooled reactor fuel. Resultant increases in concentration of neptunium-237 in the irradiated fuel are small and of no special significance.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 16 February 1988

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Refreshments

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list by bar and restaurant the non-alcoholic and low-alcoholic beverages which are available for sale in the House.

Mr. Wakeham: In addition to soft drinks and mineral waters, alcohol-free wines and alcohol-free and low-alcohol beers are available in all Refreshment Department outlets in the House.

WALES

Craft Industry

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to publish the independent report he commissioned into the developmental and marketing needs of the Welsh craft industry.

Mr. Peter Walker: The report was published earlier today. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House. I shall be consulting widely on its proposals. Given the need to reduce the present uncertainties in the industry, I hope to be in a position to make early decisions.

Regional Aid

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how the operation of selective grants for industrial development will benefit areas without assisted area status.

Mr. Peter Walker: Regional selective assistance under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 is not available outside the assisted areas. Many measures administered by the development agencies and the Wales Tourist Board, most of them selective in nature, are available, however, to support industrial and commercial projects in the unassisted areas, where about 11 per cent. of the economically active population live and work.

These include Mid Wales Development grant, DRIVE, rural building conversion grants, the new business development grant administered by WDA and MWD, capital grants and assistance for joint marketing schemes from the Wales Tourist Board, subsidised and small rural loans, equity capital, business and technology-oriented advice, assistance under the Welsh food initiative, advance and bespoke factories and derelict land and environmental improvement grants.

In addition, depending on their precise location certain projects could also be eligible for assistance under the Department's urban programme and urban development grant schemes and the Welsh Development Agency's recently announced property development grant.

Speech Therapy Training Centre

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will now take steps to facilitate the establishment of a speech therapy training centre in North Wales.

Mr. Grist: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) on 23 November 1987 at col. *12*.

Consultant Community Health Physicians

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if any health authorities in Wales do not have a consultant community health physician.

Mr. Grist: At September 1986 all district health authorities in Wales had at least one consultant community health physician.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, for each of the last three years, what was the maximum length of time that a patient confirmed as suffering from a cervical carcinoma had to wait before commencing in-patient treatment at *(a)* Singleton hospital, Swansea, and *(b)* Velindre hospital, Cardiff.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 28 January 1988]:* The available information is shown in the following table. It relates to the length of time that patients were on the waiting list before commencing in-patient radiotherapy treatment. In cases where the patient received in-patient treatment on several occasions, the information relates to the first in-patient episode in the sequence.

Maximum Waiting Times (Days)

	1984	**1985*	*1986*
Singleton Hospital	17	30	19
Velindre Hospital	21	25	28

Health Service (Clwyd)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to improve the health service in Clwyd; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* Clwyd will benefit from the increased resources of £69·8 million which is being made available to the National Health Service in Wales in 1988-89. Net resources available to the National Health Service in Wales in 1988-89 in real terms will be 39 per cent. above what it was in 1978-79.

PRIME MINISTER

Teesside Development Corporation

Q41. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Prime Minister whether she will visit the offices of the Teesside development corporation.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Wolston

Q43. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to make an official visit to Wolston, near Rugby.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

EURATOM

Q49. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Prime Minister if, during her recent meeting with Chancellor Kohl, she discussed the implications of the Transnuklear nuclear wastes and nuclear materials alleged bribes and false labelling scandal with regard to the effectiveness of the EURATOM nuclear oversight and future public confidence in civil nuclear power.

The Prime Minister: No.

Newbattle Abbey College

Q61. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Prime Minister if she wrote to the principal of Newbattle Abbey college prior to the announcement that funding would be withdrawn.

The Prime Minister: No.

Upper Barnsley

Q103. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Prime Minister if she plans to make an official visit to Upper Barnsley.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Advisory Council on Science and Technology

Q124. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Prime Minister whether she has any plans to chair the Advisory Council on Science and Technology.

The Prime Minister: I hope to chair a meeting of the Advisory Council on Science and Technology shortly.

Extortion (Terrorists)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Prime Minister what action she has taken since the terrorist practice of using extortion to obtain funds first became known in 1982; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: A number of important initiatives have been undertaken or are in train to deal with the serious problem represented by the extortion practised by terrorists in Northern Ireland. In 1982 the Royal Ulster Constabulary set up its anti-racketeering squad which, among other things, has investigated extortion and related offences. Its inquiries continue, as do a number of prosecutions, and the squad has very recently been strengthened and reorganised. The Northern Irish (Emergency Provisions) Act 1987 included provisions to prevent security firms extorting money under the guise of providing security services. Progress has also been made in co-ordinating Government activity to make extortion more difficult and further initiatives in this area are being considered.

President Waldheim (Wartime Record)

Mr. Rhodes James: To ask the Prime Minister whether she will instigate further inquiries into the fate of Sub-Lieutenant Allen Tuckey, Private Ray Jones, Captain Bluett, Captain Hamilton, Private Davies and Private Bennett, in the light of the report of the International Historians' Commission on the wartime record of President Kurt Waldheim; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: We are reviewing the results of investigations carried out in 1986 by the Ministry of Defence into the fate of captured British service men, including those mentioned by my hon. Friend, in the light of the report of the International Commission of Historians on the wartime record of President Waldheim. I would remind the House that we have taken the allegations concerning Dr. Waldheim very seriously, particularly those concerning British service men, and that our thorough investigation of British official records has found no evidence to substantiate the allegations. As we have said before, we remain ready to examine all new information.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 February.

Mr. James Cran: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 February.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 February.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 February.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 16 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an Audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authority Staff

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the number of employees of the Cheshire county council and each district council in Cheshire in each of the last 10 years, broken down by functions.

Mr. Chope: Individual authority data have only been included in the Joint Manpower Watch since the end of 1979. The information relating to Cheshire county council, broken down by function, is not available centrally. Aggregate figures for that authority are as follows:

Cheshire County Council—June figures

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Total*
1980	20,356	17,180	37,536
1981	19,760	15,857	35,617
1982	19,129	15,844	34,973
1983	18,917	15,036	33,953
1984	18,220	16,766	34,986
1985	18,072	17,051	35,123
1986	18,155	18,037	36,192
1987	18,307	19,757	38,064

Tables showing the numbers employed, broken down by function, for each of the districts within the county from June 1980 are being placed in the Library of the House.

Housing Associations

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from

district councils in Northumberland about his proposals for the reform of finance of housing associations; and what replies he has given.

Mrs. Roe: My right hon. Friend has received representations from Alnwick district council. I am sending the hon. Member a copy of the Department's reply.

Leicestershire (Job Selection)

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to end discrimination being practised by the Leicestershire county council in the selection procedure it adopts for job vacancies, in so far as this affects past or retired employees of the Crown.

Mr. Chope: Local authorities, as independent bodies responsible for their own recruitment policies, are free to employ whomever they wish provided that they have regard to relevant employment legislation. They have to account to their local electorates for their recruitment policies.

Urban Regeneration

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire of 1 December 1987, *Official Report*, column 549, if he will indicate when he expects to complete his review on the progress of urban regeneration grants.

Mr. Trippier: Soon.

Listed Buildings

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence he has as to whether his Department's code of guidance regarding the listing of buildings is being adhered to; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Roe: The code summarises the instructions given to field workers about their conduct towards the owners of the buildings they inspect. It was introduced to give more publicity to best practice. Since its publication in October 1986, over 38,000 buildings have been listed, but only about 80 complaints have been received about the conduct of field workers; of these, about 10 have been upheld on investigation.

Cheshire County Council

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to which services Cheshire county council spends above the average; by how much; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The comparative information has been presented in terms of net current expenditure per head of population in 1986-87.

Net current expenditure per head

Services	*Cheshire County Council* £	*Average for all Shire County Councils* £	*Spending by Cheshire County Council in excess of the average for all Shire Counties* £
Education	248	228	20
School meals and milk	11	8	3
Personal Social Services	45	41	4
Fire	13	12	1
Courts and probation	7	6	1
Town and Country Planning	3	2	1
Miscellaneous services[1]	7	6	1

[1] Including land drainage and flood protection, non-housing revenue account housing, employment, consumer protection and general administration.

Storm Damage

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if in view of the exceptionally wet weather, he will consider extending the time limit from 1 March to 31 March for local authorities to clear up the hurricane damage.

Mr. Ridley: On 8 December 1987, at column 99, I announced, inter alia, proposals to widen the total expenditure exclusion on storm-related revenue expenditure above a threshold amount. Total expenditure exclusions have the effect of relieving authorities from block grant loss. I have now consulted the local authority associations and the authorities concerned about these revised proposals and have considered their comments carefully.

A number of the responses also made representations about the scheme of financial assistance (the Bellwin scheme) to assist authorities with the costs of storm damage. After careful consideration of these representations I have decided to make no changes to the Bellwin scheme which was designed to provide assistance in meeting emergency expenditure in the immediate aftermath of the storm. For the purposes of the scheme, the date by which work of an emergency nature must be completed therefore remains 1 March 1988.

In the light of the representations on the total expenditure exclusions, I have decided to extend the exclusion for 1987-88 to cover all storm-related revenue expenditure above the threshold defined for the Bellwin rules, including revenue contributions to capital outlays, incurred by the end of March 1988. In addition, as proposed, I have decided to exclude for 1987-88 and 1988-89 all debt charges incurred in respect of capital expenditure on storm damage on 16 October up to the end of March 1989. Finally, I have also proposed that all debt charges on this capital expenditure which fall in 1989-90 should also be excluded: a decision on this proposal will be taken prior to the 1989-90 RSG settlement.

Members' Accommodation

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the quality of furnishings and fittings in the new Members' accommodation in Bridge street will be of similar standard to those in the Department of Health and Social Security building in Richmond terrace; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Members' accommodation in the new parliamentary building will be fitted out generally in accordance with the design brief published in the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services), Third Report, Session 1983-84, Appendix 1.1 (HC571). The quality will be comparable to the furniture in the Commons Court offices though taken from current standard ranges.

European Year of the Environment

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the achievements sponsored by Her Majesty's Government to date, in support of the European Year of the Environment; and if he will make a statement on the major initiatives known to his Department achieved by other European countries participant in the European Environment Year.

Mrs. Roe: My Department has provided over £750,000 of support to the United Kingdom Committee for the European Year of the Environment (EYE). This includes a grant scheme of £300,000 under which the Department has supported over 150 practical environmental projects on the recommendation of the committee. It also includes the running costs of a full-time team which has put together the United Kingdom EYE programme and publicity campaign on behalf of the committee.

In addition, my Department has been associated with a number of major events and projects in the EYE programme including the second International ministerial conference on the protection of the North sea hosted by the Government in London in November 1987; support for the production of the second edition of "EEC Environmental Policy and Britain" by Nigel Haigh; and the international pollution abatement fair in Birmingham in April 1987. As a further contribution the Department is preparing a general guide to the Government's environmental protection policies which it hopes to publish shortly.

The Property Services Agency has contributed a large number of events, including open days, a travelling landscape exhibition, tree and shrub planting and conservation projects.

Ministers from my Department and other Departments have also attended a number of speaking engagements and other events associated with EYE.

The regional campaigns for EYE have received additional support from the territorial Departments. The Scottish Office has contributed £30,000 to support the work of the Scottish EYE panel and a range of projects in Scotland. The Welsh Office has contributed £10,000 as well as administrative support to the work of the Welsh EYE panel, and projects including a bilingual information leaflet and an environmental exhibition. The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland has provided some £20,000 covering administrative support to the Northern Ireland EYE panel and grants to projects. It has also sponsored a range of events including conferences and guided walks and open days in country parks and nature reserves.

Other Government Departments have also contributed events and projects to the EYE programme and have encouraged many of the bodies which they sponsor to participate. The following are examples of the activities they have sponsored:

Publication of a booklet on "Defence and the Environment"; Army training areas clean-up week — a series of anti-litter, anti-pollution, landscaping, tree-planting and works projects involving the armed forces and local conservation groups such as Salisbury Plain conservation day, May 1987—*Ministry of Defence*

Conference on "The Global Environment After Chernobyl" (April 1987) — *Foreign and Commonwealth Office*

Financial support of £60,000 for the International Institute for Environment and Development/World Bank conference on sustainable development (April 1987); publication of booklet "The Environment and the British Aid Programme"—*Overseas Development Agency*

Schools pack "Watching Waste" for EYE recycling week (October 1987); joint DTI/CBI conference on recycling (February 1988); series of articles in *British Business* on environmentally friendly projects and processes — *Department of Trade and Industry*

Publication of booklet on "Transport and the Environment of Transport

National and local publicity events drawing attention to community programme environmental improvement projects; secondment of member of staff to United Kingdom EYE team — Department of Employment/Manpower Services Commission.

Series of open days held as part of a programme of farming and countryside events launched in May 1987; conservation event held in collaboration with the Royal Agricultural Society of England at the national agricultural centre (October 1987)—*Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food.*

Projects to preserve ancient woodlands, reclaim land and improve bird habitats; major project in Sherwood forest to create a traditional oak wood for conservation and recreation purposes—*Forestry Commission.*

These activities add up to a strong contribution by Government to the United Kingdom EYE campaign and are clear evidence of their support for the aims of the year.

The Department does not have full information about EYE initiatives in other European countries. The various national committees have put together wide-ranging and varied compaigns reflecting the circumstances and priorities of their respective countries. All EC member states including the United Kingdom have also played their part in the series of projects and events co-ordinated by the European Commission at Community level. This includes awards schemes; competitions; twinning and exchange scheme; and "weeks" focusing on clean beaches, water, recycling and tree planting.

Council House Rents

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what figures he has for levels of council home rents in each London borough for each of the past five years.

Mrs. Roe: For average unrebated rents for individual London boroughs at April 1987 I refer to the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 30 November 1987 at column *420*. Available information for the other years appears in the earlier editions of "Housing Rents Statistics", published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, copies of which are in the Library.

Local Authorities and Joint Boards

(Rates and Precepts)

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report*, for each year since April 1985, those local authorities and joint boards subject to rate or precept limitation.

Mr. Ridley: The relevant information was included in my reply of 11 January at columns *95-99*.

Local Authorities (Expenditure)

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report*, the cash growth in net current expenditure from *(a)* 1978-79 to 1987-88 and *(b)* 1985-86 to 1987-88 for each of the following local authorities: Basildon, Brent, Camden, Greenwich, Hackney, Haringey, Inner London education authority, Islington, Lambeth, Lewisham, Sheffield, Southwark, Thamesdown, Liverpool, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tower Hamlets, showing also the average figure for all local authorities in these two periods.

Mr. Ridley: The information, based on authorities' budget estimates for 1987-88, is as follows:

Increase in net current expenditure

£ million

	(a) from 1978-79 to 1987-88	*(b) from 1985-86 to 1987-88*
Basildon	10·0	5·3
Brent[1]	123·5	47·8
Camden[1 2]	95·4	41·1
Greenwich[1 2]	58·2	22·7
Hackney[1 2]	80·4	39·0
Haringey[1]	97·6	37·6
ILEA	569·9	124·0
Islington[1]	48·2	18·3
Lambeth[1 2]	90·5	43·5
Lewisham[1 2]	69·4	36·0
Sheffield[1]	165·2	58·1
Southwark[1 2]	65·1	20·2
Thamesdown	3·2	−0·9
Liverpool[1]	169·8	68·0
Newcastle upon Tyne[1 2]	90·8	37·1
Tower Hamlets[1]	59·0	27·6
Average for all English authorities[3]	36·2	9·9

[1] Authority assumed new functions on 1 April 1986, following abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils.
[2] Based on revised estimate for 1987-88.
[3] This is an average cash figure taken across all different classes of authority — and therefore has no significance for the purposes of comparison with any individual authority.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish for each local authority selected for rate limitation since 1 April 1985, the percentage increase or decrease in its total expenditure for each year compared with the previous year, showing also the maximum rate applicable in each year.

Mr. Ridley: The information on percentage changes in total expenditure is as shown. The relevant information on maximum rates and precepts was included in my reply of 11 January at columns *95-99*.

Percentage increases in total expenditure

	1985-86 over 1984-85	*1986-87 over 1985-86*	*1987-88 over 1986-87*	*1988-89 over 1987-88*
Authorities first selected for 1985-86				
Sheffield	2·1	not selected	[2]−6·9	not selected
Camden	−8·8	[1]41·6	[3]0·7	[4]—
Greenwich	13·7	[1]53·7	[3]−8·5	[4]—
Hackney	17·4	[1]37·3	[3]12·5	[4]—
Islington	−3·7	[1]26·3	[2]−2·9	not selected
Lambeth	5·9	[1]52·9	[3]−11·4	[4]—
Lewisham	2·0	[1]42·7	[3]19·0	[4]—
Southwark	−2·6	[1]13·2	[3]24·2	[4]—
Brent	1·3	not selected	[2]−0·3	not selected
Haringey	0·2	[1]30·6	[2]−8·1	[4]—
Basildon	−27·4	82·8	[2]4·4	[4]—
Thamesdown	−1·9	5·9	[2]−4·4	[4]—
Leicester	1·0	not selected	not selected	not selected
Portsmouth	3·1	not selected	not selected	not selected
GLC	−38·2	abolished	abolished	abolished
ILEA	−4·0	n/a	n/a	n/a
Merseyside MCC	13·0	abolished	abolished	abolished
South Yorkshire MCC	1·1	abolished	abolished	abolished
Authorities first selected for 1986-87				
Liverpool	n/a	[1]27·7	not selected	[4]—
Newcastle upon Tyne	n/a	[1]28·2	[3]−4·8	[4]—
Authorities first selected for 1987-88				
Gateshead	n/a	n/a	[2]3·0	not selected
North Tyneside	n/a	n/a	[2]−0·6	not selected
Tower Hamlets	n/a	n/a	[2]−3·3	[4]—
Hounslow	n/a	n/a	[3]−25·2	not selected
Newham	n/a	n/a	[2]5·5	not selected
Middlesbrough	n/a	n/a	[2]2·7	[4]—
Brighton	n/a	n/a	[2]−4·2	not selected
Authorities first selected for 1988-89				
Manchester	n/a	n/a	n/a	[4]—

	1985-86 over 1984-85	1986-87 over 1985-86	1987-88 over 1986-87	1988-89 over 1987-88
Ealing	n/a	n/a	n/a	[4]
Waltham Forest	n/a	n/a	n/a	[4]
Kingston-upon-Hull	n/a	n/a	n/a	[4]

[1] Authority assumed new functions on 1 April 1986, following abolition of GLC and metropolitan county councils.
[2] Based on budget estimate for 1987-88.
[3] Based on revised estimate for 1987-88.
[4] Budget information for 1988-89 not yet available.

Housing Project Control

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether any decisions have yet been made regarding his proposals to abolish housing project control for local authorities.

Mr. Waldegrave: My Department and the Welsh Office have today sent to the local authority associations copies of circulars about the abolition of the present housing project control system for new building and renovation schemes. It will be replaced by a system of admissible cost limits which will not require the submission of schemes to the Department or the Welsh Office.

The change will reduce work both for local authorities and for the Department and the Welsh Office, and will allow authorities greater freedom to plan and implement their capital programmes more efficiently. It will also clarify their responsibility for achieving value for money in their housing schemes. The circulars and the new system which it describes are the product of extensive consultations with the local authority associations.

Local Authorities (Subsidies)

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has decided what deemed rent increase and what increase in reckonable expenditure on management and maintenance should be used in calculating the entitlement of local authorities to having subsidies for 1988-89.

Mr. Waldegrave: Our proposals for these increases were issued as consultation papers last September. The local authority associations have sent us their comments in writing and in discussion with my officials. We have considered these comments very carefully.

My right hon. Friend has decided, jointly with the Secretary of State for Wales, that, in view of the need to encourage local authorities in improving the condition of their housing, the increases in reckonable expenditure and income for the purposes of calculating entitlement to housing subsidy for 1988-89 should be in excess of the general level of rises in costs and prices. Therefore, the allowance for management and maintenance will go up by 9·2 per cent., provided an authority's actual expenditure reaches the enhanced level. Similarly the increase in the deemed local contribution will be £1·60 per week. It is for local authorities themselves to decide actual rents according to their own circumstances. Taken together, the increases represent a balance between central and local contributions towards extra renovation costs.

Rating Reform

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the further margin of error relating to the tables in annex F of "Paying for Local Government" resulting from taking account of the regular 30 per cent. non-response rate to the family expenditure survey, stating for which bands of household income the data would be most affected.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 3 February 1988]:* Direct evidence of the income of non-respondents is not available. Comparison with the 1981 census does provide an indication of the types of household whose response rate is below average (see "Statistical News No. 72," February 1986, HMSO). This evidence suggests that households with three or more cars and the self-employed are under-represented. The response rate for the elderly aged over 70 is also significantly below average.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the repriced tables in his Department's note on the relationship between local taxes and income and the distributional impact of the community charge alongside the results from the 1986 family expenditure survey, together with an explanation of how the repriced figures were derived and what margin of error applies to them.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 3 February 1988]:* I am afraid the hon. Member's question is unclear. The family expenditure survey does not contain tables comparable with those in the note placed in the Library on 13 January. The table, however, shows the proportion of households in each band of net income as used in that note alongside the most nearly comparable table from the 1986 FES.

1986 FES Table 1		*DOE note of 13 January*	
Disposable income £	*Percentage of sample*	*Weekly net income* £	*Percentage of sample*
Under 45	6·8		
45-50	2·2	Under 50	5·4
50-55	1·9		
55-60	1·9		
60-65	2·5		
65-70	2·5	50-75	12·0
70-80	4·0		
80-90	4·1		
90-100	3·6	75-100	10·3
100-120	7·0		
120-140	6·5	100-150	15·7
140-160	6·7		
160-180	5·0		
180-200	5·5	150-200	15·9
200-225	7·3		
225-250	6·0	200-250	13·6
250-275	5·0		
275-300	4·2	250-300	10·2
300-325	3·3		
325-350	2·7	300-350	6·5
350-375	2·1		
375-400	1·4	350-400	4·1
400-450	2·4		
450-500	1·4	400-500	4·0
500+	3·0	500+	2·3

Percentage of households in each income band

The aggregated FES sample used to exemplify the impact of the community charge has been regrossed to 1986-87 prices using a number of appropriate indices. For example earned income in each quarter was updated by reference to the index of seasonably adjusted average earnings, water rates were updated by the water charges component of the RPI and local authority rates were regrossed according to the actual level applying to each household in the sample. The margin of error which applies will vary according to the index used.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the sampling ratio achieved by the combination of family expenditure survey responses for 1981 to 1984 used in annex F of Cmnd. 9714 "Paying for Local Government" and subsequently *(a)* for Great Britain and *(b)* for England; and what margin of error should be allowed for in a sampling ratio of this kind.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 3 February 1988]*: The tables in annex F of the Green Paper "Paying for Local Government" (Cmnd. 9714) have been superseded by those contained in the note I placed in the Library on 13 January showing the relationship between local taxes and income and the distributional impact of the community charge. The sampling ratio achieved by the family expenditure survey is around 6,000 out of 18½ million in England. Using four years data gives a combined sampling ratio of around one in 750. It is not possible, however, to estimate the margin of error simply from the sampling ratio. This will depend on

(i) the sample size
(ii) the design of the sample
(iii) the nature of the variable being measured

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Overseas Ministers (Entry)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government in respect of access into the United Kingdom of Ministers of foreign Governments.

Mr. Mellor: We afford every appropriate facility, consistent with the Immigration Act 1971 and immigration rules, in respect of the access of Ministers of foreign Governments to the United Kingdom.

El Salvador (Mercenaries)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about the supply of mercenaries by a United Kingdom-based company, KMS, to the Government of El Salvador; what action he proposes to take; what advice he will give them regarding danger of prosecution under the Foreign Enlistment Act should any fatalities arise from the actions of such United Kingdom personnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We are aware of press reports about KMS involvement in El Salvador, but have received no evidence to confirm them. KMS is a commercial company which is not controlled by Her Majesty's Government.

Defence Services Ltd.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what services have been and are provided to his Department or any of its agencies by Defence Services Ltd.

Mr. Mellor: Defence Systems Ltd. (DSL) is sub-contracted to Hall and Watts (International) Ltd. which has a commercial contract with the Mozambique Government to provide equipment and training for a Mozambican militia force deployed on security duties on the Nacala railway line. DSL provides the training element of the contract. We have no involvement with this private sector operation, but recognise that the work being done in the Nacala line accords with our overall policy towards Mozambique and the needs of its neighbours.

Atomic Energy (Peaceful Uses)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if there have been any recent discussions with *(a)* the Japanese Government, *(b)* Euratom and *(c)* the International Atomic Energy Agency over exports from the United Kingdom of nuclear materials and technology under Cmnd. 3853 on agreement for co-operation between the United Kingdom and Japan in the peaceful uses of atomic energy.

Mr. Mellor: We have had several contacts with the Japanese Government about the implementation of this agreement, but no recent discussions about the agreement with Euratom or the International Atomic Energy Authority.

Plutonium

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to initiate the renegotiation of the United Kingdom-Euratom-International Atomic Energy Agency Tripartite Safeguards Treaty (Cmnd. 6730) in order to include the requirement to report yearly plutonium production figures, by nuclear station, to the appropriate international agency.

Mr. Mellor: No renegotiation is necessary. Existing arrangements with Euratom provide for plutonium produced to be reported when the fuel is shipped from United Kingdom civil reactors. Euratom keeps the International Atomic Energy Authority informed.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Office Equipment and Computers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what was the total output of office equipment, the percentage exported, and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987;

(2) what was the total output of computers, the percentage exported, and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information for the United Kingdom for Office Equipment (Activity Heading 3301) and Computers (Activity Heading 3302) is published in table 10.5 of the *Monthly Digest of Statistics* and in *Business Monitor* MQ12, "Import penetration and export sales ratios for manufacturing industry". These are available in

the House of Commons Library. Information for West Germany and Japan could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Consumer Goods (Imports)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what was the total output of compact disc players, the percentage exported and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987;

(2) what was the total output of hi-fi equipment, the percentage exported and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987;

(3) what was the total output of photographic cameras, the percentage exported and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987;

(4) what was the total output of television cameras, the percentage exported, and proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and each year from 1979 to 1987;

(5) what was the total output of food mixers, the percentage exported and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information requested is not available for the United Kingdom. That for West Germany and Japan could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total output of loudspeakers, the percentage exported, and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in: *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available information for the United Kingdom is published in *Business Monitor* PQ 3453, "Electronic sub-assemblies and active components" (formerly PA 364, "Radio and electronic components"), which is available from the Library of the House. Information for West Germany and Japan could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total output of video recorders, the percentage exported and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information for the United Kingdom is not available prior to 1985. Figures for 1985 onwards are published in the quarter 2 1987 *Business Monitor* PQ3454, "Electronic consumer goods and miscellaneous equipment". Information for West Germany and Japan could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total output of microphones, the percentage exported and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in: *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available information for the United Kingdom is shown in the table. That for West Germany and Japan could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Microphones

1975	*£ thousands*
Sales (1)	1,657
Exports	282
Imports	2,709

Note:

(1) Sales data relate primarily to units in the United Kingdom with a minimum employment of 25. Reliable estimates of sales of microphones by smaller establishments are not readily available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total output of tape recorders, the percentage exported and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in; *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, and in each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available information for the United Kingdom is published in the quarter 2 1987 issue of *British Monitor* PQ 3454, "Electronic consumer goods and miscellaneous equipment", which is available from the Library of the House. Information for West Germany and Japan could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Enterprise and Deregulation Unit

Sir Fergus Montgomery: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what role the Enterprise and Deregulation Unit has played and is playing in the reviews of the export licensing system, the Consumer Credit Act 1974 and the burdens on business, including Sunday trading restrictions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The EDU has played and continues to play its usual role of looking at issues in all areas of the Government's work, including those my hon. Friend raises, for ways in which unnecessary burdens on businesses can be removed or minimised.

Castleford (Industrial Development)

Mr. Lofthouse: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to encourage industrial development into the Castleford travel-to-work area.

Mr. Atkins: A number of measures already exist to encourage industry to locate and develop in the area. Companies in, or moving to, the TTWA are eligible to apply for assistance under the Department's enterprise initiative consultancy schemes and the area is also eligible for assistance from the European Coal and Steel Community and social and agricultural funds. In addition, the Yorkshire and Humberside development association, funded by the DTI, local authorities and private sector

sponsors, is charged with attracting inward investment to the Yorkshire and Humberside region, including the Castleford and Pontefract TTWA.

Redundant Steel Workers

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many outstanding claims are still being processed for training payments for redundant steel workers in the Sheffield area; if the delays in making such payments arise within his Department or within the EEC Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Nine redundant steel workers from the Sheffield area have not yet received training benefits under the iron and steel employees re-adaptation benefits scheme (ISERBS) because of the European Commission's delay in approving United Kingdom applications for re-adaptation aid under the treaty of Paris. No payments can be made until Commission approval has been given. We are continuing to press the Commission for an early decision on these cases.

Regional Aid

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to York travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79;

(2) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Barrow travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79;

(3) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Stafford travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79;

(4) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Lincoln travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79;

(5) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Preston travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79.

Mr. Atkins: The information requested for each travel-to-work area for the years 1978-79 to 1986-87 is as follows:

Regional Development Grant and Regional Selective Assistance Expenditure

£ million

TTWA	York		Barrow		Preston	
Fin. Year	RDG	RSA	RDG	RSA	RDG	RSA
1978-79	0·3	0·1	1·3	0·1	1·6	0·6
1979-80	0·4	neg	0·9	neg	1·3	0·3
1980-81	0·6	neg	0·9	neg	1·5	0·3
1981-82	0·7	neg	1·6	neg	3·1	0·2
1982-83	0·3	neg	0·1	—	0·4	0·2
1983-84	—	neg	—	neg	0·6	0·5
1984-85	—	neg	—	neg	—	0·1
1985-86	—	—	—	—	neg	0·1
1986-87	—	—	—	—	—	—

Notes:
1. Stafford and Lincoln TTWAs are not assisted areas and have not therefore received any RDG or RSA. The assisted area status of the remaining 4TWAs has changed during the period and none of the areas is now assisted.
2. Regional selective assistance includes project and training grants only.
3. neg = less than £50,000.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Upminster travel-to-work area in each year from 1973 to 1979 to date.

(2) what was the total expenditure in *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Portland travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79 to date;

(3) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Weymouth travel-to-work area in each year from 1987-79 to date;

(4) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Redditch travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79 to date;

(5) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Droitwich travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79 to date;

(6) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Bodmin travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79 to date;

(7) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Newquay travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79 to date;

(8) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Bude travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79 to date;

(9) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Launceston travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79 to date;

(10) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Alfreton travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79 to date;

(11) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Haverhill travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79 to date;

(12) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Long Melford travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79 to date;

(13) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Lavenham travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79 to date;

(14) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Heanor travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79 to date;

(15) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Ripley travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79 to date;

(16) what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance to Sudbury travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79.

Mr. Atkins: Expenditure under the regional development grants (RDG) and regional selective assistance (RSA) schemes since 1978-79 to the travel-to-work areas (TTWAs) for which information is requested was as follows:

Travel-to-work area		*1978-79*	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Alfreton	RDG	0·2	0·1	0·5	1·2	0·1	—	*—	—	—
	RSA	0·5	0·4	0·3	0·3	0·4	0·2	0·1	—	—
Birmingham (Redditch)[2]	RDG	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	RSA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·5	3·3
Bodmin	RDG	—	—	0·5	*—	—	—	—	*—	0·2
	RSA	0·1	0·2	0·1	0·1	—	—	—	0·3	0·4
Bude	RDG	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	*—
	RSA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nottingham (Heanor and Ripley)[2]	RDG	0·1	*—	0·1	0·6	*—	—	—	—	—
	RSA	—	0·2	0·1	0·2	0·1	0·1	—	—	—
Launceston	RDG	*—	—	*—	*—	—	0·3	0·2	0·1	0·1
	RSA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Newquay	RDG	—	—	0·1	—	—	—	—	*—	0·5
	RSA	—	0·1	0·1	0·1	0·1	—	—	—	—

* Negligible.

[2] Heanor, Ripley and Redditch are not current TTWAs: information has been given for the TTWAs which currently encompass these towns except that some payments under the original regional development grant scheme have been identified for the former Heanor TTWA.

Notes:

1. RSA information covers project and training grants only.
2. No RDG has been paid in the TTWAs covering the other areas listed in the questions.

Microcircuits

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total output of microcircuits, the percentage exported, and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information for the United Kingdom is published in *Business Monitor* PQ3453, "Electronic sub-assemblies and active components" (formerly PQ364, "Radio and electronic components"), which is available from the Library of the House. Data for West Germany and Japan could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Computer Software

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total output of computer software, the percentage exported, and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: Total and export sales by a voluntary panel of United Kingdom companies are published in *Business Monitor* SDQ9, "Computing Services" (formerly SD9, "Computer Services"), which is available from the Library of the House. Statistics on the imports of software are not available. Information for West Germany and Japan could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Insider Dealing

Mr. Blair: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many cases of reported insider dealing are currently under investigation by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: There are 14 cases where inspectors appointed under section 177 of the Financial Services Act are currently investigating possible contraventions of the insider dealing legislation.

The appointment of such inspectors is considered in all appropriate cases which are brought to the attention of my Department.

Internal Market

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what categories of people have been invited to the Lancaster house conference on the internal market; if they include trade union representatives and Opposition hon. Members of the House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* Invitations will be issued shortly. The Lancaster House

conference is primarily for British business, and we are inviting nearly 200 senior representatives from all the main industry and service sectors.

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are his estimates of the employment implications for each category of employment of the completion of the European Community internal market in 1992.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* Completing a single Community market of 320 million people should bring substantial economic benefits, helping to create wealth and employment in this country. The effect on the pattern of employment in the United Kingdom will depend on a number of factors, including the way British business seizes the opportunities of a single large market to increase sales and improve their competitive performance in Community and world markets.

Waste Paper

Mr. Irving: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what action he is taking to encourage commercial collection from Government Departments and other producers of greater or lesser amounts of waste paper, to reduce litter, and smoke from burning and save imports.

Mr. Brooke: I have been asked to reply.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office collects some 20,000 tonnes of waste paper and allied materials per year from Government Departments throughout the United Kingdom. Of this, more than 17,000 tonnes are commercially shredded and pulped for the manufacture of cardboard boxes and similar products. The balance comprises security materials, some of which are disposed of by burning, and other products unsuitable for recycling. Her Majesty's Stationery Office already advertises these services, but I have asked it to consider whether more could be done to encourage other public sector customers to use the facility.

DEFENCE

Trident

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there has been any slippage in the timetable for introducing work on the Trident programme at AWRE Aldermaston; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Saimsbury: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State stated on 19 January at column *775*, there is no slippage of the in-service date of the Trident programme, and AWRE Aldermaston is playing its part in this programme.

London University

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many research agreements or contracts his Department has with University college, London; and in which subjects;

(2) how many research contracts or agreements his Department has with King's college, London; and in which subjects.

Mr. Saimsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) on 21 January at column *775*.

F-16 Aircraft

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the outcome of his discussions with Mr. Valerio Zanone, the Minister of Defence of Italy, on the fate of the F-16s formerly at the Torrejon base in Spain.

Mr. Ian Stewart: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited Rome on 27 January for bilateral discussions with Signor Zanone on a range of issues of mutual interest. In noting the proposed withdrawal of the F-16s currently based at Torrejon it was agreed that, in view of the important role played by the aircraft in the defence of Europe, they should if possible be relocated elsewhere in the southern region.

Novel Defences

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals exist within NATO for novel defences, including terrain enhancement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Alliance regularly reviews proposals across the whole spectrum of defence planning including terrain enhancements. Details of defence planning proposals are classified.

Radiation-Capable Shells

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there are any plans to introduce enhanced radiation-capable shells into Europe.

Mr. Ian Stewart: As my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Mr. Stanley) made clear in the reply he gave to the hon. Member on 8 May 1987 at column *557*, NATO has no plans to introduce enhanced radiation weapons into Europe.

Chemical Warfare Research

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many marmosets have been used for chemical warfare research in the United Kingdom in each of the past five years; and if he will list the establishments carrying out such research.

Mr. Saimsbury: Wherever possible, animals are not used in experiments. Where there is no suitable alternative the lowest order of animal possible is used for any experiment. It is not our practice to make available detailed information on the usage of a particular species for chemical defence research. Such information could enable an informed observer to gain a useful insight into the scope and direction of MOD's work to the detriment of national security.

La Belle Discotheque

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will call for a report from the General Officer Commanding British Sector West Berlin on the progress of the investigations, carried out by the West Berlin police into the bomb outrage at La Belle discotheque.

Mr. Freeman: No.

Trident Submarine (Transportation Loss)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances a section of a Trident submarine broke free from its transporting ship in the Irish sea on Friday 5 February; what is the estimated value of the section lost; whether it is intended to attempt to recover it; what warnings are being issued to fishing and other vessels in the area; what are the defence implications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Salisbury: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers I gave on 15 February at columns *448-49* to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

SCOTLAND

Caravans (Illegal Parking)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the number of individuals who have been charged by Tayside police with offences of parking caravans illegally in Angus over the past two years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Criminal Records Office

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to ensure that all entries in the Scottish Criminal Records Office relating to convictions are accurate in all respects.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information relating to convictions is obtained by the police service from the relevant court. Every effort is made and will be made to ensure the accuracy of the material supplied.

NHS Funding

Dr. Moonie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to allocate sufficient resources for National Health Service funding for Scotland in 1988-89 to maintain the development of services in the community for elderly, mentally ill and mentally handicapped people, without reducing the level of acute services.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Gross expenditure in the National Health Service in Scotland has risen from £1,053 million in 1979-80 to an estimated £2,334 million in the current year, a cash increase of over 120 per cent. This corresponds with growth of about 27 per cent. in real terms. The allocation for 1988-89 will shortly be announced and it will be for health boards to give adequate priority to the development of community care provision and of acute services from the very substantial resources made available to them.

A74 (Upgrading)

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new funds he intends to provide to the relevant local authorities to meet the costs of upgrading the A74 to motorway standard; and whether he will expect local authorities to meet any of those costs from their existing budgets.

Mr. Rifkind: The A74 is a trunk road, for which I am directly responsible. Consequently no costs of its upgrading will be met by local authorities.

Water (Lead Levels)

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has as to lead levels found in water in Edinburgh during a study carried out by the Scottish Home and Health Department; what maximum lead level has been recommended by that study; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There has been no recent study on lead levels in water in Edinburgh.

Rating Reform

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will seek to amend the scope of section 15 of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987 in order to avoid the necessity of community charges registration offices having to serve a statutory notice on dead people in terms of the Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend is considering this matter.

Labour Statistics

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give, for each month since June 1979, the number of job vacancies in Dundee.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* The number of job vacancies (excluding community programme) notified and remaining unfilled in the Dundee jobcentre area for each month since June 1979 is shown in the table.

Unfilled vacancies—Dundee jobcentre area

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
January	—	536	273	383	321	322	190	205	419
February	—	501	311	289	416	241	201	249	369
March	—	476	373	291	424	270	218	267	358
April	—	472	329	307	293	219	205	315	326
May	—	468	288	366	389	179	200	342	267
June	692	347	272	402	369	169	257	534	365
July	674	403	302	352	370	110	273	437	434
August	565	359	274	366	265	120	198	437	510
September	602	346	283	419	269	195	384	517	495

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
October	690	287	246	346	364	298	414	518	665
November	719	442	325	432	378	265	430	561	523
December	590	374	299	427	358	242	226	412	317

The figures are not directly comparable due to a change in the compilation of the statistics in October 1985, from which date this information is available in the Library. It is estimated that only around one-third of all vacancies are notified to jobcentres.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make a statement on the operation of the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The powers in the Act to trace, freeze and confiscate assets are proving an effective new weapon against drug trafficking. During the first year of operation of the Act the High Court made over 150 orders freezing some £7 million pounds of suspected drug traffickers' assets. The Crown court has ordered some substantial sums to be confiscated, including £452,000 in one case last month. We are seeking reciprocal agreements with other countries so as to make the most effective use of these powers: the first such agreement, with the United States of America, was signed on 9 February.

Hooliganism

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received with regard to the threat to good order and quiet enjoyment represented by hooligans, vandals, litter louts and graffiti writers.

Mr. John Patten: We receive frequent, and understandable, representations on these subjects. In regard to the lower level of offences, much can be achieved through local preventive approaches, including proper enforcement of the law against under age drinking, good planning and provision of constructive activities for young people who may otherwise congregate on the streets causing a nuisance. The Government have taken firm action against the misuse of alcohol associated with football matches and are discussing with the Football League what more needs to be done to control hooliganism. The police are giving a high priority to combatting racially motivated harassment and the Home Office has issued guidance to forces on the recording and handling of racial attacks. The Public Order Act 1986 created the new offence of disorderly conduct to deal with loutish behaviour liable to cause harassment, distress or alarm to vulnerable members of the community.

Prisons (Speech Therapy)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to increase the provision of speech therapy in prisons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Because of the limited and fluctuating demand for speech therapy the Prison Service's policy is to use the resources of the National Health Service rather than to employ its own therapists. Prison medical officers have discretion to refer patients to a local hospital in suitable circumstances or to arrange for a therapist to vist the establishment. There are no plans to change these arrangements.

Prisoners (Counselling)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any proposals to increase counselling help available for prisoners.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A wide range of counselling help is available for prisoners which may be provided by seconded probation officers, prison chaplains or ministers of other faiths, medical officers or other doctors including psychiatrists, psychologists, education officers, other prison staff or members of voluntary agencies concerned with specific problems such as alcohol abuse. No new central initiative is currently planned, although the continued development of shared working between probation officers and prison officers will lead to the greater involvement of the latter in the social work and welfare needs of prisoners. A particular recent development has been the training of some Prison Service specialist staff to counsel inmates identified as HIV antibody positive.

Traffic Offences (Revenue)

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total revenue raised from traffic offences in each of the past five years in the metropolitan region.

Mr. John Patten: It is estimated that in 1986 the value of fines imposed by courts in the Metropolitan police district for offences related to motor vehicles was £10 million, but information on resulting payments is not available. Information on the number of fixed penalty notices paid, by police force area, is published annually in "Offences Relating to Motor Vehicles, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables" (table 21 of the issue for 1986), copies of which are in the Library. For tickets issued in 1985, the latest year for which complete information is available, £11·7 million was paid as a result of fixed penalty notices issued by the Metropolitan police.

Traffic Wardens

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many full-time equivalent traffic wardens have been employed by the Metropolitan police in each of the past five years.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the information is as follows:

	Number
31 December 1983	1,789
31 December 1984	1,829

	Number
31 December 1985	1,698
31 December 1986	1,668
31 December 1987	1,527

These figures include wardens employed at Heathrow airport.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mr. Ground: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many cases were awaiting resolution by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board at the end of each month since June 1987;

(2) how many cases were resolved by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board during each month since June 1987;

(3) how many staff were employed by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board at the end of each month since June 1987.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is given in the following table:

Month	*Cases awaiting resolution at the end of each month*	*Cases resolved during each month*	*Staff in post (part-time staff being each counted as one half)*
June 1987	68,600	2,023	218·5
July 1987	70,400	2,112	218·5
August 1987	72,000	2,132	218·5
September 1987	73,300	2,244	221·5
October 1987	74,800	2,532	259·5
November 1987	76,500	1,943	283·5
December 1987	76,700	2,320	297·5
January 1988	76,000	3,652	310·5

Lunar House, Croydon

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff are currently employed at the public inquiry office at Lunar House, Croydon; and how many of these speak *(a)* Gujarati, *(b)* Punjabi, *(c)* Urdu, and *(d)* Hindi.

Mr. Renton: There are currently 90 staff employed in the immigration public inquiry office at Lunar House, of whom four speak one or more of these languages. Three speak Gujarati; one speaks Punjabi; three speak Urdu and three speak Hindi. A further six staff are employed in the nationality public inquiry office, one of whom speaks all four languages.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hours were worked as overtime by employees at the public inquiry office at Lunar House, Croydon for each year from 1984 to 1987 and to the latest available date in the current year; and what was the total cost of this overtime.

Mr. Renton: The number of hours worked as overtime by staff in the immigration public inquiry office at Lunar House are set out in the table. The estimated cost of the overtime for the period is £150,000.

	Hours
1984	2,885
1985	8,578
1986	6,827
1987	9,279
1988 to 22 January	928

As regards the nationality public inquiry office, no overtime was worked in the years 1984 to 1986. In 1987, 428 hours overtime was worked, at an estimated cost of £2,526. So far in 1988, 12 hours overtime has been worked, at an estimated cost of £80.

Police (Crime-related Injuries)

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board resolved in 1986-87 for police officers suffering crime-related injuries while on duty.

Mr. John Patten: As stated at paragraph 8 of the board's latest annual report (Cm. 42), copies of which are in the Library, 1,948 cases involving injury to police officers on duty were resolved in the year ended 31 March 1987.

Prisoners (Strip Searches)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many category A women prisoners there were in Her Majesty's prison, Durham in January 1988; and how many strip searches were made on these prisoners in that month, indicating strip searches before and after consultation with legal advisers, after visits and after cell changes, wing searches and cell searches, and listing reasons for searches and illegal contraband or smuggled items found.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: During January there were three category A women prisoners in Durham prison. The number of occasions on which each was strip searched during the month is shown in the table:

	Inmate A	*Inmate B*	*Inmate C*
After legal visits	—	—	—
After other visits	2	—	1
At the time of cell changes, and wing and cell searches	1	1	1
Other	—	2	1

No unauthorised article was found on any of the three women. I set out the reasons for such searches in my reply to a question from the hon. Member on 15 January at column 446.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many category A prisoners are at present held on remand at Risley detention centre; to how many strip searches they have been subjected on a monthly basis since they have been remanded at Risley, giving the number of persons involved, the number of times each person was searched and if any prison contraband, smuggled item or illegal correspondence was discovered in any search, indicating which items; in how many cases prisoners refused to be searched and had to be restrained while a search was being conducted; and what were the reasons for the search under each of the following headings: *(a)* making a remand appearance at court, *(b)* attending a trial, *(c)* inter-prison visit and *(d)* other reasons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 9 February there were six inmates on remand at Risley remand centre who had provisionally been allocated to category A. Comprehensive records of strip searches are available only in respect of category A women prisoners, of whom there was one in Risley on the date in question. In accordance with standing instructions, this prisoner was strip searched on initial reception at Risley in September. Subsequently, she was strip searched on the following number of occasions up to the end of January, all in connection with appearances at court for remand hearings:

	Number
September	2
October	6
November	4
December	4
January	6

No unauthorised article was discovered on any of these occasions. On no occasion did the prisoner refuse to be strip searched.

Irish Republican Army

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department was first made aware of the existence of Irish Republican Army extortion rackets in London and other cities in England; what actions have been taken to track down the sources of Irish Republican Army funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: Allegations of IRA extortion appeared in the *Evening Standard* on 5 February 1988. It is an offence under section 1 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 to solicit or invite financial or other support for a proscribed organisation, or knowingly to make or receive any contribution in money or otherwise to the resources of a proscribed organisation. Under schedule 1 to the 1984 Act the Irish Republican Army and the Irish National Liberation Army are proscribed organisations. Any evidence of such offences which comes to light is investigated by the appropriate authorities.

Kidnap and Ransom Insurance

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to introduce legislation to make it illegal to provide kidnap and ransom insurance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: No.

Mr. Gene Meyer

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why Mr. Gene Meyer, a United States citizen with permanent residence rights in the United Kingdom, was stopped and interrogated about his sexuality by officials at Gatwick airport on 4 January, and told that he was a high risk and medically unsuitable to enter the United Kingdom.

Mr. Renton: Mr. Meyer is not a resident of the United Kingdom, but sought entry at Gatwick on 4 January as a visitor. The immigration officer was not immediately satisfied that he was a genuine visitor under the immigration rules. He was not, however, questioned about his sexuality, nor was he told that he was a high risk and medically unsuitable to enter the United Kingdom. He was admitted as a visitor until the end of February 1988.

AIDS

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if there are any circumstances under which incoming travellers with the HIV virus are banned from entering the United Kingdom;

(2) if immigration officers receive training in the detection of symptoms of AIDS in travellers entering the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he has any information regarding the interviewing and vetting by immigration officers of incoming travellers suspected of having the HIV virus; and if he will make a statement on his policy regarding such practices.

Mr. Renton: Evidence of HIV infection is not considered to be a sufficient reason for refusal of leave to enter the United Kingdom. Immigration officers receive no medical training, but the immigration rules require them to refer for examination by the port medical inspector any passenger who mentions health or medical treatment as a reason for his visit, or who appears not to be in good health. Passengers coming here for medical treatment or who may need treatment during their stay, including treatment for AIDS, are required to satisfy the immigration officer that they can meet any charges which might be made for such treatment and that they can otherwise support themselves without recourse to public funds. Under the rules, any passenger arriving in the United Kingdom must provide the immigration officer with such information as may be required for the purpose of deciding whether he requires leave to enter and, if so, whether and on what terms leave should be given.

Mentally Ill Prisoners

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his Department's current estimates of the number of mentally ill people discharged from prison each year into the community.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his Department's current estimates of the number of mentally ill people currently held in Her Majesty's prisons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our most recent estimate is that on 30 September 1987 there were 344 inmates who, in the opinion of prison medical officers, were suffering from mental disorder of a nature or degree which would satisfy the criteria for detention in hospital for medical treatment. 298 of these were mentally ill.

British Nationality

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will publish in the *Official Report* the letter from Coventry community relations council, dated 23 November 1987, with reference to the deadline for applications for British nationality, and the reply sent by the assistant private secretary to the Minister of State; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what grounds would be considered acceptable as justifying a late application for registration as a British citizen made by Commonwealth and Irish citizens resident in the United Kingdom since 1 January 1973.

Mr. Renton: No. The position on the matters dealt with in the correspondence referred to was set out fully in the reply to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 15 January, at c. 449.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the total cost to public funds of the Metropolitan police in 1988-89; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: As police authority for the metropolis I have approved estimates which provide for net revenue expenditure by the Metropolitan police of £1,004·967 million in 1988-89, an increase of 8·2 per cent. on the expenditure I approved for 1987-88. There will be a cash limit on current expenditure of £994·609 million. The remainder will be capital expenditure, for which separate controls exist.

I have also authorised the issue of a precept requiring rating authorities to levy rates at 16·5p in the £ for Metropolitan police purposes. This is an increase of 7·1 per cent. on the 1987-88 precept of 15·4p.

Dr. Frank Skuse

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will now call for a review of all cases in which Dr. Frank Skuse gave evidence.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* No.

EMPLOYMENT

Training Schemes

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently employed on Government-sponsored training schemes in the Basildon area; and if he will express the figures as a percentage of the total local work force.

Mr. Cope: The information is not available in the precise form requested. At 29 January in the Basildon local authority district there were 461 young people in training on YTS of whom 143 were employed by their training provider and 37 people on the new job training scheme of whom none were employed. Occupancy figures are not available for other adult training schemes. The total local work force for the Basildon LAD is currently 64,489 (as at 29 January).

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in the Basildon area have been employed on Government-sponsored training schemes for each of the last five years.

Mr. Cope: Information about the number of people participating in Government training schemes in the Basildon area for each of the last five years, and the number of those who had employed status, is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Overtime

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the average hours of overtime worked per week by full-time employees in *(a)* manufacturing industry *(b)* mining and *(c)* agriculture.

Mr. Lee: The most recent estimates of the information requested are provided in table X2 of part B of the 1987 New Earnings Survey report.

Price Increases

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what have been the average increases each year since 1979 of *(a)* textiles, *(b)* motor vehicles, *(c)* electrical goods and *(d)* food.

Mr. Lee: I regret that the information is not available in the precise form requested.

However, the following table gives changes in retail prices over the 12 months to January each year for the closest approximation to the categories specified.

Retail prices index—percentage changes over twelve months to January

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
Food	12·6	8·9	11·0	1·9	6·0	3·4	3·2	3·8	2·9
Radio, TV and other household appliances[1]	9·8	4·3	2·9	0·9	−0·5	−0·8	0·0	−2·8	n.a.
Electrical appliances	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2·8
Audio-visual equipment[2]	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	−4·7
(Purchase of) motor vehicles[2]	11·6	6·5	6·1	3·8	3·7	−0·6	2·2	6·2	6·9
Men's outer clothing[3]	15·1	6·1	0·1	0·7	−1·2	3·1	2·9	1·5	1·6
Women's outer clothing[3]	3·7	1·1	−1·5	0·3	−2·7	2·3	3·8	0·9	−0·8
Children's clothing[3]	8·9	5·2	3·2	4·0	5·3	6·7	2·5	3·3	1·0

[1] No figure for electrical goods is available. This heading is the most closely comparable, and includes gas appliances.
[2] From February 1987 the definition of some components were changed. These figures show the annual change in prices for January 1988.
[3] No figure for textiles is available and figures for various types of clothing are therefore given.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is *(a)* the number of participants in and *(b)* the cost of the enterprise allowance scheme in (i) the Northwich travel-to-work area, (ii) the Chester travel-to-work area, and (iii) the Runcorn travel-to-work area; and what have been the figures in each year since the scheme's inception.

Mr. Cope: The figures are not available in the form requested. The Northwich, Chester and Runcorn travel-to-work areas are all covered by the Cheshire enterprise allowance team. The table gives the number of participants in receipt of the allowance in Cheshire at the end of each financial year (in 1987-88 at the latest date available) and expenditure for each financial year (in 1987-88 up to the latest date available).

(£ million)

	1983-84	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
Participants at year end	596	946	1,038	1,407	[1]1,507
Expenditure for year	1·25	1·98	2·17	2·94	[2]3·15

[1] (at 9 February 1988).
[2] (to 9 February 1988).

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what was the rate of unemployment for January of Sudbury travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79;

(2) what was the rate of unemployment for January of Haverhill travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79;

(3) what was the rate of unemployment for January of Long Melford travel-to-work area in each year from 1978-79;

(4) what was the rate of unemployment for January of Lavenham travel-to-work area, in each year from 1978-79;

(5) what was the rate of unemployment for January of Ripley travel-to-work area, in each year from 1978-79;

(6) what was the rate of unemployment for January of Grimsby travel-to-work area, in each year from 1978-79;

(7) what was the rate of unemployment for January of Heanor travel-to-work area, in each year from 1978-79;

(8) what was the rate of unemployment for January of Upminster travel-to-work area, in each year from 1978-79;

(9) what was the rate of unemployment for January of Weymouth travel-to-work area, in each year from 1978-79;

(10) what was the rate of unemployment for January of Portland travel-to-work area, in each year from 1978-79;

(11) what was the rate of unemployment for January of Redditch travel-to-work area, in each year from 1978-79;

(12) what was the rate of unemployment for January of Droitwich travel-to-work area, in each year from 1978-79;

(13) what was the rate of unemployment for January of Bodmin travel-to-work area, in each year from 1978-79;

(14) what was the rate of unemployment for January of Newquay travel-to-work area, in each year from 1978-79;

(15) what was the rate of unemployment for January of Bude travel-to-work area, in each year from 1978-79;

(16) what was the rate of unemployment for January of Launceston travel-to-work area, in each year from 1978-79;

(17) what was the rate of unemployment for January of Alfreton travel-to-work area, in each year from 1978-79.

Mr. John Lee: The following information is in the Library. Unemployment figures are not comparable over the whole period because of changes in the coverage of the count, and in the boundary definitions of the travel-to-work areas. The table shows the number of unemployed registrants in the requested travel-to-work areas as defined in 1978, at January of each year from 1979 to 1982, the number of unemployed claimants in those areas at January 1983, and the number of unemployed claimants in the travel-to-work areas as defined in 1984 for January of each year from 1984 to 1987, expressed as a percentage of employees in employment and the unemployed. Long Melford, Lavenham, Ripley, Heanor, Upminster, Portland, Redditch, and Droitwich do not form travel-to-work areas; these areas are all only a small part of a travel-to-work area.

1978 Definition travel-to-work areas

	Sudbury	*Haverhill*	*Grimsby*	*Weymouth*	*Bodmin*	*Newquay*	*Bude*	*Launceston*	*Alfreton*
Unemployed registrants									
January 1979	4·3	4·0	7·4	7·7	7·6	13·7	12·4	8·5	5·5
January 1980	4·0	4·0	6·6	8·7	5·9	13·0	11·4	8·9	6·1
January 1981	7·1	8·6	11·9	10·8	8·7	18·0	15·0	12·4	11·5
January 1982	10·1	9·8	14·2	13·3	10·7	22·4	16·9	13·6	14·8
Unemployed claimants									
January 1983	9·5	11·7	13·2	14·8	14·5	23·3	18·6	12·1	15·2

1984 Definition travel-to-work areas

	Sudbury	*Haverhill*	*Grimsby*	*Dorchester and Weymouth*	*Bodmin and Liskeard*	*Newquay*	*Bude*	*Launceston*	*Alfreton and Ashfield*
Unemployed claimants									
January 1984	11·7	9·3	16·5	10·3	15·6	27·3	15·9	13·8	10·3
January 1985	11·2	8·6	16·3	10·5	16·5	30·6	18·6	15·4	11·3
January 1986	11·9	8·6	15·5	11·4	17·3	32·2	19·3	15·8	11·5
January 1987	11·2	7·1	15·6	11·6	17·6	31·8	19·3	15·7	11·3

TRANSPORT

Taxis

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many taxis, including minicabs, are currently licensed in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Essex region, *(c)* Basildon area, *(d)* London.

Mr. David Mitchell: The figures are as follows:

Area	*Taxis*	*Hire Cars*
England and Wales excluding London	21,100 (1986)	25,780 (1985)
London	14,200 (1986)	Not licensed
Scotland	6,358 (1985)	2,956 (1985)
Essex	629 (1986)	Not available
Basildon	63 (1986)	141 (1985)

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the total number of taxis licensed in *(a)* the United Kingdom, and *(b)* the Basildon area, for each of the last five years.

Mr. David Mitchell: The available figures are as follows:

Area	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
England and Wales (excluding London)[1]	17,700	18,100	18,400	18,900	21,100
London[1]	12,800	13,100	13,600	13,800	14,200
Scotland[2]	n.a.	n.a.	5,641	6,358	n.a.
Basildon[2]	62	62	62	61	63

Sources:
[1] Transport statistics for Great Britain.
[2] TRRL surveys.

Motor Cars (Geneva Convention)

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to update the 1948 Geneva convention as this applies to motor cars crossing European borders where differing regulations exist concerning head lights and tyre tread depths.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The 1949 Geneva convention was in many respects updated by the 1968 Vienna convention. Further amendments have been proposed in the appropriate working groups of the Economic Commission for Europe. The requirements on headlamps and tyres are in broad terms so as to accommodate the differences between national regulations. For example, headlamps may be white or yellow and their use may be allowed or required in built-up areas at night. Tyres must be in a state such as to ensure conditions of safety, including adhesion, even on a wet road. This implies the presence of some tread, without specifying any minimum tread depth.

Air Traffic Control Radar

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how old the air traffic control radar on St. Boniface Down, Isle of Wight, is; what plans there are for its replacement and modernisation; what part this installation plays in preventing air near misses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Air traffic control services are the responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority. I shall draw my hon. Friend's question to the attention of the authority's chairman.

Dartford-Thurrock Crossing

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Government will publish their response to the special report of the Select Committee on the Dartford-Thurrock Crossing Bill, Session 1987-88: HC 213; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Government will publish their response to the special report on the Select Committee on the Dartford-Thurrock Crossing Bill, Session 1987-88: HC 213; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The response has been published today. Copies have been sent to members of the Select Committee and the Standing Committee, are available in the Vote Office and have been placed in the Library.

The Government appreciate that the task which the Select Committee was called upon to perform was exceptionally difficult, raising issues of great technical complexity. We are grateful to the members, and particularly to the Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet, (Mr. Chapman) for their very thorough examination of all the issues put to them.

The response addresses all the matters to which the Select Committee made reference. Since receiving its report the Department has reviewed the effects of wind on vehicles using the bridge, the traffic management measures available, and the effect of imposing a requirement for full windshielding on the bridge. The re-examination of the evidence put to the Select Committee and the results of further work commissioned since then have led us to conclude that the provision of full windshielding on the bridge is not justified. The Government will therefore seek to have the requirement deleted from the Bill at the Report stage.

However, the discussions leading up to the Select Committee, and the proceedings themselves, have helped to establish the benefits to be gained from local windshielding near the bridge towers. I am informed that this can be accommodated in the existing design and that Dartford River Crossing Ltd. will be providing it.

The Select Committee asked me to inquire into the way in which the case on windshielding was presented. I am pursuing that. Difficult issues arise about the way in which commercially confidential information should be presented.

The Government accept the Select Committee's recommendation about road access to Dartford and maintains their neutral attitude to naming of the bridge.

Finally, the response notes the recommendation on compensation for Mr. Michie and his neighbours at Rose Villas. The Department will make every effort to assist in the speedy assessment and payment of compensation.

This is an urgent and badly needed project. The Government hope that the extra capacity at this crossing will be provided as quickly as possible.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Infant Mortality

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the numbers of post neonatal deaths, and the rate per 1,000 live births, in England and Wales attributed to *(a)* sudden infant deaths, *(b)* respiratory diseases, *(c)* congenital abnormalities, *(d)* conditions arising in the perinatal period, *(e)* injury and poisoning and *(f)* all other causes, for the latest available year.

Mrs. Currie: The information is given in the table.

Postneonatal mortality for selected causes (numbers and rates)
England and Wales 1986

Cause of death	*ICD*	*Sex*	*Number*	*Rate*[1]
All causes	000-999	Male	1,693	5 · 00
		Female	1,131	3 · 51
		Total	2,824	4 · 27
Sudden Infant Death Syndrome	798-000	Male	798	2 · 36
		Female	494	1 · 53
		Total	1,292	1 · 95
Diseases of the Respiratory System	460-519	Male	195	0 · 58
		Female	116	0 · 36
		Total	311	0 · 47
Congenital Anomalies	740-759	Male	249	0 · 73
		Female	240	0 · 74
		Total	489	0 · 74
Certain conditions originating in the perinatal period	760-779	Male	137	0 · 40
		Female	66	0 · 20
		Total	203	0 · 31
Injury and poisoning	800-999	Male	58	0 · 17
		Female	46	0 · 14
		Total	104	0 · 16
Other Remainder	000-999	Male	256	0 · 76
		Female	169	0 · 52
		Total	425	0 · 64

[1] Rate per 1,000 live births.
Postneonatal deaths: deaths at ages 28 days and over, but under one year.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how he proposes to correct the tendency in regional hospital plans to emphasise hospital closures as a central plank of strategy for the mentally ill and to be unspecific about how local needs have been assessed; and how the new pattern of services is to be developed and resourced.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him on 8 February 1988 at column 97.

Special Hospital Patients

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many patients are currently residing in each special hospital who no longer require a secure environment, due to an inability to relocate them in National Health Service or local authority accommodation.

Mr. Newton: The table shows the number of patients in the special hospitals who at 4 January *(a)* had been recommended for a move to another hospital on trial leave or transfer and were awaiting a vacancy in an identified hospital; and *(b)* had been conditionally discharged or were the subject of a deferred conditional discharge by a mental health review tribunal and were awaiting a vacancy in local authority accommodation.

	(a)	*(b)*
Broadmoor	10	—
Moss Side	4	1
Park Lane	5	4
Rampton	17	2
TOTAL	36	7

Pin-ups

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will issue instructions for the removal of all offensive pin-ups in all his departmental premises.

Mr. Portillo: The Department has made clear that it is the responsibility of line managers to ensure that potentially offensive material is not displayed in the workplace.

Lost Operations

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate he has of the number of

operations and hospital treatments, including emergency operations, lost on 3 February, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The information we received from health authorities showed that the number of non-emergency operations lost through strike action in the National Health Service on 3 February was 206. There were no reports of cancelled emergency operations. A small number of non-emergency admissions, out-patients and day patients had their attendances disrupted.

Nurses

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many working days were lost in 1986 and 1987 amongst nurses in the National Health Service due to back problems.

Mr. Newton: I regret that we do not collect this information centrally.

Disabled People

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what measures he intends to take to help provide for the needs of the very severely disabled people in Blyth Valley, in the light of the entitlements of new claimants after April.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Members for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) and for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on 9 February at column *172*.

Prescriptions

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give for each of the last five available years the cost to the National Health Service of general practitioners' prescribing of *(a)* brand name drugs and *(b)* generic drugs.

Mr. Newton: The estimated net ingredient cost of drugs prescribed by general practitioners in the National Health Service in England for the last five calendar years is set out in the table:

£ million

Calendar year	*Drugs prescribed Generically*	*Drugs prescribed by brand name*
1982	48·5	811·8
1983	53·3	916·4
1984	56·6	978·7
1985	88·2	955·8
1986	103·3	1,021·5

Not included in this table are those drugs prescribed generically but dispensed by brand name, that is, where a generic equivalent is not available.

Breast Cancer (Screening)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he intends to encourage health authorities to send written reminders to women over 64 years of age of the need for three-yearly screening for breast cancer.

Mrs. Currie: We have no plans to encourage health authorities to send written reminders to women aged 65 and over to attend for breast cancer screening. The nationwide breast cancer screening service which we are introducing over the next three years is based on the conclusions in the report of a Government-appointed working group, chaired by Professor Sir Patrick Forrest. The report recommended that the priority for any screening programme should be to offer an initial screen to as many women as possible aged 50-64. Women aged 65 and over will not be automatically invited for screening but they will be screened on request.

Health Authorities (Chief Officers)

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many graduates with masters of business administration degrees are employed at chief officer level in regional and district health authorities; and how many such graduates are employed in health service administration within his Department.

Mr. Newton: I regret that the information for health authority officers is not held centrally. For departmental staff, information is not readily available in this form and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Consultants

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to how many consultants do more work for the National Health Service than is stipulated in their contracts.

Mr. Newton: I regret that this information is not collected centrally.

NHS (Funding)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of the representations he has received on the means of funding of the National Health Service favoured *(a)* a tax-based system and *(b)* a system based on personal insurance.

Mr. Newton: A variety of different funding methods have been recommended in the representations we have received. Variations on both systems have featured in these representations, but it would not be meaningful to categorise them precisely in this way.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the total amount of National Health Service funding what comes from direct taxation; and what percentage of the total National Health Service funding this represents, for each year from 1979.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 11 February 1988]:* The information requested is as follows for Great Britain:

Year	From general taxation (Consolidated Fund) £ million	Per cent. of total NHS funding	From National Health Service Contributions £ million	Per cent. of total NHS funding
1978-79	6,810	88·0	745	9·6
1979-80	8,071	87·9	877	9·6
1980-81	10,654	89·1	989	8·2
1981-82	11,783	87·8	1,257	9·4
1982-83	12,588	85·7	1,662	11·3
1983-84	13,325	85·8	1,708	11·0
1984-85	14,291	85·6	1,848	11·1
1985-86	15,071	85·6	1,945	11·0
1986-87	16,055	84·6	2,205	11·6
1987-88 (est)	16,841	83·1	2,676	13·2

NHS funding drawn from the Consolidated Fund is not attributable to different forms of taxation, direct or indirect.

Medicine and Surgery (Expenditure)

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, of the total expenditure on secondary services, what amounts and proportions are attributed to medicine and surgery, respectively.

Mr. Newton: The requested details of expenditure, for hospitals in England in 1986-87, are as follows:

	Total revenue expenditure (£)	Percentage of total revenue expenditure (£)
(1) Expenditure on drugs, dressings and pharmacy	836,132,385	10·1
(2) Expenditure on direct treatment of patients excluding costs at (1)	3,950,185,144	47·5

AIDS

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is aware of any research findings which show that infection caused by the AIDS virus cannot pass through the material of an intact condom.

Mr. Newton: I am advised that there are two published studies from San Francisco and Brussels in which various commercially available latex condoms have been demonstrated to be impermeable to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) under laboratory conditions. In addition, I understand that similar results have been obtained by other researchers which have not yet been published.

Neonatal Intensive Care

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the conclusions of the meeting held between the Medical Research Council and the health departments into the long-term consequences of neonatal intensive care.

Mrs. Currie: A meeting of experts to discuss appropriate measurements of developmental, social and educational outcome in children who had undergone neonatal intensive care was proposed at the last annual meeting between the health departments and the Medical Research Council. I understand that the Medical Research Council is currently considering the most appropriate way to approach the issue. Progress is to be reviewed at the next annual meeting in March.

Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley District Health Authority

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases were dealt with by the Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley district health authority from 1979 to 1986 in *(a)* general medicine, *(b)* paediatrics, *(c)* geriatric medicine and *(d)* general surgery.

Mrs. Currie: The requested information is given in the table.

Patients treated in Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley district health authority for the following specialties

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
General medicine								
Number of available beds	174·2	187·6	204·9	201·8	200·8	195·3	197·2	177·7
Number of occupied beds	166·1	172·1	174·9	165·3	165·4	158·0	162·6	150·3
Discharges and deaths	5,634	5,854	6,385	6,145	6,563	7,035	7,352	7,064
Total out-patient attendances	15,428	15,341	20,001	21,453	23,382	23,797	25,402	26,708
Day cases	553	553	920	1,154	1,037	1,266	1,365	1,314
Paediatrics								
Number of available beds	36·3	37·4	58·3	59·3	58·2	51·6	50·6	53·5
Number of occupied beds	16·2	17·2	25·1	28·6	25·7	24·0	24·7	22·9
Discharges and deaths	1,515	1,501	2,326	2,542	2,699	2,663	2,852	2,669
Total out-patient attendances	4,431	4,459	6,111	6,783	7,397	6,972	6,575	6,075
Day cases	2	9	1	1	5	4	6	3
Geriatrics								
Number of available beds	337·2	350·2	352·9	351·6	334·8	282·4	280·9	276·5

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Number of occupied beds	332·8	346·3	348·5	339·7	315·3	266·0	257·9	244·2
Discharges and deaths	1,015	1,328	1,636	2,013	2,439	2,255	2,385	2,267
Total out-patient attendances	345	508	773	1,054	1,089	1,382	1,745	1,812
Day cases	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
General surgery								
Number of available beds	154·4	156·2	155·0	147·8	154·3	142·5	137·2	130·2
Number of occupied beds	129·7	128·6	125·2	119·6	120·0	111·4	106·5	97·2
Discharges and deaths	6,088	6,259	6,160	6,136	6,577	6,740	6,772	6,487
Total out-patient attendances	13,731	14,217	14,806	14,848	14,004	14,546	14,338	13,753
Day cases	397	560	650	570	553	698	708	715

Housing Benefits (Lambeth)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to how many housing benefit claims have been made to Lambeth council but have not been processed.

Mr. Portillo: We do not collect such unformation centrally. Local authorities are responsible for the day-to-day administration of the housing benefit scheme.

1981 Census

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the reasons for the difficulties encountered when the trial ethnic question for the 1981 census was tried out in Haringey; and whether similar difficulties are expected with the 1991 census.

Mrs. Currie: Co-operation from the public in the test carried out in Haringey in 1979 was seriously hampered by an organised campaign of opposition which was given considerable publicity in the media. The campaign contended that information collected in the test was linked with plans to change the nationality laws in a manner that would worsen the status of ethnic minority groups in Britain. Such fears were unfounded, but the level of opposition at the time of the test and subsequently during consultation with organisations representing ethnic minority groups was sufficient to show that an ethnic origin question was not acceptable at that time.

The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and the Commission for Racial Equality are currently holding meetings with community relations officers and representatives of ethnic minority organisations to find out why some people are worried about a possible ethnic origin question in the census so that ways can be found to remove any mistaken doubts and fears if such a question were to be included in the 1991 census. These meetings follow a recent series of tests carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys to develop an effective form of wording of such a question.

Pontefract Health Authority

Mr. Lofthouse: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many consultants are employed by Pontefract district health authority on contracts; and how many of these work *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time for the National Health Service;

(2) what is the annual cost of consultants' contracts for the Pontefract district health authority.

Mrs. Currie: Information on the number of consultants in non-teaching districts such as Pontefract is not available centrally as such staff are employed by regional health authorities. Some information on costs is available from district accounts. In 1986-87 Pontefract's total expenditure on salaries and wages of consultants was £1,376,934. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Yorkshire regional health authority for any further information which he requires.

Mr. Lofthouse: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many beds have been closed either temporarily or permanently in each of the past three years in the Pontefract district health authority area; and how long each closure lasted;

(2) what is the bed availability to the Pontefract district health authority at the latest date; and if he will give similar figures for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Currie: Information is available centrally only on the average number of beds in Pontefract. This is given in the table, together with discharges and deaths per available bed.

The hon. Member may wish to approach the chairman of Pontefract DHA for the remainder of the information he is seeking.

Average daily available beds in Pontefract district health authority

	Average daily available beds	[1] *Throughput*
1979	853·5	22·3
1980	848·3	25·0
1981	873·0	24·2
1982	864·5	23·1
1983	883·0	25·1
1984	904·0	25·0
1985	884·9	26·2
1986	880·6	25·9

[1] Discharges and deaths per available bed.
Figures before 1982 relate to Pontefract's predecessor district within Wakefield area health authority.

Mr. Lofthouse: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many nurses have left the Pontefract district health authority since 1979; how many have been reinstated; what is the present number in post; and what was the number in post in 1979.

Mrs. Currie: Such figures as are available are shown in the table. Because of the 1982 National Health Service reorganisation, figures on a consistent basis are not held centrally for the years prior to 1982. Information on nurses who have left, or been reinstated, is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the Pontefract district health authority for this information.

NHS nursing and midwifery staff in post[1]
Pontefract District Health Authority at 30 September

	Whole time equivalents[2]
1982	1,020
1983	1,040
1984	1,070
1985	1,080
1986	1,100

Source: DHSS annual census of National Health Service non-medical manpower.

[1] Includes agency staff.

[2] Figures are independently rounded to nearest ten whole time equivalents.

Mr. Lofthouse: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many appointments he has made to the Pontefract health authority since 1983.

Mrs. Currie: The Secretary of State reappointed Mr. R. Widdowson as chairman of Pontefract health authority on 1 April 1986. The appointment of members to Pontefract district health authority is the responsibility of the Yorkshire regional health authority and certain local authorities.

Schizophrenics

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the annual numbers of schizophrenics discharged from hospitals in the United Kingdom over the past 10 years.

Mrs. Currie: The number of discharges of patients with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia from National Health Service mental illness hospitals and units in England are shown in the table for each year since 1977. The figures refer to discharges and cannot be related to individual patients; a patient may be readmitted more than once during the year.

Year	Discharges
1977	28,595
1978	25,695
1979	24,656
1980	25,280
1981	25,992
1982	24,594
1983	25,336
1984	25,934
1985	26,225
1986	26,077

Figures for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his latest estimate for the amount of money to be spent by his Department on research into schizophrenia in the current financial year.

Mrs. Currie: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad) on 10 November 1987 at column *149*.

Mentally Ill People

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many documented cases of abuse of mentally ill people in institutions covered by his Department there have been in the most recent period for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie: Individual health authorities are responsible for monitoring their own services and dealing with all issues — including abuse — as appropriate. Such information is not routinely collected by the Department. Since 1 January 1986, there have been 80 complaints by patients in the special hospitals alleging ill-treatment. In one of these cases, the allegation was substantiated and a staff member was dismissed.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate he has of the numbers of those caring for the mentally ill at home under the care in the community proposals who are subsequently certified as mentally ill.

Mr. Newton: We have no basis for making such an estimate.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are his Department's current figures for the number of homes funded by health authorities to provide sheltered accommodation for people who are mentally ill.

Mrs. Currie: If accommodation for people who are mentally ill is funded by a health authority it should form part of the in-patient accommodation the health authority provides, and so not figure separately in NHS statistics. Health authorities may also provide varying degrees of financial support to voluntary bodies which are providing sheltered accommodation, but we have no statistics of such payments.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Bradford, South received on Tuesday 9 February, if he will list the 45 National Health Service hospital units, hostels and holiday homes for the mentally handicapped closed since 1984, stating in each case the changes of use for each site.

Mrs. Currie: I regret the delay in supplying the information originally requested. As I explained in my reply to the hon. Member on 18 January at column *579*, it was necessary to make enquiries to bring the information held centrally up to date.

Listed are details of the National Health Service hospital units, hostels and holiday homes for mentally handicapped people which have closed since 1979, including 31 since 1984.

NHS hospitals units, hostels and holiday homes for mentally handicapped people closed since 1979

Region	*District*	*Hospital*	*Closure date*	*Use made of sites*
Northern RHA	—	None		
Yorkshire RHA	Scunthorpe	Bubwith Hostel	1985	Part sold to GP practice and part to building firm
	York	Tadcaster Hostel	1987	To be demolished to provide new facilities for mentally handicapped people
	Harrogate	Bondgate Hostel	1987	To be marketed
Trent RHA	Southern Derbyshire	Retreat Hostel	1983-87	Sold for use as an old peoples home
	Leicestershire	Glengate Hospital	1987	Sold for use as training centre
	Leicestershire	Hillesden Hostel	1981-82	Sold privately. Use not known
	North Lincolnshire, Central	Tuxford Hostel	1983-84	Sold subject to contract
	Nottinghamshire	Victoria Hospital	1986	Demolished. 6 person bungalow for elderly people planned
	Rotherham	Aughton Court	1984	Part sold for use as a private nursing home
	Sheffield	Wales Court Hospital	1979-80	Sold privately. Use not known
	Sheffield	Scott Road Hostel	1985	Withdrawn from market
	Sheffield	Commonside Hostel	1985	Under consideration for day centre
East Anglian RHA	Norwich	Blofield Hall	1984	Sold for use as educational establishment
North West Thames RHA	North West Hertfordshire	Tenterdon House, St. Albans (part of Cell Barnes Hospital)	1986	Sale to be completed before end of March 1988
	North West Hertfordshire	Houndswood (part of Harperbury Hospital	1984	Sold to private developer
North East Thames RHA	North East Essex	Brunswick House	1987	Disposal option under review
	North East Essex	Essex Hall	1983	To be sold by tender
	North East Essex	Middlesex House	1986	Sold for residential development
	Barking, Havering and Brentwood	Little Warley Lodge	1987	Sold for use as nursing home
South East Thames RHA	Hastings	East Down House	1987	Sold possibly for residential development
	Canterbury	Lanthorne Houe	1987	Demolished to provide 4 bungalows for mentally handicapped people
South West Thames RHA	Merton and Surrey	Brook	1983	Sold for residential development
	North West Surrey	Murray House	1984	Sold for residential development
	South West Surrey	King George V Hospital	1986	Sold for residential development
Wessex RHA	Isle of Wight	Longford (Ryde)	1985	Awaiting outcome of planning application
	West Dorset	Elfadene Holiday Home	1983	Sold to Housing Association
	Winchester	Tichbourne Down	1986	Possible residential development
	Portsmouth	Sandy Point Hospital	1985	Residential development institutional use and nature reserve
	Bath	Winsley Centre	1985	Planning appeal for residential units rejected
Oxford RHA	West Berkshire	Style Acre Hospital	1985	Sold for use as private hospital
	Oxfordshire	Bradwell Grove Hospital, Burford	1986	Reverted to ground landlord on closure
South Western RHA	Frenchay	Leigh Court Hospital	1985	Sold for private mental handicap care
	Exeter	Hawkmoor Hospital	1987	Sale under consideration
	Cornwall	Elizabeth Barclay Home	1985	Sold to private sector
	Bath	Rock Hall House	1983	Sold to Housing Association
	Exeter	Starcross Hospital	1986	Sold to private sector
West Midlands RHA	North Warwickshire	Over Whitacre Hostel	1986	Sold for private nursing home
	Dudley	Part of — Prestwood Hospital	1986	Sold. Present use not known
North Western RHA	West Lancashire	Ormskirk Childrens' Hospital	1986	Closure being reviewed by Health Authority
Mersey RHA	Chester	Tabley Agricultural Hostel	1981	Sold to private developer
	Crewe	Wrenbury Hostel	1981	Sold to Trust for use as hostel for mentally handicapped people

Region	District	Hospital	Closure date	Use made of sites
	Macclesfield	Part of—Mary Dendy Hospital ie Warford Hall	1987	Not yet marketed
		Ancoats	1987	Not yet marketed

Health Authorities (Resources)

Dr. Moonie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make it his policy to allocate sufficient resources to health authorities in 1988-89 to meet the needs for services of elderly, mentally ill and mentally handicapped people, without reducing the level of acute services.

Mr. Newton: It is for regional and district health authorities to provide for the health care needs of the elderly, mentally ill and mentally handicapped, after taking account of other priorities, from within their total resources. The national resource allocation formula allows for the numbers of elderly people, mentally ill and mentally handicapped in regionally managed populations in arriving at target allocations.

Local Authorities (Health Charges)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, on how many occasions in the last five years *(a)* he has agreed that a local authority may make charges under section 28(4) of the National Health Service Act 1977, *(b)* charges have been determined by arbitration; and if he will list the local authorities involved.

Mr. Newton: Charges by local authorities under section 28(4) of the National Health Service Act 1977 have never been agreed to my knowledge. The Department has recently reached a negotiated settlement of the bill presented by the London borough of Camden for the provision of hospital social workers.

Hospital Social Workers

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will publish a table showing the number of hospital social workers employed by each local authority social services department for the last available year;

(2) if he will publish a table showing the number of hospital social workers in each district health authority in England and Wales for the last available year.

Mr. Newton: I regret that this information is not available centrally.

Storm Damage

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a further statement on the arrangements he has made to give financial assistance to health authorities for costs arising from the storm of 15-16 October 1987, where the costs arise from risks which were insurable but which were not insured.

Mr. Newton: I have nothing to add to my statement to the House on 16 December 1987 at columns 1093-94.

Advice Service

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if there are any plans to provide a social security advice service specifically for employers and the self-employed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Yes. A new free telephone inquiry service will become operational on 22 February 1988. The social security advice line for employers will provide expert advice on national insurance contributions and the payment of statutory sick pay and statutory maternity pay. The service will be useful to all employers and independent payrolling services, and particularly helpful for people starting up a new business, the self-employed and small businesses without a separate wages section. A free telephone call will enable them to check that they are following the correct procedures.

Dental Ailments (Lost Working Days)

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the number of working days lost as a result of dental ailments.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* This information has not been collected since the introduction of self-certification for days of absence. Time lost through dental disease was usually not long enough to be recorded under this system.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Avgas

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what revenue was raised through the duty on Avgas for each of the years 1979-80 to 1986-87.

Mr. Lilley: Estimates are as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	3·70
1980-81	6·85
1981-82	4·65
1982-83	2·60
1983-84	2·95
1984-85	2·85
1985-86	3·05
1986-87	2·55

Toxic Waste (Seaham)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what provision is made for the checking of toxic waste which is landed at the port of Seaham, to ensure that the cargo manifest tallies with the materials offloaded.

Mr. Lilley: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) on 8 February, at column 95. All imported goods, including toxic waste, have to be declared to

Customs and Excise, which imposes checks to test the accuracy of the declaration and its supporting documents and to ensure that the goods are not subject to prohibition. There are no special provisions at Seaham to ensure the cargo manifest tallies with the material offloaded.

National Savings

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what compensating allowance has been made in the national savings index-linked products for the recently announced error in the retail prices index.

Mr. Lilley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) on 18 December, at column 846.

EC (Rebates)

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rebate from the whole European Economic Community budget has been obtained for the years 1986 and 1987.

Mr. Brooke: The United Kingdom's payments to and receipts from the European Community budget in 1986 gave rise to an abatement of its VAT contributions in 1987 of 1,633 million ecu (some £1,150 million). The preliminary draft budget for 1988 provides for an upward correction of 244 million ecu (£170 million) to the abatement in respect of 1986, and for an abatement of 2,269 million ecu (£1,580 million) in respect of 1987.

Government Data Network

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the lowest grade of civil servant able to grant permission to allow an authorised intradepartmental and interdepartmental transfer of data on the Government data network; and whether any transfer of data between Departments will be permitted without the consent or knowledge of the data subject.

Mr. Brooke: These will be operational matters for the Departments using the network. As data users, Departments will be responsible for compliance with the Data Protection Act 1984.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what computers at the Department of Health and Social Security, Inland Revenue, Home Department and Customs and Excise will be connected to the Government data network; and what are the locations of these computers.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* Departmental decisions on which computer systems and sites would be connected to the proposed GDN cannot be made until after the project is approved.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the costings of the savings arising from the economies of scale referred to in the service requirements for a Government data network have been calculated.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* Only when tenders are received will sufficient financial information be available to assess the savings to Government arising from the introduction of the proposed Government data network.

Confectionery and Biscuits

Mr. Aspinwall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he proposes to meet the president of the Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionery Alliance to discuss the imposition of value added tax on confectionery and chocolate biscuits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* Changes in taxation are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget judgment. As my hon. Friend will appreciate, it is not possible for him to meet all those seeking to put their views beforehand. However, representations submitted by the president of the Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionery Alliance have been carefully considered by Treasury Ministers.

THE ARTS

Art in Prisons

Mr. Butler: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on the Arts Council's initiatives to encourage art in prisons.

Mr. Luce: I am pleased to learn of the Arts Council's proposed initiatives to encourage art in prisons. This work is of great value, and I look forward to learning more about the scheme when firm plans have been drawn up.

Grants

Mr. Buchan: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will list the grants made by the Arts Council to *(a)* the English National Opera, *(b)* the National Theatre, *(c)* the Royal Opera House and *(d)* the Royal Shakespeare Company for every year from 1977-78 to 1987-88 inclusive, and the grants proposed for them in 1988-89.

Mr. Luce: The information requested is as follows:

	English National Opera £	*National Theatre* £	*Royal Opera House* £	*Royal Shakespeare Company* £
1977-78	2,640,000	2,770,593	4,850,000	1,365,000
1978-79	3,665,000	3,401,500	5,475,000	1,838,486
1979-80	4,800,000	4,806,500	7,000,000	2,117,000
1980-81	5,475,000	5,188,000	7,805,000	2,535,934
1981-82	4,550,000	5,770,000	9,020,000	2,880,000
1982-83	5,440,000	6,550,000	10,379,682	4,075,000
1983-84	5,988,401	6,869,446	11,584,776	4,660,312
1984-85	5,918,250	7,005,870	12,386,891	5,286,000
1985-86	6,034,500	6,955,200	13,474,491	5,392,000

	English National Opera £	National Theatre £	Royal Opera House £	Royal Shakespeare Company £
1986-87	6,576,000	7,811,400	13,096,500	5,197,000
1987-88	6,748,000	7,811,400	13,226,960	5,197,000
1988-89	6,917,000	[1]7,811,400	13,491,270	5,326,500

[1] An additional sum of £105,600 is reserved for the National Theatre and may be made available on receipt of a three-year plan showing, inter alia, financial break-even.

I have increased the grant to the Arts Council in 1988-89 and subsequent years to enable it, in part, to provide more assistance for touring within the United Kingdom and overseas. The national companies may well receive increased funding on this account, and also from the incentive funding arrangements now being devised.

Mr. Buchan: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will list the grants made by the Arts Council to each of the 12 English regional arts associations by the Arts Council for each year from 1977-78 to 1987-88, inclusive, and the grants proposed for them in 1988-89.

Mr. Luce: The information requested is as follows:

	Eastern £	East Midlands £	Greater London £	Lincs/ Humberside £	Merseyside £	Northern £
1977-78	242,099	216,023	470,913	202,305	189,067	729,309
1978-79	343,594	297,163	558,571	267,829	254,180	914,787
1979-80	419,398	428,033	652,301	335,893	338,147	1,088,960
1980-81	481,180	579,874	932,101	390,747	386,083	1,306,630
1981-82	541,045	699,754	1,209,972	460,691	444,877	1,456,051
1982-83	690,483	824,944	1,464,087	523,048	497,419	1,733,236
1983-84	728,305	927,160	1,487,240	556,740	535,158	1,819,020
1984-85	889,775	1,061,119	1,583,722	591,050	583,903	1,938,659
1985-86	1,144,871	1,627,406	1,791,430	782,836	656,000	2,086,802
1986-87	1,715,344	1,809,737	8,427,313	904,490	1,096,830	3,543,845
1987-88	1,774,026	1,873,783	8,127,248	962,235	1,094,270	3,556,920

	North West £	South East £	Southern £	South West £	West Midlands £	Yorkshire £	Total £
1977-78	337,281	190,675	305,935	360,229	416,634	255,974	3,916,444
1978-79	490,069	249,285	445,031	485,561	553,019	343,292	5,202,381
1979-80	578,474	318,807	525,050	535,794	696,735	444,425	6,362,017
1980-81	662,483	367,495	618,638	637,082	803,105	520,779	7,686,197
1981-82	751,055	431,274	708,620	702,175	896,095	586,900	8,888,509
1982-83	864,849	540,353	850,418	876,133	1,034,811	717,002	10,616,783
1983-84	932,393	581,659	884,447	883,678	1,100,434	737,914	11,174,148
1984-85	1,031,953	628,991	995,088	970,894	1,221,727	841,602	12,338,483
1985-86	1,493,749	1,085,773	1,172,470	1,225,052	1,558,134	1,338,899	15,963,422
1986-87	1,982,320	1,231,962	1,298,559	1,555,765	2,291,310	2,084,900	27,942,375
1987-88	1,996,480	1,303,970	1,369,191	1,685,317	2,315,020	2,117,070	28,175,530

I understand that the Arts Council will be notifying individual regional arts associations about their 1988-89 grants in the course of this week. I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as I am able to pass on these figures, and will place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

Items in Lieu of Tax

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether, pursuant to his written answer on 2 February, *Official Report*, columns *535-536*, to the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), in connection with the change in the cash limits for the Office of Arts and Libraries, the figure of £7,329,000 on class XIII, vote 10, represents an actual payment of cash to the Inland Revenue in respect of acceptance of works of arts in lieu of tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* Subject to parliamentary approval, supplementary provision is being made so that the sum of £7,329,000 may be paid in due course to the Inland Revenue, in respect of three works of art accepted in lieu of tax in 1987-88. Two have already been accepted: Constable's "Stratford Mill" (tax satisfied £5·5 million), and Picasso's "Weeping Woman" (tax satisfied £1·2 million). The offer of a third item (which would be similarly funded) is in the final stages of agreement. Further details will be made available when the acceptance has been completed.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Student Grants

4. **Mr. Bidwell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to publish the report on the review of student financial support; and if he will make a statement.

35. **Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he now anticipates publishing his proposals for student finance.

43. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects the Review Body on Student Grants to complete its report.

Mr. Jackson: The Government hope to publish proposals for consideration by the middle of this year.

Science Budget

5. **Mr. Lamble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science for what reasons the Government are planning for a reduction of the science budget of 2 per cent. in real terms in 1990-91 relative to 1988-89, according to table 12.14 of "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1988-89—1990-91" (Cm. 288-II).

Mr. Jackson: The figures for 1988-89 and 1989-90 include special additions for AIDS research and research in the Antarctic which are not carried forward into 1990-91. Expenditure in 1990-91 in these and other areas of the science budget will be reviewed in this and next year's public expenditure surveys.

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what estimate he can make of the total size of his science budget relative to the increase of industry's funding of its own research and development needed to bring such industrial research and development up to the lowest level as a proportion of gross domestic product in Germany, Japan and the United States of America.

Mr. Jackson: The latest year for which we have a complete set of relevant statistics is 1985. The figures for industry's own funding of R and D as a percentage of GDP are as follows:

Country	*Percentage*
United Kingdom	1·0
Federal Republic of Germany	1·6
Japan	1·8
United States of America	1·3

If the science budget in 1985-86 were increased by 60 per cent., 80 per cent. and 30 per cent., the figures would be respectively £920 million, £1,035 million and £745 million. However, United Kingdom Government funding of civil R and D as a percentage of GDP, although lower than in the Federal Republic of Germany, was higher in 1985 than that in Japan and the United States of America:

Country	*Percentage*
United Kingdom	0·63
Federal Republic of Germany	1·0
Japan	0·57
United States of America	0·4

Source: OECD.

Special Schooling

15. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he is prepared to make extra funds available for special schooling.

Mr. Dunn: The Government's plans, announced last November, for local authority spending on education for 1988-89 represents a cash increase of 7·9 per cent. over the 1987-88 plans. The plans for special education in 1988-89 are 8·3 per cent. higher than the 1987-88 plans. The increase should help local education authorities to pursue their policy priorities for special education.

Education Reform

16. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received about the assessing and testing proposals within the new school curriculum.

Mrs. Rumbold: A few representations have been received since the publication of the report of the task group on assessment and testing on 12 January. Some 14,000 individuals and organisations have written in response to the Government's consultation document on the national curriculum, published last July. Many of these have expressed a variety of views about the place of assessment and testing.

26. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received regarding the percentage of time proposed for foundation subjects in the Education Reform Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Education Reform Bill makes no provision for the percentage of time to be spent on foundation subjects.

44. **Mr. Hannam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received asking him to take steps in the Education Reform Bill to provide improved education for handicapped children.

73. **Mr. Ashley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received regarding the effect of the proposals in the Education Reform Bill on the education of disabled children; and what was the nature of his response.

Mr. Dunn: The statistical breakdown is available only in respect of responses to the national curriculum consultation document. Of the 13,800 responses, approximately 12,000 were from individuals and 1,800 from organisations. Some representations concerning children with special educational needs were made by 836 individuals and 213 organisations. My right hon. Friend is drawing the attention of the task group on assessment and testing and of the subject working groups to the implications of those representations which concerned the national curriculum. The Government believe that the proposals in the Education Reform Bill hold every prospect of improved educational provision for children with special educational needs.

47. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the effect of allowing boroughs in district councils to opt out of county local education authorities.

Mrs. Rumbold: The outer London boroughs have had responsibility for education for over 20 years, and under the proposals announced by my right hon. Friend on 4 February, at columns 1178-79, the inner London boroughs will assume similar responsibilities on 1 April 1990. The Government have no further plans to reorganise the arrangements for the administration of education.

52. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many inquiries or comments he has received from school governing bodies in the county of Devon relating to individual schools opting out of the local education authority system.

Mr. Dunn: All individual schools which have approached the Department about this proposal have done so on the basis that their interest will be treated in confidence.

61. **Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he intends to take, should the Education Reform Bill become law, to enforce the compulsory nature of the national test for seven-year-olds.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Education Reform Bill places duties on local education authorities, governing bodies and head teachers to secure implementation of the national curriculum, including assessment and testing arrangements. It also provides for regulations requiring information to be made available which will enable parents and the public to check on implementation; and for procedures to deal with complaints that statutory requirements are not being implemented. If necessary, the Secretary of State could use the powers under sections 68 or 99 of the 1944 Act to issue a direction in order to secure compliance.

69. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has had any representations from teachers or parents groups in Leicestershire about the Education Reform Bill.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department has received about 60 representations from teachers' and parents' groups in Leicestershire in addition to many from individual teachers and parents.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his latest estimate of the number of schools likely to opt out if the Education Reform Bill becomes law; what will be the earliest date for them to do so; and if he will make a statement.

67. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his latest estimate of the number of schools that would opt out under the terms of the Education Reform Bill.

Mr. Dunn: Schools will be able to initiate the procedures leading to an application for grant-maintained status as soon as the Education Reform Bill has received Royal Assent. I expect the first few grant-maintained schools to come into being in September 1989, and anticipate a steady increase in their numbers thereafter.

32. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how the proposals contained in the Education Reform Bill will help integrate pupils with special educational needs into the educational system.

Mr. Dunn: The changes proposed in the Bill will provide improved educational opportunities for all children and do not affect the integration principles established under the Education Act 1981. Pupils with special educational needs in ordinary schools will benefit from the new opportunities, whether the schools remain within LEA control or become grant-maintained.

First Division Association

19. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to meet representatives of the First Division Association branch in his Department.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong).

Religious Instruction

20. **Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussions he has had with Church leaders and representatives of the teaching profession about improving the teaching of religious instruction.

Mrs. Rumbold: Since publication of the Government's proposals for a national curriculum my right hon. Friend and I have had meetings with representatives of the Church of England Board of Education, the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference, the Religious Education Council, and with the Bishop of Newcastle. Discussion at all these meetings covered religious instruction in schools.

Children (Assessment Tests)

21. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether it is the Government's intention to publish the results of tests for children aged seven years; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon).

City Technology Colleges

22. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a further statement on the progress in the growth in the number of city technology colleges.

Mrs. Rumbold: Sponsorship for five city technology colleges has now been announced. The Kingshurst CTC is to open in September and the Nottingham CTC in 1989. We are making good progress in discussions with a number of prospective sponsors and expect further announcements to be made soon.

25. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will report on the progress to date on the setting up of a city technology college in Wolverhampton.

Mrs. Rumbold: There has been some interest in the establishment of a city technology college in Wolverhampton but as yet we have received no firm proposals. If there is support in industry and in the local community for doing so, we would be pleased to consider any proposals which are put forward.

Inner London Education Authority

18. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many representations he has received opposing the abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Mrs. Rumbold: Since my right hon. Friend announced on 4 February the Government's decision to amend the provisions currently in the Education Reform Bill, we have received rather fewer than 200 letters expressing support for the retention of ILEA.

23. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received about the future of the Inner London education authority; and if he will make a statement.

129. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received regarding the future of the Inner London education authority.

Mrs. Rumbold: Since the introduction of the Education Reform Bill on 20 November, we have received some 1,200 letters concerning education in inner London.

34. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to announce his policy on the future of the Inner London education authority.

75. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to announce his decision about the future of the Inner London education authority.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Members to my right hon. Friend's statement on 4 February at columns 1178-79.

72. **Mrs. Rosie Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures he will undertake to ensure that inner London boroughs provide a proper and adequate education service if the inner London education authority is abolished.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government propose that in 1989 each inner London council should be required to publish a development plan, setting out the way in which it proposes to organise the transfer of education responsibility and the service it would propose to run when it becomes an LEA, subject to the full range of duties under the Education Acts. The Department will consider with the councils concerned whether formal or informal co-operative arrangements are necessary in respect of particular aspects of provision.

General Certificate of Secondary Education

24. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he is satisfied with the progress of the implementation of the GCSE.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend is satisfied that teachers and others in the education service will secure the successful implementation of the GCSE. It will take time to reap the full benefits of the new examinations. Careful monitoring is taking place by HMI and reports of significant improvements in teaching and learning have been given.

28. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received about the GCSE.

54. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on the content of the new GCSE since September 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has received a range of representations from parents, teachers and others about the GCSE. Many have welcomed the new examination and the content of courses associated with it. My right hon. Friend is concerned to ensure that any concerns expressed in representations about the content of GCSE syllabuses are brought to the attention of the GCSE examining groups and the Secondary Examinations Council, which are responsible for keeping the GCSE national criteria and syllabuses under review.

Scottish Universities

27. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to meet the University Grants Committee to discuss the future of the Scottish universities; and if he will make a statement.

41. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to meet the University Grants Committee to discuss the future of Scottish universities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave on 19 January, at column 625, to the hon. Members for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) and Kirkaldy (Dr. Moonie).

33. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science to what extent he has considered the impact of his new funding proposals on the Scottish universities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Our policies for the universities, including the relevant provisions in the Education Reform Bill, apply to universities in Scotland is exactly the same way as to those in England and Wales.

42. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he is satisfied that admission procedures to Scottish universities do not discriminate against *(a)* pupils from state schools and *(b)* disabled applicants.

Mr. Jackson: Universities are autonomous institutions. Matters relating to the admission of students are, within the law, entirely for them.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to reverse the declining number of Scots-domiciled undergraduates entering Scottish universities.

Mr. Jackson: Universities are autonomous institutions. Matters relating to the admission of students are, within the law, entirely for them.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in the *Official Report* the numbers and countries of origin of undergraduates, other than Scots-domiciled undergraduates, who entered Scottish universities in each of the past five years.

Mr. Jackson: The maximum disaggregation of student domicile in Scottish universities from the available information is as follows:

Academic year	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Scotland	8,245	7,969	8,102	7,682	7,864
England and Wales	1,924	1,946	2,051	2,261	2,272
Northern Ireland	232	269	242	320	318
Overseas	998	1,299	1,341	1,802	1,857
Total	11,399	11,483	11,736	12,065	12,311

University of Aberdeen

29. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will pay an official visit to the University of Aberdeen.

Mr. Jackson: I shall be visiting Aberdeen university on 27 April.

School Sports Facilities

30. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will encourage more dual use to be made of the sports facilities in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: With my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for sport, we are seeking to develop guidance which will further encourage the adoption of dual use schemes. Such guidance would build on the many initiatives which our Departments, the Sports Council and others have developed in recent years.

Further Education

31. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will take steps to ensure that further education students are informed about the true cost of the education they receive.

Mr. Jackson: The provisions on further education in the Education Reform Bill will require college budgets to be related to the number of students at each college. They will also require the publication of LEA funding and delegation schemes, and empower my right hon. Friend to require the publication of information about the operation of those schemes. This will promote awareness of funding methods and costs.

60. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to ensure a continued provision for students with special educational needs in colleges of further education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: It is for the local education authorities to decide what provision to make for special educational needs in colleges of further education.

Clause 81 of the Education Reform Bill puts beyond doubt their duty to provide full-time education either in school or in FE for all who seek it up to the age of 19, including those with special educational needs. Provision for the adult population is a matter for the discretion of individual local education authorities.

Teachers (Pay and Conditions)

36. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to meet representatives of the teachers unions to discuss future arrangements for the determination of pay and conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Responses to the Green Paper entitled "Teachers' Pay and Conditions" are still being received in the Department. No meetings to discuss future arrangements with the teacher unions have yet been fixed.

45. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received concerning the resources available to meet the next teachers pay settlement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The rate support grant settlement for 1988-89 allows fully for the cost of a teachers' pay settlement consistent with the remit which my right hon. Friend has given to the Interim Advisory Committee on school teachers' pay and conditions.

Nursery Education

37. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to increase the level of pre-school provision for children with special educational needs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: It is for each LEA to determine its own policy in respect of pre-school provision. Each LEA makes its own decisions on pre-school provision for children with special educational needs in the light of any consultations leading up to statements of special educational need, and of the appropriateness of any pre-school provision available to them.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will list for Northumberland education authority the proportion of the total number of under fives in pre-school education represented by *(a)* three-year-olds and *(b)* four-year-olds; and how many vacancies there are.

Mr. Dunn: The proportions of the total number of pupils under five attending maintained nursery and primary schools in Northumberland in January 1987 who were aged three and four were 34 per cent. and 59 per cent. respectively.

Information on the number of vacant nursery or primary places is not collected centrally.

School Governors

38. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to give parents the right to elect parent governors to temporary school governing bodies.

Mr. Dunn: Schedule 2 to the Education (No 2) Act 1986 provides that the temporary parent governors for a new school will normally be appointed by the LEA, or in the case of an aided school by the promoters, from among parents of children likely to attend the school. The Government have no plans to change this. Once the school is established, parent governors will normally be elected under the new instrument of government.

Economic and Social Research Council

39. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to announce the new location of the Economic and Social Research Council; why no site in Humberside is among those being considered; and what plans he has for the further relocation out of London of other research bodies.

Mr. Jackson: It is for each research council to decide on the location of its headquarters. I understand that the Economic and Social Research Council is expected to make an anouncement about its intentions in the near future. Humberside would not have met the criteria set by the council. The Agricultural and Food Research Council announced on 10 February that it would move to Swindon on the expiry of the lease on its present premises.

Universities Funding Council

40. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the directions he gives to the new Universities Funding Council will take account of the differences between the Scottish university system and the system in England and Wales, with particular reference to the length of courses and levels of funding.

Mr. Robert Jackson: The University Grants Committee makes no distinction between universities in Scotland and elsewhere in the application of its standard criteria for funding which, in particular, take account of different course lengths. The Universities Funding Council will doubtless want to maintain this general approach.

School Buildings

46. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the state of school buildings in Northumberland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Information is not collected about individual schools, but my right hon. Friend is informed by his recent visit to Northumberland, by his officials and by HMI about the general situation in the county.

Children (Special Education Needs)

48. **Mr. Ames:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the assessment of children with special learning difficulties.

Mr. Dunn: Under the Education Act 1981 local education authorities are required to assess the needs of children in their areas who have learning difficulties and to ensure that suitable educational provision is made for them.

74. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to increase the staffing ratios for the teaching of children with special educational needs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Current guidance on the staffing of special schools and classes is set out in DES circular 4/73. The Government hope to consult on the draft of a revised circular during the year.

University Education (Wales)

49. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the future of university education in Wales.

Mr. Jackson: Government policy towards the universities, set out in "Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge" (Cm. 114) and elsewhere, applies to Great Britain as a whole, and makes no distinctive provision as regards Wales.

Pupil-Teacher Ratios

50. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on current pupil to teacher ratios.

Mr. Dunn: The overall pupil to teacher ratio in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in England has fallen markedly in recent years, from 18·1:1 in 1983 to 17·3:1 in 1987. "The Government's Expenditure Plans" (Cm. 288) allow for some further reduction in the overall pupil to teacher ratio to 17·0:1 by 1989.

Universities (Independence)

51. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has for safeguarding the independence of universities.

Mr. Jackson: The Government have no wish to see universities' proper freedoms eroded. Universities' substantial reliance on public funds means that the interests of the taxpayer have to be taken into account alongside desirable institutional autonomy. The right balance is being explored in debate during the Education Reform Bill's parliamentary passage.

Academic Freedom

53. **Mr. Ashdown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on the subject of academic freedom.

64. **Mr. Wm Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on securing academic freedom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: We have received about 40 letters on the subject of academic freedom.

The Government believe wholeheartedly that academic freedom is fundamental to a healthy system of higher education. I refer the hon. Members to the detailed statements I made in reply to my hon. Friend the Member

for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) on November 1987 at columns *676-78* and the hon. Member from Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) on 13 January 1988 at columns *268-69*.

Universities (Research Funds)

55. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of Research Council funds goes to those universities which fall in the *(a)* top, *(b)* middle and *(c)* bottom third of research grant funds per student.

Mr. Jackson: The proportions are as follows:

(a) 68 per cent.
(b) 24 per cent.
(c) 8 per cent.

Sex Education

56. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any further plans to encourage responsible sex education in secondary schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department issued a circular to all maintained schools in England in September 1987 giving guidance on sex education at school. The circular made clear that sex education should be given in a factual and balanced manner and in accordance with section 46 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986. There are no plans at present for any further guidance to be issued.

Pre-school Playgroups

57. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will bring forward proposals to permit local education authorities to encourage parents to provide pre-school playgroup activities for children on school premises.

Mr. Dunn: No. My right hon. Friend is satisfied that there is no significant obstacle to local education authorities offering such encouragement.

Teachers Unions

58. **Mr. Evennett:** to ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met respresentatives of the teachers unions; and what was discussed.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has had meetings since the last election with representatives of the National Association of Head Teachers, Secondary Heads Association of The National Union of Teachers, the National Association of Schoolmasters the Secondary Heads Association, the National Union of Teachers the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers, the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association and the Professional Association of Teachers. In each meeting matters of current concerns to the teacher association were discussed.

English Subject Working Group

59. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to set up the subject working group on English; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend intends to establish the national curriculum working group on English after Easter, following and building on the report, due next month, of the committee chaired by Sir John Kingman on the knowledge needed by teachers and pupils about the workings of the English language.

16-year-olds (Further Education)

62. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans the Government have to increase the staying on rate at the age of 16 years; and if he will make a statement.

71. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans the Government have to increase the staying on rates at the age of 16 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: As stated in the 1988 public expenditure White Paper the Government wish to encourage greater participation in post 16 education and training. My right hon. Friend aims to raise the level of attainment of young people and to encourage a more positive attitude to continuing education and training. He considers that the examination reforms and new forms of provisions already introduced, together with the curriculum and other school reforms proposed in the Education Reform Bill will help to achieve this objective.

University Funding

63. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on his policy on university funding and control.

Mr. Jackson: We have received many representations about university funding and the university provisions in the Education Reform Bill.

Research and Development

65. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has from the Advisory Board for the Research Councils on Government expenditure on civil academic and academically related research and development as a percentage of gross domestic product in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* France and *(c)* Germany.

Mr. Jackson: A study commissioned by the Advisory Board for the Research Councils (published in 1986) found that in 1982 Government spending on academic and academically related research amounted to:

	Percentage of GDP
United Kingdom	0·38
France	0·44
West Germany	0·49

The ABRC is currently supporting a further study to update this information.

Teaching Standards

66. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to ensure that standards of teaching are adequately assessed.

Mrs. Rumbold: The pilot work on teacher appraisal, which is expected to be completed in summer 1989, is being

undertaken in six local education authorities under the direction of the national steering group. The intended outcome of the pilot work is a proven set of guidelines which will form the basis of an agreed national framework consistent with the June 1986 ACAS working group report. The implementation of that framework should lead to a system which will both enhance career development for teachers and raise standards of teaching in our schools.

School Discipline

68. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set up an inquiry to examine standards of discipline in schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) on 29 January at column *399*.

Schools (Examination Results)

70. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether for the purposes of producing legislation he takes into account the O and A-level results obtained by individual schools in assessing the value of such schools.

Mr. Dunn: O and A-level examination results are one of the factors taken into consideration by my right hon. Friend in reaching decisions on proposals under sections 12 and 13 of the Education Act 1980.

School Uniforms

76. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will seek powers to enable him to obstruct the plans of some local education authorities which, despite the Education Act 1986, seek to prevent the wearing of school uniforms in schools which have freely opted so to do.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has no plans to seek such powers. His own views, as expressed in circular 7/87 from his Department, is that the wearing of school uniform contributes significantly to the ethos of the school and the decision should normally rest with the governing body.

School Meals

77. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has about the average daily charge by local educational authorities for a school meal and how many authorities charge more than the average.

Mr. Dunn: The information requested is included in the October 1986 school meals census, copies of which are available in the Library. The average fixed charge for primary schools was 61p. This sum was exceeded by 50 LEAs. It is not possible to provide equivalent data in respect of secondary schools as many authorities operate cash cafeterias.

"Strategy for Science"

78. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received following the publication of the Advisory Body on Research Councils, report "Strategy for Science"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend has received 250 representations about the Advisory Board for the Research Council's discussion document "A Strategy for the Science Base". He will be making a statement later this year on the Government's conclusions on policy for the science base, taking account of the ABRC's recommendations and the comments of the higher education and scientific communities.

Schools (Ministerial Visits)

79. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools he has visited in the current year.

Mr. Dunn: One to date.

Day Release Courses

80. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consultations he has had with organisations representing employees in inner London concerning the pattern of day release courses in colleges of further education.

Mr. Jackson: None.

EC (Community Action Programme)

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give details of the extent of United Kingdom involvement in the programme established by the EEC on community action to promote the educational integration of disabled children and young people.

Mr. Dunn: Within the first four-year programme United Kingdom representatives have participated in study visits to schools and to education departments of local and central Government in many member states to develop knowledge and share expertise about the education of handicapped pupils. Participation continues in the field of computing and new technology involving data banks and communication aids for the disabled. There is official and HMI representation at the EC working group meetings which oversee this programme.

Pupil Costs

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent per pupil in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in *(i)* England and Wales and (ii) Cheshire in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what were the comparable figures in 1978-79, at constant prices.

Mr. Dunn: The available information is as follows:

Net institutional recurrent expenditure[1] per pupil
£ 1985-86 prices

	Primary schools	*Secondary schools*
England[2]		
1978-79[3]	690	1,000
1985-86	815	1,175
Cheshire		
1978-79[3]	670	985
1985-86	760	1,100

[1] Net institutional recurrent expenditure covers the cost of salaries and wages, premises and certain supplies and services. It does not

include the cost of school meals, central administration and inspection, debt charges or revenue contributions to capital outlay.

[2] Information for Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

[3] The cash prices for 1978-79 have been repriced to 1985-86 prices using the gross domestic product (market prices) deflator.

Pupil Statistics

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the numbers of children in Northumberland education authority of compulsory school age entering the maintained sector from the private sector of education, over the most recent period for which figures are available.

Mr. Dunn: These figures are not available.

Rating Reform

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what account was taken in fixing the individual student grant award for 1988-89 of the inability of students in Scotland to pay the community charge in 1989-90.

Mr. Jackson: All prospective changes in students' financial circumstances are considered in determining the level of the student grant. In the Government's view, liability for the community charge at the discounted rate of 20 per cent. in the second half of academic year 1988-89 does not justify a higher rate of grant for students studying in Scotland. Rates of grant applicable in England, Wales and Scotland in academic year 1989-90 will be considered in due course.

Housing Benefit (Students)

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what account was taken in fixing the individual student grant award for 1988-89 of the loss of students' entitlement to housing benefit from 1 April.

Mr. Jackson: Students in circumstances which now entitle them to claim housing benefit will not lose that entitlement from 1 April. The reformed system of housing benefit, which will apply to all categories of claimant, was one of the many factors taken into account in the Government's decision to raise grant rates by 4 per cent. in September of this year.

Student Financial Support

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to publish his proposals on student fiancial support; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The work of the student support review is expected to be completed by the middle of this year.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Waste Disposal

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the effects of waste disposal in all of its forms upon marine life off the coast of Durham.

Mr. Gummer: My Department assesses the effects on marine life of disposals of waste which it licenses. The only significant effect of such disposals off the Durham coast relates to beach tipping of solid colliery waste where there is an identifiable alteration to the nature of the seabed and consequential change in the associated benthos. The area where this occurs is restricted to the foreshore and the offshore area immediately adjacent to the beach. This tipping predates statutory controls over dumping at sea by many years, but care is taken to ensure that the area affected is not extended.

Control of discharges of waste by pipeline is a matter for the Northumbrian water authority under the provisions of the Control of Pollution Act 1974.

EC (Surplus Food)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received relating to the allocation of surplus European Community food.

Mr. Gummer: I have received a number of expressions of view on the arrangements announced by my right hon. Friend on 12 January, to which I am replying.

Alternative Land Use

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many hectares have been bought under the woodland scheme in the ALURE package *(a)* in the county of Durham and *(b)* in Easington district.

Mr. Gummer: None. The farm woodland scheme will not come into operation until later this year following the passage of the necessary legislation.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the objectives of the set-aside scheme; and if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on the scheme.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* The principal aim of the Community set-aside scheme is to reduce surplus production of crops and so reduce budget costs. The Government have pressed for set-aside to be adopted as a complement to stabilisers, not a substitute for them. We also envisage that the scheme can fulfil desirable objectives for the environment. Under the agreement reported to the House yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, the scheme can now go ahead on a basis that meets these objectives. I and my agriculture colleagues will proceed as quickly as possible to settle details of the arrangements to be applied in the United Kingdom, taking full account of the many responses we have received to our consultation document.

Cereals

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how the annual cost of the cereals regime, as shown in the annual review, breaks down into the costs of *(a)* intervention purchases, *(b)* transport, *(c)* storage, *(d)* subsidy on disposal, *(e)* administration and *(f)* other costs for each of the years from 1984-85 to 1987-88.

Mr. Donald Thompson: A breakdown of expenditure by the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce on the cereals regime is set out in the table. Administration costs are not included in these figures and are not separately available.

£ million

	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	[1]1987-88
Intervention purchases	242·0	543·1	121·6	4·8
Incidental costs[2]	30·4	81·4	79·3	54·4
Other expenditure[3]	95·5	29·5	−86·4	131·9
	367·9	654·0	114·5	191·1
Receipts from EAGGF for loss on sales	5·9	33·5	275·5	105·5

[1] Forecast.
[2] Includes storage, transport, intake and discharge costs which are not separately available.
[3] Includes export refunds and positive monetary compensatory amounts offset by proceeds of sales out of intervention, co-responsibility levy and negative monetary compensatory amounts.

European Community

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North, of 20 July 1987, *Official Report*, column 62, if he will update the details of the total value of agricultural production *(a)* for the European Economic Community and *(b)* for each European Economic Community country, to the latest date for which information is now available.

Mr. MacGregor: The latest information is shown in the table.

Total final agricultural production: 1986 (provisional)

	[1]million ecu
Belgium	5,507
Denmark	6,545
Germany	27,581
Greece	7,052
France	42,941
Ireland	3,676
Italy	34,819
Luxembourg	172
Netherlands	14,133
United Kingdom	17,420
Total EC10	159,846
Spain	[2]—
Portugal	[3]—

Source: Eurostat.
[1] At 1986 prices and exchange rates.
[2] The latest figure available is 20,215 million ecu for 1985.
[3] The latest figure available is 2,188 million ecu for 1981.

Food Surpluses

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his latest estimate of the cost to *(a)* the European Economic Community and *(b)* the United Kingdom of storing and exporting food surpluses produced in the United Kingdom.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* All the costs of operations in the United Kingdom under the CAP are ultimately borne by the United Kingdom, either directly or via our contribution to the EC budget. In 1986-87 the costs of storing and exporting surplus commodities (beef, cereals, milk products, sugar) produced in the United Kingdom were:

	£ million
Storage	129
Stock financing (notional)	77
Stock depreciation	45
Loss on sale	444
Export refunds (net of MCAs)	185
Total	880

A total of £813 million was transferred from the EC budget to the United Kingdom in respect of these operations.

During this period £406 million was spent by the Intervention Board on buying stock into intervention and £270 million was received for sales out of intervention.

Monofilament Nets

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he plans to undertake research into bird deaths caused by the use of monofilament gill nets.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 11 February 1988]:* My Department has no plans at present to undertake specific investigations of the effects of monofilament nets on sea bird populations, but we are keeping the situation under review.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on the recent effects on auk species, including razorbills, of fishermen fishing inshore due to bad weather, using monofilament gill nets off St. Just, Cornwall.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 11 February 1988]:* I have received a number of reports about unusually high mortalities of auks associated with the use of gill nets in St. Ives bay, but not off St. Just. This appears to have resulted from a combination of factors, including the adverse weather.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce further limits, or codes of practice, on the use of monofilament gill nets so as to limit bird deaths in areas of seabird concentrations.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 11 February 1988]:* I have no such plans at present. The use of monofilament gill nets is regulated in a number of ways, including local sea fisheries committee byelaws. Where such nets are used as fixed engines they will be subject to new byelaws being prepared to regulate use of fixed engines in all local sea fisheries districts. In appropriate instances these byelaws will specify the minimum depth below the surface at which fixed gill nets may be set.

ENERGY

North-east Power Stations

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he intends to meet the chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board to discuss the refurbishment of north-east power stations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I meet the chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board regularly to discuss a range of issues. The refurbishment of power stations is a matter for the board.

Nuclear Waste

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) *Official Report*, 1 February, column *472*, he will place in the Library a copy of the contracts signed before 1976 between British Nuclear Fuels plc and Okg Aktiebolag for spent nuclear fuel and nuclear waste processing, with the specific financial arrangements covered by commercial confidentiality erased from the texts.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Details of contracts between BNF and its customers are a commercial matter for the parties concerned.

Italian Reactor

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) *Official Report*, 1 February, column *473*, if he has any information on why the Italian Latina Magnox reactor has been closed, and on whether this is a permanent closure.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The closure of the Latina Magnox reactor is a matter for the Italian authorities.

Nuclear Fuel

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) *Official Report*, 1 February, column *473*, on the reprocessing of electricity board nuclear fuel, he will list as proportions of the annual throughput of nuclear fuel from electricity board reactors in each year from 1980 to 1986, the throughput in the period 15 December 1986 to 15 December 1987.

Mr. Michael Spicer: For the period April 1980 to March 1986, spent fuel deriving from the United Kingdom electricity boards' Magnox reactors accounted for some 90 per cent. of the civil spent fuel reprocessed at Sellafield. For the period April 1986 to March 1987, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) on 16 December 1987 at column *516*.

Fuel Plants

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the number of *(a)* nuclear power plants, *(b)* nuclear fuel cycle facilities, *(c)* fossil fuel plants, *(d)* fossil fuel processing facilities and *(e)* renewable energy production and conversion sites he has visited since he became Secretary of State.

Mr. Parkinson: I have visited the nuclear facilities at Dounreay and Sellafield, the Leman and Morecambe bay gas fields, the gas processing facilities at Bacton, and the Orkney wind generator.

My hon. Friends the Minister of State and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State have visited Dungeness A and B power stations, the Capenhurst enrichment plant, the UKAEA at Harwell, Didcot coal-fired power station, British Alcan's coal-fired power station at Lynemouth, the Fort Dunlop CHP plant, the refuse driven plant at Byker, and the Islay wave power project.

Nuclear Power Plants (Safety Procedures)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, in the light of the near accident involving two aircraft in airspace over the Dungeness A and B nuclear reactors in Kent on 6 February, he will review the integrity and safety procedures at nuclear power plants against aircraft crashing on *(a)* the reactor buildings, and *(b)* the spent nuclear fuel cooling ponds.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I understand that the air traffic incident referred to took place about 20 miles from the Dungeness power stations. At that distance there was no danger to the power stations. The HSE's nuclear installations inspectorate has been reviewing the overflying restrictions as part of its consideration of external hazards at nuclear installations and will make proposals for further restrictions if necessary.

Plutonium

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how much plutonium, plutonium oxide or plutonium nitrate produced at the Sellafield reprocessing plant had been transported by air prior to December 1987; on what occasions; and whether to *(a)* overseas civil customers or *(b)* domestic civil customers.

Mr. Michael Spicer *[holding answer 1 February 1988]:* From May 1979 up to the end of December 1987, some 4·5 tonnes of plutonium oxide produced at Sellafield has been transported by air for civil purposes. Some 2·5 tonnes of this was despatched to Dounreay as mixed uranium-plutonium oxide for use in the fast reactor programme. The remainder was despatched overseas. Information relating to specific shipments is confidential for reasons of security and commercial sensitivity.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Voluntary Organisations (Grants)

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the grants made by the health and social services boards, the education and library boards, the probation board, the Arts Council, the Police Authority, the Tourist Board and district councils to voluntary organisations in each of the last two years, with the amount in each case and the name and address of the recipient organisations.

Mr. Stanley: Except as stated, the information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Police Authority does not pay grants to voluntary bodies. Those paid by the probation board are as follows:

Voluntary Body	Grant paid 1986-87	Grant paid 1985-86
Extern Organisation	204,814	247,349
Save the Children Fund, Northern Ireland	176,962	158,726
NI Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders	166,105	173,159
Presbyterian Church in Ireland	56,304	58,357
Dismas House Hostel	21,958	21,154
Ulster Quakers Service Committee	20,151	12,070
Suffolk Adventure Group	20,000	—
Lower Falls 'New Start'	20,000	—
Laganvalley Auto Project	20,000	—
Newtownabbey Auto Project	15,000	5,000
Belfast Rape Crisis Centre	11,440	11,000
Twinbrook Tenants/Community Association	10,400	2,270
NI Victim Support Scheme	5,778	—
Citizens Advice Bureau	3,780	1,500
Inter Agency	3,475	3,367
Prison Fellowship	3,000	—
Edward Street Hostel	3,000	3,000
Joe Lindsay Memorial Group	3,000	3,261
Westrock/Whiterock Community Group	3,000	—
Cookstown Hostel (MUST)	3,000	—
Simon Community	3,000	—
Dunmurry Christian Community	1,100	—
Irish German Exhange Trip	1,000	—
Clonard Parent/Youth Support Group	1,000	—
Oliver Plunkett Education and Leisure Services	—	2,500
Horn Drive Parent Youth Group	—	1,500
Belfast Voluntary Welfare Society	—	1,250
Farset City Farm	—	1,000
Total	777,267	706,463

Maghaberry Prison

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will make a statement on the reasons for the shortfall of prisoners in Maghaberry prison, in the light of general prison overcrowding;

(2) why Maghaberry prison will, by mid-February, after a build-up, have a shortfall of 332 prisoners.

Mr. Stanley: The overcrowding which occurs in many prisons in England and Wales is not a feature of Northern Ireland prisons. The current build-up of the prisoner population at Maghaberry began in November 1987 with the initial aim of having one of its four houses occupied with around 100 inmates by mid-February 1988. The build-up will continue, but because of the need to relocate staff and to give careful consideration to which prisoners should be transferred, full occupancy has to be phased in over a period.

Administration of Justice

Mr. McCusker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, he will list in precise terms the concerns about the present arrangements for the administration of justice in Northern Ireland which have been made known to him by the Government of the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Stanley: Joint statements issued after each meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference set out subjects discussed. As is customary with communications between Governments, it has not been our practice to make public further detail of the discussions.

Prisoners (Strip Searches)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many strip searches were made of female prisoners in Her Majesty's prison, Maghaberry in January 1988, giving the number of persons involved and number of times each person was searched and if any prison contraband, smuggled item or illegal correspondence was discovered in any search indicating which items; in how many cases prisoners refused to be searched and had to be restrained while the search was being conducted; and what were the reasons for the search under each of the following headings: making a remand appearance at court, attending trial, inter-prison visit or other reasons.

Mr. Stanley: The information requested is as follows:

Number of Searches	Number
Total number of searches carried out	33
Total number of inmates searched	25
Number of prisoners searched once	17
Number of prisoners searched twice	8
Number of prisoners searched three times or more	—
Reasons for Search	
First admission on remand/awaiting trial	11
First admission on sentence/final discharge	16
Attending Newry Remand Court	1
Going on or returning from home leave	2
Inter-prison visits	1
After a visit	2

No prohibited article was found during these searches and no prisoner refused to be searched.

Electricity Supplies

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information is available to indicate the number of households by district which have no electricity supply.

Mr. Viggers: The best currently available information is contained in table 18 of the 1984 Northern Ireland "House Condition Survey", a copy of which is available in the Library, which shows by region and district the number of dwellings without an electricity supply.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information is available to indicate how many households without electricity supply have made application for supply to Northern Ireland Electricity.

Mr. Viggers: None. In 1987 Northern Ireland Electricity received 18,111 applications regarding electricity supply, but its records do not show how many of these concerned existing households without supply.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information is available to indicate the charges to the consumer for providing an electricity supply in *(a)* rural and *(b)* urban areas in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: Northern Ireland Electricity does not differentiate between urban and rural areas in determining its domestic connection charges. The basic position is that anyone seeking an electricity supply is required to pay 60 per cent. of the actual cost of connection. The cost can be reduced if spread over a number of households which are being connected simultaneously. In the case of new housing developments consisting of a group of 12 or more houses convenient to an existing mains supply, a fixed charge of £150 per house applies.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information is available to indicate what proportion of houses without electricity supply in Northern Ireland, by district, are farm households.

Mr. Viggers: None.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information is available to indicate the levels of social security dependency in households which have no electricity supply.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information is available to indicate the numbers of existing households in rural areas which have been supplied with electricity for the first time in the last five years.

Mr. Viggers: None. During the five-year period ending 31 December 1987 there was a net increase of 43,488 in the total number of households connected to the electricity supply system in Northern Ireland. However, Northern Ireland Electricity's records do not differentiate between urban and rural areas or existing and new houses.

Building Contractors (Attacks)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many attacks have been carried out upon building contractors or those employed by them in the last three years; how many deaths and injuries have resulted; and what information he has as to the groups responsible for each attack.

Mr. Stanley: Information about injuries is not readily available. The list shows the number of building contractors and their staff whom we are aware have been killed by terrorists in the last three years, together with the background of the groups believed to have been responsible.

	Murdered by Republican terrorists	*Murdered by Loyalist terrorists*
1985	—	1
1986	5	1
1987	1	1
1988 (to date)	—	1

Irish Republican Army

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the sums obtained by the Irish Republican Army from extortion in the building industry in Northern Ireland in the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: Reliable estimates of sums obtained by extortion in the building industry by both Republican and Loyalist paramilitary organisations are not available. The problem of extortion in the building industry and elsewhere is, however, recognised to be serious and major efforts are being made to combat it.

Paramilitary Organisations (Fraud Convictions)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many convictions have been obtained in the last three years for which figures are available against members of paramilitary organisations who have defrauded the Inland Revenue; if he will give the figures divided between Republican and Protestant paramilitary groups; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: Since 1984, 114 convictions have been obtained against paramilitaries who had defrauded the Inland Revenue. All convictions were against those believed to belong to Republican groups. Convictions have been obtained against paramilitaries believed to belong to Loyalist groups for other types of racketeering offences.

Extortion

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the operation of the Northern Ireland Emergency Provisions Act 1987 as it applies to preventing the use of extortion rackets to fund paramilitary activities.

Mr. Stanley: Under part III of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1987 it became an offence, from 1 January 1988, to provide or to offer to provide security guard services for reward without a certificate issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. My right hon. Friend may refuse to issue such a certificate, or may revoke one which is already in force, if he is satisfied that a proscribed organisation or an organisation closely associated with a proscribed organisation would be likely to benefit from the issue of the certificate.

To date 50 certificates have been issued. Although no applicant has been refused a certificate, a number of firms have not applied for one. Our understanding is that these companies have ceased trading as a result of the legislation. We believe therefore that the provisions are having their desired effect of inhibiting the exploitation of security requirements by paramilitary organisations.

Fair Employment Agency

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for the past five years for which figures are available the bodies investigated by the Fair Employment Agency and the subsequent outcome.

Mr. Viggers *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* In the five year period to 31 January 1988 the Fair Employment Agency published reports of 16 investigations. Copies of the relevant findings are available in the Library. The agency has recently completed a further two investigations, reports of which have still to be published, and a further 36 investigations are currently under way. Sectors or organisations investigated by the agency are as follows:

Sector-body investigated and outcome

1. *Employment patterns in the Belfast areas with particular reference to engineering — Report published September 1983.
2. *Employment patterns in the Londonderry area — Report published September 1983.
3. Belfast Telegraph Newspapers Ltd. — Report published September 1983.
4. The British Broadcasting Corporation in Northern Ireland—Report published November 1983.
5. The non-industrial Northern Ireland Civil Service — Report published December 1983.
6. The Fire Authority for Northern Ireland — Report published June 1984.
7. The Unipork Organisation — Report published February 1985.

8. Northern Ireland Housing Executive — Report published October 1985.
9. The ambulance services of the Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland. — Report published November 1985.
10. The Ulster museum.—Report published March 1986.
11. Nine building societies (Halifax, Woolwich, Abbey National, Gateway, Nationwide, Leicester, Leeds Permanent, Anglia and Progressive).—Report published March 1986.
12. The Southern Health and Social Services board. — Report published March 1986.
13. The principal banks in Northern Ireland (TSB, Northern Bank, Allied Irish Bank, Ulster Bank and Bank of Ireland).—Report published March 1986.
14. Eight insurance companies (Britannic, Pearl, Prudential, Refuge, United Friendly, Commercial Union, General Accident and Royal). — Report published November 1986.
15. Derby city council.—Report published September 1987.
16. Hyster (NI) Limited. — Report published November 1987.
17. Newry and Mourne district council. — Investigation completed. Report not yet published.
18. Northern Ireland Railways — Investigation completed. Report not yet published.
19. Moy Meats.—Investigation underway.
20. Ulster Bus/City Bus.—Investigation underway.
21. Queen's University of Belfast.—Investigation underway.
22. University of Belfast.—Investigation underway.
23. Western Health and Social Services Board — Investigation underway.
24. North Eastern Education and Library Board — Investigation underway.
25. Coleraine Borough Council—Investigation underway.
26. Dungannon District Council—Investigation underway.
27. Craigavon Borough Council—Investigation underway.
28. Limavady District Council—Investigation underway.
29. Ballymena Borough Council—Investigation underway.
30. Antrim Borough Council—Investigation underway.
31. Ballymoney Borough Council—Investigation underway.
32. Carrickfergus Borough Council — Investigation underway.
33. Banbridge District Council—Investigation underway.
34. Lisburn Borough Council—Investigation underway.
35. Magherafelt District Council—Investigation underway.
36. Ards Borough Council—Investigation underway.
37. Isaac Agnew—Investigation underway.
38. Irish Road Motors—Investigation underway.
39. Philips Motors—Investigation underway.
40. Prentice—Investigation underway.
41. Bairds Limited—Investigation underway.
42. J. E. Coulter Limited—Investigation underway.
43. Dencourt Motors—Investigation underway.
44. Desmond Motors—Investigation underway.
45. Lindsay Cars—Investigation underway.
46. James Eakin & Sons Limited—Investigation underway.
47. Dornan Service Station—Investigation underway.
48. Cars Limited—Investigation underway.
49. R. Kennedy and Company—Investigation underway.
50. Neville Johnston—Investigation underway.
51. Sidney Pentland—Investigation underway.
52. Charles Hurst—Investigation underway.
53. Blue Circle Industries Plc.—Investigation underway.
54. Dunmanbridge Creamery—Investigation underway.

* Employers investigated not named.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 17 February 1988

WALES

Job Creation

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of jobs he estimates will be made available in the next four years *(a)* in Clwyd and *(b)* in Wales, as a result of the new system of grants; and what was the number of jobs projected under the regional development grant system.

Mr. Peter Walker: Under the regional development grant scheme, 22,500 jobs in Wales and 7,700 jobs in Clwyd are expected to be created as a result of projects already approved for grant. The number of jobs created under the new grants schemes will depend on the response from industry and on the number and size of individual projects for which assistance is sought. I am confident that the new schemes will have a very beneficial effect on employment in Wales as a result of the substantial increase in regional industrial expenditure planned over the next three years.

County Structure Plans

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the status of county structure plans; and what regard is given to them in deciding planning applications not in conformity with the structure plan.

Mr. Grist: In any area the structure plan forms part of the statutory development plan. A decision on an application for planning permission must have regard to the provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations. The latest central Government advice on these matters is set out in paragraphs 11 to 15 of planning policy guidance note No. 1 (PPG 1), dated January 1988, which was issued with Welsh Office circular No. 1/88, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Pharmacies

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will supply figures for the number of pharmacies in each family practitioner committee area in Wales for each year since 1978 to the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Grist: The number of pharmaceutical chemists in family practitioner committee areas in Wales at 31 December of each year is given in the table:

Family Practitioner Committee Area	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Clwyd	89	89	89	89	88	87	83	83	85
Dyfed	95	96	94	93	90	90	90	92	96
Gwent	92	94	93	93	91	90	90	90	90
Gwynedd	64	64	63	62	61	60	59	59	61
Mid Glamorgan	115	117	116	115	116	120	124	126	134
Powys	25	24	24	22	23	23	23	23	23
South Glamorgan	101	99	99	97	100	96	96	98	102
West Glamorgan	99	100	101	99	100	100	100	105	105
Wales	680	683	679	670	669	666	665	676	696

Appointments

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the appointments he has made to organisations in Wales since June 1987.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 16 January 1988]:* In the period from 13 June 1987 to 31 December 1987, I have made the following appointments to public bodies in Wales:

	Chairman	*Deputy Chairman*	*Members*
Agricultural Advisory Panel for Wales	—	—	4
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	—	1	—
Committee on Agricultural Valuation for Wales	—	—	1
Committee for the Welsh Scheme for the Development of Health and Social Research	—	—	1
Court of University College, Bangor	—	—	1
Court of University College, Swansea	—	—	1
Community Health Council—Clwyd South	—	—	1
—Clwyd North	—	—	1
—South Gwent	—	—	1
—Ogwr	—	—	1
—Vale of Glamorgan	—	—	1
Cwmbran Development Corporation	—	—	1
District Health Authority—Mid Glamorgan	—	—	1
—Powys	—	—	2
—West Glamorgan	—	—	1
Family Practitioner Committee—Gwent	—	—	2
—Gwynedd	—	—	2

	Chairman	Deputy Chairman	Members
—Mid Glamorgan	—	—	1
—Powys	—	—	2
—West Glamorgan	—	—	1
Health Policy Board	—	—	1
Historic Buildings Council	—	—	2
Land Authority for Wales	—	1	5
Library and Information Services Council (Wales)	—	—	4
South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee	—	—	1
Wales Tourist Board	1	—	1
Welsh Committee on Drug Misuse	—	—	1
Welsh Development Agency	—	—	2
Welsh Health Common Services Authority	—	—	4
Welsh Industrial Development Advisory Board	—	—	1
Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting	—	—	1
Welsh Water Authority	—	—	4
	1	2	53

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many of the people he has appointed to public bodies since his appointment are normally resident outside Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* Of the 56 people I have appointed in the period from 13 June 1987 to 31 December 1987, 52 are normally resident within Wales. Of the remaining four, two are reappointments, one is Welsh by origin, and the other is a specialist in his field.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will make a statement on the criteria and conditions required by state and public schools for acceptance on the assisted places scheme;

(2) if he will list those schools, both state and public, that have applied to join the assisted places scheme in the last 12 months; and when he expects to announce his decision as to whether or not they have been accepted.

Mr. Dunn: The assisted places scheme exists to give help with tuition fees at certain independent secondary schools to the parents of able children who might not otherwise attend these schools. The principal criteria for admission to the scheme cover overall and sixth form size, curricular breadth, examination success and general academic merit. In addition, the Secretary of State has regard to the desirability of securing an equitable distribution of assisted places both geographically and between boys and girls.

A total of 128 schools have within the last 12 months submitted formal applications to join the scheme. These are listed in the table. Careful consideration is now being given to these applications and my right hon. Friend will announce the outcome in due course.

Independent Schools which have submitted formal applications to join the Assisted Places Scheme

Abbotsholme School, Uttoxeter
Ackworth School, Pontefract
Ardingly College, Haywards Heath
Ashville College, Harrogate
Austin Friars, Carlisle
Barnard Castle School, Co. Durham
Bedstone College, Bucknell
Bentham School, Nr. Lancaster
Birkdale School, Sheffield
Bloxham School, Banbury
Bootham School, York
Box Hill School, Dorking
Bromsgrove School, Worcs.
Blue Coat School, Birmingham (Prep.)
Burgess Hill School for Girls
Cheltenham Ladies College
Christ's Hospital School, Horsham
City of London Freemans School, Ashstead
Claremont Fan Court School, Surrey
Clayesmore School, Dorset
Combe Bank School, Sevenoaks
Convent of Our Lady of Providence, Hants.
Croft House School, Dorset
Croham Hurst School, Croydon
Culcheth Hall School, Altrincham
Derby High School
Douai School, Reading
Dover College
Downe House School, Newbury
Durham School
Edgbaston C of E College for Girls
Ellerslie School, Worcs.
Ellesmere College
Elmslie Girls School
Felixstowe College
Fernhill Manor School, New Milton
Fulneck Boys School, Pudsey
Giggleswick School, Settle
Godolphin School, The, Salisbury
Guildford High School for Girls
Haileybury and Imperial Service College
Halliford School, Surrey
Headington School, Oxford
Heathfield School, Pinner
Hipperholme G S, Halifax
Hollygirt School, Nottingham
Holy Child School, Edgbaston
Holy Trinity Convent School, Bromley
Hurstpierpoint College, Hassocks
Huyton College, Liverpool
Kelly College, Devon
Kent College, Tunbridge Wells
Kimbolton School, Cambridgeshire
Kings School, Bruton
Kings School, Gloucester
Kingsley School The, Leamington Spa
Laxton School, Peterborough
Leicester G S
Leicester High School for Girls
Leighton Park School, Reading
Lubavitch House School, N16
Marist Convent Senior School, Ascot
Menorah G S, NW11
Moira House School, Eastbourne
Mount School The, NW7
Mount School, York
Mount Carmel School, Cheshire

Newcastle-upon-Tyne Church High School
Notre Dame Senior School, Cobham
Oakham School, Rutland
Oswestry School
Our Lady's Convent Senior School, Abingdon
Pangbourne College, Reading
Pierrepont School, Farnham
Polam Hall School, Darlington
Presentation College, Reading
Princethorpe College, Rugby
Prior Park College, Bath
Purcell School
Reading Blue Coat School
Reed's School, Cobham
Rendcomb College, Cirencester
Rickmansworth Masonic School, Hertfordshire
Rosemead School, Littlehampton
Royal Russell School, Croydon
Royal Walverhampton School
Ryde School, Isle of Wight
St. Anne's School, Windermere
St. Brandons School, Clevedon
St. Columba's College, St. Albans
St. Edmunds School, Canterbury
St. Edwards School, Cheltenham
St. Felix School, Southwold
St. Francis College, Letchworth
St. Georges School, Ascot
St. Hildas School, Whitby
St. Joseph's College, Stoke-on-Trent
St. Lawrence College, Ramsgate
St. Margaret's School, Bushey
St. Margaret's School, Exeter
St. Martin's School, Solihull
St. Mary's Convent, Folkestone
St. Mary's Convent, Worcester
St. Mary's Convent, Shaftsbury
St. Michael's School, Oxted
St. Nicholas School, Fleet
St. Teresa's Convent School, Dorking
St. Ursula's High School, Bristol
Sacred Heart College, Droitwich
Sacred Heart School, Tunbridge Wells
Scarisbrick Hall School, Lancashire
Scarborough College
Sevenoaks School
Shebbear College, Devon
Silcoats School, Wakefield
Solihull School
Stella Maris Convent School, Bideford
Stratford House School, Bromley
Surbiton High School
Tettenhall College, Wolverhampton
Tormead School, Guildford
Upper Tooting High School, Balham
Ursuline Convent School, Kent
Wentworth Milton Mount School, Bournemouth
Westonbirt School, Tetbury
Westwood House School, Peterborough
Worksop College, Nottinghamshire
Wrekin College, Telford

Higher Education (Allowances)

Mr. Ashdown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what would be the cost of providing each 16 to 19-year-old student attending higher or further education with an allowance equivalent to the pay of a youth training scheme trainee, on the assumption that there would be a 50 pe cent. take-up of places.

Mr. Jackson: If 50 per cent. of 16, 17 and 18-year-olds participated in full-time education and received an allowance equivalent to the youth training scheme allowance, the annual cost of those payments would be some £1,900 million. This figure is based on 50 per cent. of the total population of 16-year-olds in England receiving £28·50 per week — the youth training scheme allowance for that age — and 50 per cent. of 17 and 18-year-olds in England receiving £35 per week — the allowance for trainees in their second year.

The figure does not discount awards currently made by LEAs to students in this age group. Nor does it take account of child benefit payments to the parents of students in full-time education up to their 19th birthday.

Educational Assessments

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide the latest available figures of the number of children with statements under the Education Act 1981 in each local authority in England, Scotland and Wales.

Mr. Dunn: The number of pupils with statements of special educational need attending maintained primary, middle and secondary schools and special schools in each local education authority in England in January 1987 is given in the table. Information on the number of pupils with statements of special educational need in Scotland and Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales.

Pupils with statements in each LEA[1] January 1987

	Pupils
Barking	272
Barnet	531
Bexley	525
Brent	492
Bromley	761
Croydon	835
Ealing	597
Enfield	503
Haringey	431
Harrow	396
Havering	484
Hillingdon	558
Hounslow	721
Kingston upon Thames	324
Merton	316
Newham	680
Redbridge	499
Richmond upon Thames	237
Sutton	394
Waltham Forest	893
Inner London	8,386
Birmingham	3,673
Coventry	1,052
Dudley	694
Sandwell	1,022
Solihull	410
Walsall	760
Wolverhampton	736
Knowsley	654
Liverpool	1,974
St. Helens	557
Sefton	803
Wirral	1,170
Bolton	632
Bury	432
Manchester	2,024
Oldham	735
Rochdale	713
Salford	940
Stockport	1,024
Tameside	585
Trafford	673

	Pupils
Wigan	838
Barnsley	426
Doncaster	1,035
Rotherham	770
Sheffield	1,427
Bradford	1,388
Calderdale	411
Kirklees	1,003
Leeds	2,526
Wakefield	816
Gateshead	588
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	1,036
North Tyneside	659
South Tyneside	402
Sunderland	882
Isles of Scilly	0
Avon	4,450
Bedfordshire	1,298
Berkshire	2,186
Buckinghamshire	2,459
Cambridgeshire	1,753
Cheshire	3,476
Cleveland	2,287
Cornwall	1,173
Cumbria	1,306
Derbyshire	3,135
Devon	3,107
Dorset	1,777
Durham	1,381
East Sussex	1,964
Essex	4,371
Gloucestershire	1,409
Hampshire	4,836
Hereford and Worcester	1,880
Hertfordshire	3,294
Humberside	2,129
Isle of Wight	352
Kent	4,882
Lancashire	4,207
Leicestershire	1,734
Lincolnshire	1,736
Norfolk	1,729
North Yorkshire	1,726
Northamptonshire	1,856
Northumberland	774
Nottinghamshire	2,597
Oxfordshire	1,040
Shropshire	1,353
Somerset	1,398
Staffordshire	2,576
Suffolk	1,708
Surrey	3,361
Warwickshire	1,633
West Sussex	1,522
Wiltshire	1,852
England	141,962

[1] Excludes independent schools and nursery schools.

Middle Schools

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many middle schools of eight to 12 years and of nine to 13 years there are; and what are the approximate numbers of pupils in each category.

Mr. Dunn: The number of maintained middle schools of age eight to 12 and of nine to 13, and the number of pupils in these schools in January 1987 in England was as follows:

Middle schools with age range	Schools	Pupils
8 to 12	598	147,737
9 to 13	569	193,085

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Irish Republic

Mr. McCusker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, pursuant to his answer of 9 February, *Official Report*, column *149*, he will list in precise detail the views and proposals of the Government of the Irish Republic put forward by them at the meeting of the Anglo-Irish Inter-Government Council both in November 1985 and since that date; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend cannot give details of specific proposals put forward in private by the Irish Government. Nonetheless, a detailed communiqué was issued after the meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council at Hillsborough in November 1985, and joint statements have been issued after each meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference held since.

Nuclear Power Stations (Attacks)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the discussions in the conference on disarmament on banning attacks on nuclear power stations; and if he will take steps to strengthen the provisions of article 56 of protocol I of the 1977 additional protocols to the 1949 Geneva convention.

Mr. Mellor: The prevention of attacks on peaceful nuclear facilities is the subject of discussion by the conference on disarmament's ad hoc committee on radiological weapons. The United Kingdom plays a constructive role in these talks and is chairing the committee this year.

We do not believe that it would be appropriate to attempt to alter the text of the 1977 additional protocols, which were preceded by long and detailed negotiations.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Food Aid

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to *(a)* the estimated value of emergency food relief contributions, by country, for the years 1985 to 1987-88, *(b)* whether these contributions are deducted from the overseas aid budget of such countries, and *(c)* the proportion of the overseas aid budgets of such countries these payments represent.

Mr. Patten: The table contains details of total food aid by donor country for 1985 and 1986 and the percentage of total official development assistance of each country that these figures represent. Information on the value of food aid used for emergency relief is not separately available. Nor is information readily available on the relationships between the overseas aid budget and expenditure on food aid in all the countries listed.

DAC donor countries—food aid 1985 and 1986

$ million

	1985 Food aid	*1985 As percentage of oda*	*1986 Food aid*	*1986 As percentage of oda*
Australia	51	6·8	84	11·2
Austria	8	3·2	3	1·5
Belgium	44	10·0	20	3·6
Canada	263	16·1	262	15·5
Denmark	25	5·7	27	3·9
Finland	12	5·7	21	6·7
France	127	3·2	122	2·4
Germany	204	6·9	227	5·9
Ireland	8	20·5	2	3·2
Italy	164	14·9	259	10·8
Japan	27	0·7	66	1·2
Netherlands	85	7·5	109	6·3
New Zealand	1	1·9	—	—
Norway	27	4·7	27	3·4
Sweden	38	4·5	35	3·2
Switzerland	29	9·6	30	7·1
United Kingdom	137	9·0	98	5·6
United States	1,859	19·8	1,518	15·9
Total DAC countries	3,113	10·6	2,912	7·9

Note: Total bilateral and multilateral food aid ie includes food aid by EEC according to member states shares of EC budget.
ODA = Official development assistance (net).
Source: Development assistance committee (DAC) of the OECD.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Motor Manufacturers (Components)

Mr. Bright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has as to which British-based motor manufacturers are in a position to fit *(a)* oxidation catalysts and *(b)* three-way catalysts to their products from 1 January 1989.

Mr. Atkins: Some United Kingdom motor manufacturers are currently producing three-way catalyst versions of certain of their models for export markets which enforce emissions standards requiring such equipment. However, these models are not necessarily produced in specifications designed for United Kingdom conditions. No United Kingdom manufacturers are presently supplying cars fitted with oxidation catalysts. The future model plans of the manufacturers are a commercial matter for the companies concerned.

Trade Statistics

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will update the information contained in his reply to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North on 10 February 1987, *Official Report*, column *164*, regarding the crude balance of imports and exports of *(a)* cereals and cereal preparations, *(b)* motor vehicles and *(c)* electrical goods in 1979 and 1987 and the net overall position in 1979 and 1987; and if he will also show (A) total imports and (B) total exports of (i) cereals and cereal preparations, (ii) all agricultural products, (iii) all other imports and exports, (iv) motor vehicles, (v) electrical goods, (vi) steel and (vii) coal for 1979 and 1987, giving in each case, the difference between (A) and (B) in actual and percentage terms.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is as follows:

Value : £ million

	1979				*1987**			
	(a) imports (cif)	*(b) exports (fob)*	*Crude balance*		*(a) imports (cif)*	*(b) exports (fob)*	*Crude balance*	
			£ million	*as a percentage of (a)*			*£ million*	*as a percentage of (a)*
Total trade	48,423	42,802	−5,621	12	94,016	79,851	−14,165	15
of which:								
(i) Cereals and cereal preparations	668	264	−404	60	741	831	+90	12
(ii) Agricultural products	6,264	1,814	−4,450	71	9,407	4,080	−5,327	57
(iii) Other	42,160	40,988	−1,172	3	84,609	75,771	−8,838	10
of which:								
(iv) Motor vehicles	2,997	1,519	−1,479	49	5,692	2,452	−3,240	57
(v) Electrical goods	3,643	3,633	−9	0	13,529	10,246	−3,283	24
(vi) Steel	998	1,080	+83	8	1,603	1,874	+271	17
(vii) Coal	136	62	−74	54	368	78	−290	79

Sources: The following SITC/R2 data in the United Kingdom Overseas Trade Statistics: (i) Division 04, (ii) Sections 0 & 4 and Division 22, (iv) Groups 781, 782, 783 and Sub-group 784.1, (v) Divisions 75, 76, 77 and Group 716, (vi) Groups 672-675, Sub-groups 678.2, .3, .4 and 679.3 and Items 676.01 (part), .02 (part), 679.42 and 791.99 (part), (vii) Sub-groups 322.1 and 322.2.
Notes: (i) crude balance is United Kingdom exports (fob) less United Kingdom imports (cif). (ii) 0 signifies a value of less than 0.5. (iii) * 1987 figures are provisional.

Fertilisers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total output of fertilisers, the percentage exported and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available information for the United Kingdom for the value of output for years up to 1985 is published in the "Business Monitor" series PA 1002, "Report on the Census of Production", summary volume (table 11); 1986 output data are available in "Business Monitor" PA 251 (table 8). The available information on United Kingdom export and import ratios is published in "Business Monitor" series MQ12, import penetration and export sales ratios for manufacturing industry. These publications are available in the Library. Similar information for the Federal Republic of Germany and Japan is not available.

Superconductivity

Sir David Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what measures he is taking to promote the application of the principles of superconductivity in British industry.

Mr. Butcher: On 21 January 1988, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced a £16 million three-year programme to stimulate collaborative industrial research on superconductivity. The DTI will provide up to 50 per cent. of the programme cost and industry will find the balance. Work supported under the programme will include research into materials and device applications, as well as research aimed at producing superconductors that work at room temperature. The programme has been developed in consultation with the electronics and electrical engineering industries, and complements the Science and Engineering Research Council's programme of academic research in HEIs, including the first university research centre at Cambridge. The DTI and SERC have together established a National Committee for Superconductivity, announced in October 1987. Chaired by Sir Martin Wood, the national committee co-ordinates support for industrial and academic research and advises on national policy for superconductors.

Financial Services Act

Mr. Blair: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received from interested bodies concerning applications to register with self-regulating organisations under the Financial Services Act.

Mr. Maude: I have received many representations about this and other aspects of the Financial Services Act.

Mr. Blair: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he has any estimate of the number of applications currently before the self-regulating organisations or the Securities and Investments Board.

Mr. Maude: I am informed by the Securities and Investments Board that the number of applications by investment businesses for authorisation by a recognised self-regulating organisation or the Securities and Investments Board which were either approved or in the course of consideration as at 12 February 1988 was approximately 9,800.

Mr. Blair: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to advertise further the time limits for applications before self-regulating organisations or the Securities and Investments Board.

Mr. Maude: My Department will be issuing a further series of advertisements in both national and regional press drawing to the attention of investment businesses the need to apply for authorisation before 27 February. This follows two earlier series of advertisements which, regrettably, some investment businesses seem to have ignored.

Mr. Blair: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he is satisfied that the Securities and Investments Board and the self-regulating organisations have adequate staff and resources to deal with the applications before them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The then Secretary of State concluded before proposing the transfer of functions to the SIB in May 1987 that the staff and resources available to it were sufficient for the time. I believe that still to be the case. Before recognising a self-regulating organisation under the Act, the SIB is required to satisfy itself as to a number of factors, including the adequacy of the organisation's resources. I see no reason to differ from SIB's judgment.

Wimbledon Citizens' Advice Bureau (Pamphlet)

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will take steps to cease the distribution by the citizens' advice bureau in Wimbledon of the pamphlet "Sex", published by the Terrence Higgins Trust, in view of its explicit promotion of exclusively homosexual activities.

Mr. Butcher: Policy and day-to-day running of the citizens' advice bureaux are matters for the National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux (NACAB). I understand that NACAB circulates to bureaux a monthly information pack on AIDS publications which provides a comprehensive list of leaflets available on AIDS, including the Terrence Higgins Trust leaflet "Sex", which bureaux may choose to look at to decide whether they might be helpful to clients. The NACAB has informed me that, in its view, this leaflet is not suitable for public display and that it has not distributed it to bureaux. The NACAB has also informed me that the leaflet has not been stocked, distributed or displayed by the Wimbledon CAB.

Specialised Satellite Services

Mr. Forth: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he intends to liberalise the provision of specialised satellite services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Government remain committed to the duopoly policy in telecommunications which was announced in November 1983. The Government made clear then that they did not intend to license operators other than BT and Mercury to provide the basic telecommunication service of conveying

messages over fixed links whether cable, radio or satellite either domestically or internationally. This position will not be reviewed until November 1990.

The Government also made clear that they would give consideration to ways of introducing new specialised services by satellite. We are now proposing a degree of liberalisation in this area. Before settling the final details, we are allowing a six-week consultation period on how the following arrangements should be brought into practice.

Our present intention is to license up to another six operators to provide point to multi-point satellite-based third party services in the United Kingdom only. If more than six acceptable proposals are put to us in a one-month qualifying period after the consultation period has ended, we will ask the Director General of Telecommunications to advise us which of the applicants to license.

We are also intending to license receive-only terminals on users' permises. Users will be licensed to receive all kinds of satellite-delivered services within the scope of the Telecommunications Act 1984, whether national or international. A licence under that Act will be issued shortly after the end of the consultation period. The licence will not permit users to convey the signals received onwards beyond their own premises. An announcement about the implications of this decision for the licensing regime under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 will be made shortly.

Chemicals

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what was the total output of chemicals, the percentage exported, and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987;

(2) what was the total output of chemicals, by value, the percentage exported and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* The available information is as follows:

Chemicals

	Sales (US $ million)			*Export ratio (percentage)*			*Import penetration (percentage)*		
	United Kingdom	*FRG*	*Japan*	*United Kingdom*	*FRG*	*Japan*	*United Kingdom*	*FRG*	*Japan*
1965	5,675	8,471	5,506	22·0	29·1	9·9	14·6	16·8	7·6
1970	7,602	13,625	15,256	24·6	37·2	8·1	17·8	24·0	6·7
1975	15,093	30,283	34,845	31·3	38·6	11·1	22·3	23·6	6·2
1979	27,960	55,870	68,316	34·9	43·0	8·9	28·8	29·2	7·7
1980	31,772	59,324	79,461	37·4	43·9	8·6	27·8	30·5	7·9
1981	29,138	51,710	81,946	38·5	46·2	8·3	30·2	32·4	7·9
1982	26,438	48,516	74,097	40·2	47·2	8·6	32·9	33·8	9·1
1983	25,681	49,733	80,956	41·1	48·3	8·6	34·8	34·6	8·9
1984	25,193	49,418	84,881	43·9	50·8	9·0	38·2	36·6	9·7
1985	26,112	50,527	85,865	46·6	51·7	9·0	39·3	38·1	9·4
1986	30,499	64,544	115,674	46·8	51·4	8·2	40·1	37·6	8·4

Notes:
1. Information for 1958 and 1960 and 1987 is not readily available.
2. Figures for United Kingdom and Japan exclude man-made fibres, whilst for FRG they include man-made fibres.

Source: Basic International Chemical Industry Statistics 1963-1986 published by Chemical Industries Association.

Sub-postmasters (Annual Revisions)

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has as to how many sub-postmasters' annual revisions are awaiting checking at postal finance depot, Chesterfield; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* This is an operational matter for the Post Office Board and I have therefore drawn my right hon. and learned Friend's question to the attention of the chairman of the Post Office.

Acrylics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total output of acrylics, the percentage exported, and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* I regret that this information is not available. The only available information relates to the United Kingdom and is published in the "Business Monitor" PQ2514 (tables 2 and 5).

Videotape

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total output of videotape, the percentage exported, and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan, in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* I regret that this information is not available. Information

for the United Kingdom on output of videotapes is not published because the figures would disclose information about individual undertakings.

PRIME MINISTER

Brussels Council

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister what is the agreed limit on agricultural spending for the current year in consequence of the Brussels Council agreement; and what was the agreed limit for 1987.

The Prime Minister: As I indicated in my statement of 15 February the guideline base for 1988 has been set at 27·5 billion ecu (about £19 billion). The limit for 1987 was just under 23 billion ecu (about £16 billion).

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister what estimate she has made of the maximum expenditure which the European Economic Community would be entitled to undertake if the 1·2 gross national product formula agreed at the Brussels Council were applied in full; and what limit would have applied if the 1·4 limit had remained in force.

The Prime Minister: The 1·2 per cent. gross national product ceiling on the Community's own resources agreed at the European Council is equivalent in 1988 to some 46·5 billion ecu (£32·2 billion), whilst the current 1·4 per cent. value added tax ceiling this year is equivalent, on a comparable basis, to some 36·7 billion ecu (£25·4 billion).

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what percentage levy of gross national product for the current year was agreed at the Brussels Council;

(2) what voting system will apply, in consequence of the Brussels Councils agreement, to alterations in the gross national product levy; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The level of the new gross national product-related contributions will be subject to the overall ceiling on all own resources equivalent to 1·2 per cent. of Community GNP and to any annual sub-ceilings which the Council may agree. These ceilings, once adopted, cannot be changed except by unanimity and following ratification in all member states. Within that constraint, the level of GNP-related contributions required to balance the budget in 1988 and later years will reflect the expenditure decisions taken by qualified majority voting in the annual budgetary process, just as the actual rate of value added tax contributions is determined under the present system.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if there is any provision in the Brussels Council agreement to prevent the Commission underwriting spending levels in excess of legal limits in a manner similar to the metric year operated in 1987 when receipts were demanded one month in advance and receipts delayed for a month; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The decision on budget discipline described in my statement of 15 February will be legally binding.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister why she agreed to the exceptional circumstances clause in the Brussels Council agreement; and by which voting system it will be operated.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I made on Monday 15 February on the outcome of the European Council. The monetary reserve which I referred to in my statement will operate on the basis I described and the question of voting does not therefore arise. There is no other provision for so-called exceptional circumstances.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if the sum which is currently spent each week by the European Economic Community on dumping, storing and destroying food surpluses will change in consequence of the Brussels Council agreement; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The sums spent each week on storage and disposal of surplus depend on the level of surpluses and the prices at which they can be sold. As I said in my statement on 15 February, the agreement on the agricultural stabilisers is intended to control both output and spending on surpluses.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister what representations Her Majesty's Government have received from the United States of America and other foreign governments about the Brussels Council agreement.

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if the previous decision of the Finance Ministers' Council to transfer the responsibilities of financing the cost of butter dumping to member states, which was declared to be unlawful by the Court of Auditors, was discussed at the Brussels Council; and what changes were proposed in these arrangements following the increase in EEC resources.

The Prime Minister: The matter was not discussed and no changes are proposed.

Cereal Production

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister by what amount the 160 million ton ceiling for cereal production payment without price reduction exceeds or is less than actual cereal production in 1987; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The 1987 cereals harvest was affected by exceptionally difficult weather conditions in many parts of the Community; the harvest is estimated at 153 million tonnes, which is well below the trend-line production figure for 1987 of 165 million tonnes.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Intestacy

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Attorney-General if he will introduce new regulations to simplify the settling of estates in intestacy cases.

The Attorney-General: No. I am not satisfied that there is any need to change the rules relating to the settlement and distribution, by personal representatives, of the estates of persons dying intestate. The rules are intended to enable the distribution of an intestate's estate in a manner that the intestate might have directed if he or she had left a valid will.

Cash Limits and Running Costs

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Attorney-General whether any changes will be made to the 1987-88 cash limit and running costs limit for Class XX Vote 27 of covering the administration costs of the serious frauds office and the provision in Class XX Vote 28 covering the Department's prosecution costs.

The Attorney-General: Yes. The office will not, as earlier expected, take over the conduct of some cases from the Crown Prosecution Service before it becomes operational. Sections 1-3 of the Criminal Justice Act 1987 are likely to be brought into force in April 1988. The cash limit for Class XX, Vote 27 will be reduced by £570,000 from £2,000,000 to £1,430,000 and the running costs limit by £570,000 from £1,500,500 to £930,000. With a shortfall of £1 million on prosecution costs under Class XX, Vote 28, £1,570,000 will be surrendered to the Reserve.

DEFENCE

Weapons (Interoperability)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals exist for interoperability among NATO countries in *(a)* artillery barrels and *(b)* ammunition.

Mr. Sainsbury: Existing arrangements within NATO already provide a substantial measure of artillery barrel and ammunition interoperability. These include a quadrilateral ballistics memorandum of understanding, and a NATO sub-panel with responsibility for ammunition information exchange. The United Kingdom is also fully involved in discussions on the interoperability of future artillery systems.

TRANSPORT

Head Restraints

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the number and percentage of vehicles registered in the United Kingdom that are fitted with head restraints; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department has no statistical information on this. The majority of new cars are now being provided with head restraints that meet European standards.

Public Service Vehicle Drivers

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what legislation is *(a)* in force and *(b)* proposed concerning the maximum and minimum ages of licensed public service vehicle drivers.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Road Traffic Act 1972 and regulations made under the Act prescribe 21 years as the minimum age for driving public service vehicles with some closely defined exceptions where the minimum age may be reduced to 18 years. Drivers of these vehicles may continue to renew their licences until they fail to satisfy the traffic commissioners as to their fitness to hold a licence. There are no proposals to change these arrangements.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what legislation is *(a)* in force and *(b)* proposed concerning the physical fitness, and medical examination, of licensed public service vehicle drivers.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981 and the regulations made under the Act require all applicants for public service vehicles drivers' licences to satisfy the traffic commissioners that they are fit to hold the licence. A medical report is required on first application, on each five-year renewal when drivers reach 46 years of age and annually after 65. There is also a general requirement for all drivers to report any medical condition which could affect fitness to drive. Interested bodies are now being consulted on a proposal to require public service vehicle drivers to submit medical reports with licence renewals from the age of 45.

Greater London (Traffic Disruption)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the approximate proportion of traffic disruption or major delay in Greater London over the latest convenient annual period attributable to *(a)* road repair works, *(b)* road improvement schemes, *(c)* road works by statutory undertakers, *(d)* traffic signal failure, *(e)* road accidents, *(f)* flooding or burst water mains, *(g)* vehicle breakdowns, *(h)* shed loads, other than in accidents, *(i)* illegal parking, *(j)* state occasions, processions and demonstrations and *(k)* excess of traffic demand over road capacity.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Information is not collected in this form.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has concerning the amount of road traffic congestion in Greater London; from what sources he obtains such information; and what definitions he adopts of *(a)* congestion and *(b)* serious delay to traffic flow.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Road traffic congestion in London is monitored by its effect on traffic speeds. Results of regular surveys are published in statistics bulletins available from the House Library. We have not adopted a definition of congestion or serious delay to traffic flow. The Department is considering whether specific indicators would be useful.

M25

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has concerning the M25 in respect of *(a)* the number and distribution of major delays, *(b)* the causes of major delays, *(c)* the numbers, locations and causes of major accidents, *(d)* the times, places and degree of any excess of demand over effective road capacity and *(e)* hourly peak and minimum flows, expressed in passenger car units, in the most heavily and least used sections.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information is not available in the form requested. The M25 is congested at certain times on some sections. Work has started to enable a fourth lane to be added to both carriageways between junctions 11 and 13. A study has been commissioned into the best way of adding a fourth lane between junctions 15 and 16.

We have recently invited proposals from consultants for a study of traffic patterns on the whole motorway which was announced in last year's roads White Paper. It will identify existing and potential problem areas and their causes, and suggest solutions. M25 traffic flows were set out in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on 9 November 1987, *Official Report*, columns *79-80*.

Disabled People (Parking Concessions)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if there are any reciprocal arrangements for parking concessions for disabled people between Her Majesty's Government and the Government of New Zealand; and if he will consult the Royal Association on Disability and Rehabilitation on this matter.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Reciprocal arrangements for parking concessions for people with disabilities are confined to Europe. We intend to raise with the disabled persons transport advisory committee the question of extending reciprocity to countries outside Europe.

French Minister of Transport

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met his French counterpart; and what was discussed.

Mr. Channon: I met M. Douffiagues on 7 December at a meeting of the EC Transport Council. Matters discussed included international air services, road haulage permits and traffic through non-EC transit countries.

Coaches (Speed Governors)

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of the requirement to install speed governors in coaches.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I made regulations on 15 February which will be laid before the House shortly. These require new coaches to be fitted with a speed limiter from 1 April 1989, coaches first used on or after 1 April 1984, from 1 April 1990, and coaches first used on or after 1 April 1974, from 1 April 1991. Older coaches or those which have a maximum design speed no higher than 70 mph will not be affected by the regulations.

The limiters must comply with British Standard AU 217 and be set to a maximum speed of 70 mph. The regulations will be amended as necessary to refer to minor changes to this standard now under consideration.

Manchester Airport

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action has been taken, following the meeting between the Minister responsible for aviation and directors of Manchester Airport plc held on 8 February, to communicate the Government's views on the issues which the Manchester Airport plc directors raised at the meeting concerning the serious implications of the Civil Aviation Authority's draft charging proposals for Manchester airport; if he will publish any letter sent to the Civil Aviation authority as a result of that meeting; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The issues are for the Civil Aviation Authority. As promised at the meeting, my noble Friend sent a short letter to the chairman of the authority mentioning the Government's oft-repeated White Paper commitment to the development of Manchester airport, and the provisions of section 39(2)*(c)* of the Airport Act 1986.

Motorway Accidents

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out in a table for each month of 1987 *(a)* the number of accidents that occurred on motorways, *(b)* the number of vehicles involved, *(c)* the number of goods vehicles with an unladen weight of more than 3 tonnes or vehicles drawing a trailer involved and *(d)* the number of coaches involved.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Rear Seat Belts

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he intends to require that all self-drive hire cars are equipped with rear seat belts.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: All cars, including self-drive hire cars, first used from 1 April 1987 are required to be fitted with rear seat belts or child restraints. We have no plans to extend this requirement to any type of car registered before this date. We hope that all concerned—the car hire firms and their customers—will consider on a voluntary basis, the safety advantages of fitting and using rear seat belts.

Dartford-Thurrock Crossing Bill

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has placed in the Library a copy of the report by Mr. Aksel Frandsen, referred to in the Government response to the special report of the Select Committee on the Dartford-Thurrock Crossing Bill.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I did so yesterday.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Indecent Displays (Control) Act 1981

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints have been brought under the Indecent Displays (Control) Act 1981; and how many were successful.

Mr. Renton: The available information, which may be incomplete, is given in the following table:

Defendants proceeded against and found guilty of offences under the Indecent Displays (Control) Act 1981

England and Wales — *Number of persons*

Year	*Total proceeded against*	*Total found guilty*
1981[1]	—	—
1982	17	10
1983	20	18
1984	22	17
1985	24	24
1986	22	19

[1] The Act came into force on 27 October 1981

Arrest and Search

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will place in the Library a copy of his reply to the letter from the joint central committee of the Police Federation on specific powers of arrest and search of suspected carriers of knives or other sharply pointed articles; whether he proposes to meet Mr. Leslie Curtis, chairman of the Police Federation, to discuss this matter; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have done so today. The chairman of the Police Federation has not requested a meeting to discuss the matter, but my right hon. Friend and I are always willing to discuss the matter with him and I have already met the Metropolitan branch of the federation.

Section 128 of the Criminal Justice Bill makes it an offence to have a bladed or sharply pointed article (other than a pocketknife) in a public place without good reason. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 increased police powers by making available to all constables a power to stop and search for offensive weapons and prohibited articles, and the Criminal Justice Bill will extend these powers to enable the police to stop and search those reasonably suspected of carrying articles covered by section 128. The "reasonable suspicion" requirement, which is the basis of the federation's concern, is not specific to the new offence, but applies generally to stop and search powers. A definition of "reasonable suspicion" is contained in the codes of practice made under PACE. A review of the codes has now been initiated, during which my right hon. Friend will be consulting the Police Federation and others.

Police (Computers)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he will list the constabularies which will have computers connected to the upgraded police national computer network and those constabularies that have an existing mainframe computer linked to the police national computer;

(2) whether he will list mainframe computers belonging to constabularies and indicate whether they are for command and control or criminal information purpose.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The following police forces have a direct link to the police national computer through their own force computer system(s); this indicates whether these are command and control or criminal information systems.

Force	*Command and Control*	*Criminal Information*
Avon and Somerset	Yes	—
Bedfordshire	Yes	—
Cambridgeshire	Yes	—
Cleveland	Yes	—
Cumbria	Yes	—
Devon and Cornwall	Yes	—
Dorset	Yes	—
Durham	—	Yes
Essex	Yes	—
Hertfordshire	Yes	—
Humberside	—	Yes
Kent	—	Yes
Lincolnshire	—	Yes
Merseyside	Yes	—
Metropolitan	Yes	—
North Yorkshire	Yes	—
Northamptonshire	—	—
Nottinghamshire	—	—
South Wales	Yes	—
South Yorkshire	Yes	Yes
Staffordshire	Yes	Yes
Suffolk	Yes	Yes
Surrey	—	—
Sussex	Yes	—
Warwickshire	Yes	Yes
West Mercia	Yes	—
West Midlands	Yes	—
Wiltshire	Yes	—

Hampshire intends to implement a direct link to the police national computer within the next year.

It is intended that all forces in England, Scotland and Wales will eventually have a direct link to the police national computer through the proposed upgraded network. Further information about force computer systems is not held centrally in the form requested.

Local Development Agencies

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to amend the processes by which central Government funds are channelled to local development agencies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The only central Government funds for local development agencies for which my right hon. Friend is responsible are those channelled through the experimental local development agencies development fund. We are at present awaiting the first progress report from the committee administering the fund and in the meantime have no plans to change it.

My right hon. Friend has recently amended the terms and conditions under which the fund is administered to permit him to require the committee to withhold or vary the conditions attached to a particular grant in those exceptional circumstances where such action is justified in the public interest.

This safeguard should not normally affect the day-to-day administration of the fund. We have, however, invited interested parties to make representations about the change and these are being considered.

Data Protection

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will indicate the measures taken to advise the general public of their right of access for data subjects in the Data Protection Act following the introduction of the measure on 11 December 1987.

Mr. Renton: I am informed by the Data Protection Registrar that after 11 November 1987, when the right of subject access came into force, he carried out an advertising campaign in the national press for about one month, to advise the general public of their rights. In addition 2 million advisory leaflets and posters were distributed to public libraries, citizens' advice bureaux and similar information points, and arrangements were made for the Post Office to frank approximately 90 million pieces of mail with a special mark drawing attention to the subject access right. The registrar undertook a public relations campaign involving the distribution of publicity material to regional newspapers and radio stations and he and his staff participated in more than 40 radio and

television appearances and numerous press interviews. Copies of the registrar's advisory leaflet, together with the guidelines on the Data Protection Act, have been deposited in the Library.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will hold discussions with the Data Protection Registrar to produce a code of practice covering personal data held for the purpose of national security.

Mr. Renton: No. Under section 27(1) of the Data Protection Act 1984 it is for the Secretary of State concerned to determine, in the light of the particular circumstances, whether personal data should be exempt from the provisions of the Act for the purpose of safeguarding national security.

Prisons (Bibles)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the annual budget within the prison service for the distribution of bibles to prisoners;

(2) how much of the annual budget within the prison service for the distribution of bibles to prisoners remained unspent at 1 January;

(3) if chaplains to Her Majesty's prisons are experiencing any difficulty in obtaining bibles to distribute to prisoners;

(4) whether the remainder of the annual budget within the prison service for the distribution of bibles to prisoners will be spent on the purposes for which it was originally allocated by 31 March.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The budget for the distribution of bibles to prisoners is reviewed annually. The amount allocated for this purpose in 1987-88 was £7,260. All of this was spent by 1 January 1988. It was hoped that a further sum could have been made available in the current financial year, but this was not possible because of other severe pressures on the prison Vote.

A small number of copies of the authorised version and the revised standard version (used by Roman Catholics) remain in stock, but all copies of the good news version of the bible have been distributed.

British Standard Time

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider seeking to reintroduce a British standard time to give people in Britain an extra hour of evening daylight.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Government are aware of the interest in having extended daylight hours in the evenings and are considering how best to assess support for any change in the present arrangements.

Taxi Drivers (Assaults)

Mr. Ames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many reported assaults there have been on licensed taxi drivers for each of the last five years in *(a)* the United Kingdom, and *(b)* the Basildon area;

(2) how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions were made for assaults on licensed taxi drivers in (i) the United Kingdom, and (ii) the Basildon area for each of the last five years, and if he will express the figures as a percentage of all prosecutions and convictions.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not available. It is not possible from the records held centrally to distinguish the occupation of victims of assault.

Police Manpower

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the ratio of police officers to *(a)* population and *(b)* crimes in (i) Northumberland police authority area and (ii) Northumberland county.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information available is as follows:

	Northumbria police	*Northumberland county*
Police[1]/Population[2] ratio	1:413	1:694
Police[1]/Crime[3] ratio	1:47	—

[1] Police strength as at December 1987.
[2] As at mid 1986.
[3] Notifiable offences recorded by the police as produced in volume 3 of "Criminal Statistics England and Wales Supplementary Tables 1986". The force does not have those figures broken down for Northumberland county.

Miss A. A. Bergeman

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the scientific name of the anti-depressant given to Audrey Ann Bergeman on 23 July 1987 at Risley remand centre; what other medical treatment was given to Miss Bergeman while she was at the centre; whether she made any requests for medical treatment whilst she was at the centre; whether she made any statements about her medical condition while she was at the centre; and what was the assessment of the medical staff who examined her upon her admission to the centre.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Miss Bergeman was received at Risley remand centre on 20 July 1987. At the reception examination she was found to be in good general health except for a bronchial condition, for which medication was prescribed. She reported sick on 23 July and was prescribed small doses of amitriptyline. No other medical application was made and no other treatment was given.

AIDS

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is currently considering for the improved protection of prisoners from infection with the HIV virus.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: High priority continues to be given to preventive measures, which currently include systematic medical inquiry and examination at the reception stage, counselling of individual prisoners, precautionary regime restrictions at the discretion of the medical officer for prisoners identified as HIV antibody positive, and a strong emphasis on educational initiatives directed to all prisoners. A purpose-designed video film for prisoners is being developed. All aspects of the prevention strategy are kept under review.

"Sex"

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek advice as to whether the pamphlet "Sex", published by the Terrence Higgins

Trust and distributed by Wimbledon citizens advice bureau, contravenes the provisions of the Obscene Publications Act.

Mr. Renton: Whether the publication of a particular article contravenes the Obscene Publications Act 1959 is a matter which only a court can determine. It is not a matter on which my right hon. Friend has any authority to offer advice.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Peachey Property plc (Investigation)

Mr. Page: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster why he has announced the appointment of inspectors to investigate possible contravention of the insider dealing legislation in relation to the securities of Peachey Property plc; and why when doing so he made reference to any transaction with which Mr. John Ritblat, chairman of British Land plc, may have been connected.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. and noble Friend decided that the appointment of inspectors in this case was necessary in the light of information provided. Such information is received from various sources including the stock exchange. It has been the practice for some time to announce such appointments where the fact that a particular person would be involved in an investigation might, if it became known, be likely to affect the share price of a company with which he is connected. The purpose — to which the stock exchange as the listing authority attaches importance — is to avoid a disorderly market in the shares of the company through such information becoming known only gradually and partially. The appointment of inspectors carries no implication of guilt, but only of the existence of circumstances needing investigation.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Housing Benefit

78. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the responsibilities *(a)* of local authorities in relation to the administration of housing benefit locally and *(b)* of his Department in relation to the administration of housing benefit centrally; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Local authorities are statutorily responsible for the administration of the housing benefit scheme which includes informing the public about the scheme, determining claims, making payments and reviewing decisions on appeal. It also includes making payments to householders who qualify for housing benefit because they are in receipt of supplementary benefit (from April 1988 income support). The detailed rules and benefit rates which determine entitlement are set out in regulations issued by the Department. The Department is responsible for issuing guidance on the regulations and determining the arrangements for reimbursing most of the costs of the scheme incurred by local authorities. Information is collected centrally both to enable subsidy payments to be made and to inform Ministers, Parliament and the public on the costs and operation of the scheme nationally.

Rating Reform

79. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how much rebate from community charge he estimates a young person in Coventry with an annual income of £2,500 would be entitled to, following the abolition of the domestic rating system.

Mr. Scott: The details of the community charge rebate scheme have yet to be decided and benefit rates for 1990 are not yet known, so it is not yet possible to make such an estimate. Rebate entitlement will also depend on a claimant's circumstances and on the level of community charge set by the local authority.

Food Handlers

80. **Ms. Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what provision he is making to ensure that local authorities are able to secure adequate training for all food handlers in retail and manufacturing outlets.

Mrs. Currie: On 30 October 1987 my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced that officials had been asked to review the proposals contained in the joint consultation document on food legislation, which was issued in December 1984, in the light of comments received from interested organisations. One of these proposals is that local authorities should be empowered to provide food hygiene training for food handlers.

Drugs

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the current annual cost of providing drugs in the National Health Service as a whole and to family practitioners; if he is satisfied with the control and accountability of these costs; and what measures he proposes to prevent fraud by the sale of drugs overseas by those who have received them at public expense.

Mr. Newton: The net cost of providing drugs in the National Health Service in England in 1986-87, including fees, remuneration and payments to hospital pharmacists[1] was £2,016 million. Of this £1,639 million was paid in the family practitioner services, including £120 million to dispensing doctors.

For proprietary medicines, pharmaceutical companies with sales to the NHS of £4 million or more provide audited financial returns each year covering their costs and capital. These returns are scrutinised under the terms of the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme. Companies with sales of between £0·5 million and £4 million also provide information annually, but of a more limited nature. For generic medicines, the prices reimbursed to chemists are shown in the drug tariff. In the main, the drug tariff reflects the competing prices in this market.

A patient may receive drugs at public expense only in exchange for a prescription form signed by a doctor. It is the doctor's responsibility to ensure that any drugs he prescribes are, in his judgment, needed by that patient. Once dispensed, the drugs become the patient's property. The clinical control expected of doctors militates against patients receiving drugs in large quantities, and there are special arrangements for drugs controlled by the Misuse of Drugs Act and its regulations. Any cases of suspected fraud are investigated by family practitioner committees or health authorities in the first instance.

[1]This information has recently become available.

Vaccination

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any new schemes to increase parental compliance with the need for increased vaccination against measles, whooping cough and polio.

Mrs. Currie: Levels of vaccination have risen in recent years to 67 per cent. for whooping cough, 86 per cent. for polio and 71 per cent. for measles (1986). We do not regard these figures as high enough to give adequate protection from these preventable diseases.

We announced on 17 December plans to introduce a triple vaccine for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) from 1 October 1988. We intend that the introduction of MMR is preceded by a national and local publicity campaign aimed at parents and the health professions, which we hope will lead to a substantial increase in uptake levels. We are also considering how best to continue to promote the benefits of vaccination against whooping cough and polio.

Every district health authority has now appointed an immunisation co-ordinator who will have a very important part to play in securing our objective of improved uptake of the childhood immunisation.

Private Health Facilities (Operations Purchases)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will gather and publish from each district health authority information regarding the number, kind and cost of operations which they have bought from privately owned health facilities; and what priority his Department attaches to such information in the carrying out of the review on the funding of the National Health Service.

Mr. Moore: An annual return is made of contractual arrangements between National Health Service hospitals and private hospitals and a copy of the most recent return (1986) has been placed in the Library. This information relates to the number of patients treated by specialty. Details of the number, type and cost of operations performed under these arrangements are not kept centrally. We have already indicated that our internal review of the NHS will be wide ranging and fundamental. In reaching conclusions, we will want to take into account all relevant information.

NHS Patients (Charges)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the effect on the percentage of the total funding available to the National Health Service taken by administrative costs of collecting "hotel charges" from patients.

Mr. Newton: Such an estimate could only realistically be made in relation to proposals for the introduction of such charges, which we do not have.

NHS Waiting Lists

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services by how much National Health Service waiting lists have changed between 1979 and 1987 in *(a)* the North West regional health authority, and *(b)* the Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley district health authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The requested information is given in the table.

In-patient waiting list in the National Health Service at 31 March 1979 and 1987.

	March 1979	*March 1987*	*Change between 1979-1987*
North Western RHA			
Urgent	4,614	3,315	−1,299
Cases over one Month	3,130	1,824	−1,306
Non-urgent	72,754	60,566	−12,188
Cases over one year	21,667	15,056	−6,611
TOTAL	77,368	63,881	−13,487
Blackburn, Hyndburn, Ribble Valley DHA			
Urgent	195	9	−186
Cases over one month	134	0	−134
Non-urgent	5,317	2,395	−2,922
Cases over one year	2,645	450	−2,195
TOTAL	5,512	2,404	−3,108

Nurses (Geriatric Training)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what measures he proposes to increase the number of nurses working within the National Health Service with special skills related to geriatric nursing.

Mr. Newton: The measures referred to in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on 15 February at column *489* aimed at improving nurse recruitment and retention in all specialisms including geriatric nursing. In particular the recently agreed new clinical grading structure, for which the review body will recommend rates from 1 April 1988, will open up improved pay and career opportunities for those who wish to remain in clinical nursing. It will differentiate more clearly between levels of responsibility and competence and will recognise and reward additional skills and responsibility more appropriately.

The health departments' evidence to the review body suggests that the geriatric lead of £165 per annum should continue pending a review during 1988 by the Nursing and Midwifery Staffs Negotiating Council, the body responsible for negotiating nurses' terms and conditions of service. The council aims to agree recommendations to the review body in the autumn of 1988.

NHS (Staff Statistics)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total number of *(a)* medical laboratory scientific officers, *(b)* pharmacists and *(c)* medical physicists employed in the National Health Service in each of the last 12 months, distinguishing between trainees and fully qualified staff.

Mr. Newton: Information in the form requested is not held centrally. Such information as is available is shown in the table (the data for 30 September 1986 are the latest available to this level of detail):

Staff in Post (England) 30 September 1986 (Whole-Time Equivalents)[1]

	Medical Laboratory Scientific Officers	*Pharmacists*	*Medical Physics Technicians*
Students	[2]3,530	355	114
Qualified	11,094	2,789	2,031
Total	14,624	3,144	2,144

[1] Figures are independently rounded to nearest whole-time equivalent.
[2] Includes all Junior A MLSOs and Junior B MLSOs. Some may not be in training, but none are qualified staff.

Patient Costs

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has on the average cost of *(a)* an operation, *(b)* an out-patient attendance and *(c)* a one-day attendance at all the hospitals in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Scotland in 1979 and 1986.

Mrs. Currie: The nearest available figure for the average cost of an operation is the average cost per inpatient case. These figures, together with those for out-patients and day cases are shown in the table.

	England		*Wales*		*Scotland*	
	1979-80 £	*1985-86* £	*1979-80* £	*1985-86* £	*1979-80* £	*1985-86* £
Inpatient case (acute hospitals)	466	718	433	712	535	849
Outpatient attendance	14	26	16	25	n.a.	12
Day Case attendance	36	66	25	56	n.a.	60

Note:
Comparison between the Scotland outpatient and day case figures and those for England and Wales is not valid because outpatient figures for England and Wales include day case and day patient attendances in respect of hospitals with less than 1,000 cases per year.
One of the factors leading to the higher cost per inpatient case in Scotland is that Scotland has a higher proportion of the United Kingdom's teaching hospital places and proportionately more patient care therefore takes place in the relatively more expensive teaching hospital environment.

District Health Authorities (Land Holdings)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North on 26 November 1987, *Official Report*, columns *319-21*, if he will list in league order, with the highest at the top, by acreage of land held, district health authority areas within the National Health Service in England, showing the valuation in each case *(a)* before the recent revaluation and *(b)* at the present valuation as decided by the district valuer.

Mrs. Currie: Returns from district valuers are currently being checked for completeness before being aggregated. It is likely to be several weeks before the information sought is available, when I will let my hon. Friend have a further reply.

Retirement and Pension Rights

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if, in the light of the recent European Court decision on women's retirement and pension rights, he will seek to introduce equalisation between the sexes of working and retirement benefits.

Mr. Scott: Equal treatment between men and women in respect of working conditions and state and occupational benefits is already the subject of three EC directives. EC directive 76/207 provides for equal treatment at work, and following the European Court's decision that the age of retirement from work fell within the scope of that directive, the necessary provisions have been introduced into British law in the Sex Discrimination Act 1986. EC directive 79/7 deals with equal treatment in social security benefits and has been in force since December 1984. Pension age and survivors' benefits are excluded from the scope of that directive. Equal treatment in occupational social security is required by directive 86/378, which is not yet in force and excludes pension age and survivors' benefits until equalisation is required in the state scheme. The steps we have taken to comply with these directives mean that equal treatment between men and women exists in most areas of working and retirement benefits; some further steps will be needed to comply with EC 86/378 and we are considering these. We have no immediate plans to introduce equal treatment in areas excluded from the directives, but changes in pension age in particular have been under consideration for some time.

Chlamydia

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what diagnostic services are available under the National Health Service for the detection of the disease Chlamydia; and what plans he has to extend these.

Mrs. Currie: Facilities to test for the presence of chlamydial infection are readily available at NHS laboratories. Research is proceeding to investigate the prevalance of chlamydial infection in patients attending ante-natal, genito-urinary medicine and family planning clinics, in order to determine at risk groups; and to establish whether there is any justification for screening pregnant women for this infection.

AIDS

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has on the mode by which two laboratory workers in the United States of America working with the AIDS virus were infected by it; and if he will make a statement regarding the implications for similar United Kingdom technicians.

Mr. Newton: The two laboratory workers in the United States of America found to be infected with HIV after working with it had both regularly handled large volumes of highly concentrated virus.

I am informed that in the first case it has been suggested that spillages of contaminated material not observed and adequately dealt with at the time, may have been a contributory factor. In the second case, in which a laboratory origin of infection has not been confirmed, infection may have been the consequence of accidental injury with a blunt needle.

Our laboratory safety guidlines for HIV remain entirely appropriate; it is important that they be observed scrupulously. No case of laboratory acquired infection has been reported in this country.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will supply details of the following on *(a)* on a national basis, *(b)* on a regional basis, and *(c)* for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde: the number of married or cohabitating men in receipt of invalid care allowance who have been successful in claiming the supplementary benefit long-term scale rate since married women were allowed to claim invalid care allowance;

(2) if he will list *(a)* on a national basis, *(b)* on a regional basis, *(c)* for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde, the number of married women in receipt of invalid care allowance who have been refused the supplementary benefits long-term scale rate because their husband is or has been unemployed and who has been deemed to be an alternative means of care;

(3) if he will give the criteria whereby someone is categorised by his Department as representing a alternative means of care under regulation 6*(b)*(ii) of the Supplementary Benefit (Conditions of Entitlement) Regulations 1981;

(4) if he will list *(a)* on a national basis, *(b)* on a regional basis, and *(c)* for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde, the number of times regulation 6*(b)*(ii) of Supplementary Benefit (Conditions of Entitlement) Regulations 1981 has been implemented against married or cohabiting men since married or cohabiting men were allowed to claim;

(5) if he will list *(a)* on a national basis, *(b)* on a regional basis, and *(c)* for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde, the number of married or cohabiting women in receipt of invalid care allowance who have been successful in claiming the supplementary benefit long-term scale rate since that section of the community were allowed to claim invalid care allowance;

(6) if he will list *(a)* on a national basis, *(b)* on a regional basis, and *(c)* for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde, the number of times regulation 6(b)(ii) of the Supplementary Benefit (Conditions of Entitlement) Regulations 1981 has been implemented against married or cohabiting women since they became eligible to claim;

(7) if he will list *(a)* on a national basis, *(b)* on a regional basis, and *(c)* for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde, the number of couples, one of whom is in receipt of invalid care allowance, who have been refused the right to transfer the role of claimant due to regulation 6(b)(ii) of the Supplementary Benefit (Conditions of Entitlement) Regulations 1981 because the husband is unemployed and thus deemed by his Department to be an alternative of care.

Mr. Scott: It is the independent adjudicating authorities rather than the Department who decide whether a claimant for supplementary benefit should be exempt from the requirement to be available for work by virtue of regulation 6(b) of the Supplementary Benefits (Conditions of Entitlement) Regulations 1981. The guidance relating to alternative means of caring issued by the Chief Adjudication Officer is that the adjudication officer should:

(1) have regard to medical opinion, the views of social workers and the wishes of the family;
(2) consider whether the severity of the disablement of itself means that temporary relief from such as a friend or neighbour is inadequate or inappropriate;
(3) consider whether there is anyone else in the household who could provide the necessary help or whether the disabled person is able to pay for professional assistance.

The statistical information requested is not collected and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list *(a)* on a national basis, *(b)* on a regional basis and *(c)* for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde constituency, the number of married or cohabiting men in receipt of invalid care allowance in each of the years 1981 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986;

(2) if he will list *(a)* on a national basis, *(b)* on a regional basis and *(c)* for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde constituency, the number of successful claims for invalid care allowance made by married or cohabiting men in each of the years 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986.

Mr. Scott: I regret that the requested information is not available. The information which is available is set out in the table.

Invalid care allowance awards
Men in Great Britain

(1) Year	*(2) Number of awards made*	*(3) Awards in (2) where the disabled person was the claimant's spouse*	*(4) Number of awards current at 31 December*
1981	[1]606	[1]333	3,442
1982	1,825	909	4,113
1983	1,975	958	4,776
1984	2,272	1,093	5,409
1985	3,433	1,089	5,989
1986	3,248	1,309	7,135

[1] Commencing 30 April 1981.

Eli Lilly

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will now take steps to prevent the National Health Service purchasing any of Eli Lilly's drugs except those which are not replaceable.

Mr. Newton: As I explained to the right hon. Member when we met earlier this week, I do not think it would be appropriate for the Government to take such action.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list the number of women diagnosed as having breast cancer in the Central Nottinghamshire health authority area, together with the percentage of the totals screened for the years 1979-87, inclusive;

(2) if he will list the numbers of women on whom breast cancer screening was carried out in the Central Nottinghamshire health authority area for the years 1979-87 inclusive;

(3) if he will list the number of women who sought breast cancer screening in the Central Nottinghamshire health authority area for the years 1979-87 inclusive;

(4) if he will list the funds made available for breast cancer screening in the Central Nottinghamshire health authority area for the years 1979-1987 inclusive.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that the information requested is not centrally available.

In 1979 the Government funded a seven-year, multi-centre, research trial in the United Kingdom to compare the effectiveness of different methods of early detection of breast cancer. The total financial support provided was £5 million. Nottingham was one of two centres testing the effectiveness of breast self-examination and women there were taught how to perform the examination and encouraged to report any abnormalities found. Diagnostic breast clinics were available for those who found abnormalities. The trial is not yet complete. A first report is expected later this year.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if National Health Service breast cancer screening is available on demand to women who reside or work in the Central Nottinghamshire health authority area; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list the facilities available for breast cancer screening in the Central Nottinghamshire health authority area;

(3) if he will list the facilities available for breast cancer screening in the Barnet health authority area;

(4) if he will list the facilities available for breast cancer screening in the Southern Derbyshire health authority area;

(5) if he will list the facilities available for breast cancer screening in the Leicester health authority area;

(6) if he will list the facilities available for breast cancer screening in the Croydon health authority area.

Mrs. Currie: The programme for the national breast cancer screening service envisages a nationwide network of some 100 centres, each serving a population of about 500,000. All women between 50 and 64 will be invited for screening by mammography every three years, using computerised call and recall system. Older women will be screened on request. The programme will also involve the provision of the necessary back-up facilities for assessment, diagnosis, treatment, counselling and aftercare.

Each regional health authority in England was allocated about one third of a million pounds in the current financial year to establish at least one centre by the end of March. The Government's cash plans include provision to meet the full, continuing estimated costs of the remaining centres to be set up by spring, 1990.

The first centre to be established in Trent regional health authority is located in Nottingham. It is one of four centres which will provide training for staff for the national programme and has received additional funds for this work. The first centre to be established in North West Thames regional health authority is located in Barnet. The population of Southern Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Croydon health authorities will be served by centres to be set up over the next two years.

More detailed information can be obtained from the Regional Health Authorities concerned.

Social Security Reform

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the effect of non-householders deduction for claimants under 26 years receiving income support contained in the housing benefit scheme from April, has been taken into account when estimating the number of losers under income support in the Government's publication "Impact of the Reformed Structure of Income Related Benefits".

Mr. Scott: Paragraph 11 of the preface to the "Impact of the Reformed Structure of Income Related Benefits" makes clear that the tables contained in it do not include the effect of changes to the structure of non-dependant deductions.

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how the numbers of people requiring transitional additions relate to the numbers of losers estimated in the Government's report entitled "Impact of the Reformed Structure of Income Related Benefits".

Mr. Scott: Table 1B of the technical annex, "Impact of the Reformed Structure of Income Related Benefits" shows an estimated 1·66 million claimants to have a lower entitlement to income support than to supplementary benefit. This is calculated by comparing the current system, uprated to 1988-89 values, with income support. It is estimated that at the point of change, around 1·4 million claimants will have a lower entitlement to income support than their current entitlement to supplementary benefit and these people will receive transitional protection.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services to what extent his calculations on the effect of the structural reform of social security benefits on sick and disabled people included *(a)* disabled pensions, *(b)* unemployed registered disabled people and *(c)* families with disabled children.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 1 February 1988]:* I refer the hon. Member to "Impact of the Reformed Structure of Income Related Benefits" October 1987, a copy of which is in the Library. Within the category "pensioners aged 60-79" are 130,000 income support claimants who will qualify for the higher pensioner premium because they are disabled. Of these, about 100,000 will also be in receipt of housing benefit. The equivalent figure for housing benefit claimants not also in receipt of income support is 150,000. The 10,000 income support families expected to receive the disabled child's premium form part of the categories "Lone parents" and "Couples with children". There is no premium specific to unemployed registered disabled people; unemployed claimants who are blind or who receive mobility allowance or attendance allowance will qualify for the disability premium.

National Insurance Rates

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has completed his review of national insurance contribution rates for 1988-89.

Mr. Portillo: I have reviewed the national insurance contribution rates paid by mariners and registered dockworkers. In the past, these groups paid a reduced rate of contribution to reflect the fact that the standard rate of class 1 contributions paid by other employees included the employment protection allocation paid into the redundancy fund, on which mariners and registered dockworkers could not normally draw. In the light of the decision that no employment protection allocation should be paid from class 1 national insurance contributions into the redundancy fund in 1988-89, which I announced on 3 November 1987 at columns *704-5*, the special rates of national insurance contributions paid by some mariners and registered dockworkers, and their employers will be abolished with effect from 6 April 1988.

The special lower rates of national insurance contributions paid by employers of foreign-going mariners will remain unchanged in 1988-89.

The special rates of national insurance contributions paid by members of Her Majesty's forces will also be changed following a review by the Government Actuary. The rate of abatement will be reduced by 0·1 per cent. for both employees and employers to 0·8 per cent. and 0·85 per cent. respectively with effect from 6 April 1988.

The special class 2 contributions paid by sharefishermen, and volunteer development workers, will remain at £6·55 a week during the 1988-89 tax year.

Aspirin

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when the conclusions of Dr. Warlow's study on the use of aspirin to prevent stroke and myocardial infarction are expected.

Mr. Jackson: I have been asked to reply.

I understand from the Medical Research Council that the preliminary results of Professor Warlow's United Kingdom transient ischaemic attack aspirin trial, on the prevention of stroke and myocardial infarction, were published in the *British Medical Journal* on Friday 29 January 1988.

NHS (Expenditure)

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was Government spending on the National Health Service per household as a proportion of the average household income in 1978-79 and 1986-87.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 11 February 1988]:* Gross NHS expenditure per household in the United Kingdom represented 6·3 per cent. of average household income in 1978 and 6·7 per cent. in 1986. The figures for total health care expenditure are 6·9 per cent. and 7·5 per cent. respectively.

Eye Treatment (Waiting Lists)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the numbers in each district health authority waiting for eye treatment as *(a)* in-patients (i) urgent over one month and (ii) non-urgent over one year, and *(b)* out-patients.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 11 February 1988]:* The available information is given in the table,

Numbers of patients awaiting treatment for Opthalmology by District Health Authority and Special Health Authority as at 31 March 1987

	Total cases	*Urgent Cases*		*Non-urgent Cases*	
		All	*On list more than one month*	*All*	*On list more than one year*
Northern RHA					
Hartlepool	0	0	0	0	0
North Tees	0	0	0	0	0
South Tees	612	23	12	589	188
East Cumbria	58	0	0	58	0
South Cumbria	77	0	0	77	1
West Cumbria	146	0	0	146	0
Darlington	348	0	0	348	1
Durham	90	0	0	90	0
North West Durham	0	0	0	0	0
South West Durham	0	0	0	0	0
Northumberland	0	0	0	0	0
Gateshead	0	0	0	0	0
Newcastle	1,486	103	11	1,383	192
North Tyneside	0	0	0	0	0
South Tyneside	0	0	0	0	0
Sunderland	918	6	0	912	61
Yorkshire RHA					
Hull	375	0	0	375	21
East Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	0
Grimsby	187	0	0	187	4
Scunthorpe	488	0	0	488	210
Northallerton	0	0	0	0	0
York	531	4	0	527	61
Scarborough	399	1	0	398	23
Harrogate	157	3	0	154	8
Bradford	705	5	4	700	6
Airedale	0	0	0	0	0
Calderdale	96	2	0	94	0

	Total cases	Urgent Cases		Non-urgent Cases	
		All	On list more than one month	All	On list more than one year
Huddersfield	211	0	0	211	2
Dewsbury	52	0	0	52	2
Leeds Western	446	12	8	434	55
Leeds Eastern	632	0	0	632	53
Wakefield	296	0	0	296	16
Pontefract	0	0	0	0	0
Trent RHA[1]					
North Derbyshire	112	0	0	0	44
Southern Derbyshire	699	0	0	0	80
Leicestershire	727	0	0	0	29
North Lincolnshire	341	0	0	0	21
South Lincolnshire	176	0	0	0	14
Bassetlaw	0	0	0	0	0
Central Nottinghamshire	71	0	0	0	0
Nottingham	651	0	0	0	16
Barnsley	160	0	0	0	0
Doncaster	65	0	0	0	0
Rotherham	499	0	0	0	176
Sheffield	685	0	0	0	37
East Anglian RHA					
Cambridge	201	26	7	175	2
Peterborough	381	0	0	381	23
West Suffolk	365	12	7	353	46
East Suffolk	498	0	0	498	42
Norwich	281	0	0	281	0
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	170	0	0	170	7
West Norfolk and Wisbech	101	0	0	101	0
Huntingdon	152	2	0	150	3
North West Thames RHA					
North Bedfordshire	144	0	0	144	27
South Bedfordshire	410	0	0	410	27
North Hertfordshire	164	0	0	164	9
East Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0	0
North West Hertfordshire	210	0	0	210	59
South West Hertfordshire	170	4	4	166	36
Barnet	123	0	0	123	0
Harrow	0	0	0	0	0
Hillingdon	265	0	0	265	103
Hounslow and Spelthorne	586	0	0	586	0
Ealing	0	0	0	0	0
Brent	476	17	15	459	138
Paddington and North Kensington	414	0	0	414	0
Riverside	719	61	48	658	78
North East Thames RHA					
Basildon and Thurrock	41	1	0	40	0
Mid Essex	326	1	1	325	41
North East Essex	282	0	0	282	7
West Essex	297	44	44	253	139
Southend	56	39	21	17	4
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	356	6	3	350	10
Hampstead[2]	—	—	—	—	—
Bloomsbury	0	0	0	0	0
Islington	0	0	0	0	0
City and Hackney	53	33	15	20	5
Newham	0	0	0	0	0
Tower Hamlets	11	3	3	8	6
Enfield	0	0	0	0	0
Haringey	278	1	0	277	50
Redbridge	5	0	0	5	0
Waltham Forest	366	7	0	359	0
South East Thames RHA					
Brighton	148	9	0	139	4
Eastbourne	286	1	0	285	31
Hastings	128	7	0	121	10
South East Kent	331	0	0	331	16
Canterbury and Thanet	497	29	24	468	187
Dartford and Gravesham	0	0	0	0	0

	Total cases	Urgent Cases		Non-urgent Cases	
		All	On list more than one month	All	On list more than one year
Maidstone	441	0	0	441	22
Medway	0	0	0	0	0
Tunbridge Wells	239	48	28	191	24
Bexley	508	0	0	508	0
Greenwich	279	0	0	279	4
Bromley	0	0	0	0	0
West Lambeth	647	49	1	598	12
Camberwell	166	6	4	160	1
Lewisham and North Southwark	67	3	3	64	6
South West Thames RHA					
North West Surrey	67	3	0	64	1
West Surrey and North East Hants	1,028	183	180	845	353
South West Surrey	234	0	0	234	30
Mid Surrey	754	13	4	741	411
East Surrey	624	16	16	608	150
Chichester	66	3	0	63	0
Mid Downs	0	0	0	0	0
Worthing	555	44	34	511	84
Croydon	200	1	1	199	0
Kingston and Esher	375	78	47	297	44
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	0	0	0	0	0
Wandsworth	238	0	0	238	4
Merton and Sutton	147	0	0	147	0
Wessex RHA					
East Dorset	572	0	0	572	20
West Dorset	257	4	0	253	0
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	899	0	0	899	137
Southampton and South West Hampshire	560	0	0	560	0
Winchester	357	7	3	350	63
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	184	4	1	180	48
Salisbury	572	12	0	560	0
Swindon	360	0	0	360	19
Bath	555	16	8	539	99
Isle of Wight	64	0	0	64	0
Oxford RHA					
East Berkshire	763	6	3	757	286
West Berkshire	298	0	0	298	0
Aylesbury Vale	358	0	0	358	19
Wycombe	0	0	0	0	0
Milton Keynes	54	1	0	53	2
Kettering	8	0	0	8	0
Northampton	82	0	0	82	3
Oxfordshire	596	0	0	596	12
South Western RHA					
Bristol and Weston	1,240	8	2	1,232	169
Frenchay	0	0	0	0	0
Southmead	0	0	0	0	0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	597	21	11	576	89
Exeter	289	0	0	289	18
North Devon	56	0	0	56	2
Plymouth	554	0	0	554	179
Torbay	403	36	1	367	96
Cheltenham	178	0	0	178	0
Gloucester	507	6	0	501	105
Somerset	356	13	3	343	17
West Midlands RHA					
Bromsgrove and Redditch	439	0	0	439	72
Herefordshire	251	0	0	251	0
Kidderminster and District	175	0	0	175	2
Worcester and District	269	0	0	269	37
Shropshire	813	0	0	813	286
Mid Staffordshire	0	0	0	0	0
North Staffordshire	642	5	2	637	168
South East Staffordshire	153	0	0	153	19

	Total cases	Urgent Cases		Non-urgent Cases	
		All	On list more than one month	All	On list more than one year
Rugby	0	0	0	0	0
North Warwickshire	0	0	0	0	0
South Warwickshire	233	0	0	233	75
Central Birmingham	203	39	33	164	64
East Birmingham	651	52	41	599	332
North Birmingham	0	0	0	0	0
South Birmingham	463	20	20	443	47
West Birmingham	973	62	40	911	307
Coventry	1,000	12	2	988	273
Dudley	295	51	37	244	89
Sandwell	331	0	0	331	115
Solihull	0	0	0	0	0
Walsall	6	0	0	6	0
Wolverhampton	582	139	128	443	228
Mersey RHA					
Chester	417	0	0	417	12
Crewe	219	0	0	219	48
Halton	0	0	0	0	0
Macclesfield	0	0	0	0	0
Warrington	185	0	0	185	18
Liverpool	631	12	7	619	16
St. Helens and Knowsley	89	3	1	86	0
Southport and Formby	419	0	0	419	140
South Sefton	26	0	0	26	4
Wirral	371	0	0	371	39
North Western RHA					
Lancaster	177	0	0	177	34
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	665	50	44	615	162
Preston	453	0	0	453	27
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	365	0	0	365	29
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	146	9	6	137	29
West Lancashire	0	0	0	0	0
Chorley and South Ribble	0	0	0	0	0
Bolton	508	1	0	507	154
Bury	0	0	0	0	0
North Manchester	0	0	0	0	0
Central Manchester	2,003	0	0	2,003	246
South Manchester	0	0	0	0	0
Oldham	770	0	0	770	289
Rochdale	612	59	35	553	249
Salford	21	0	0	21	2
Stockport	491	1	1	490	59
Tameside and Glossop	19	0	0	19	2
Trafford	0	0	0	0	0
Wigan	928	5	0	923	426
All Special health authorities					
The Hospitals for Sick Children	52	1	0	51	0
The National Hospitals for Nervous Diseases	0	0	0	0	0
Moorfields Eye Hospital	1,387	0	0	1,387	0
Bethlem Royal and Maudsley Hospitals	0	0	0	0	0
The National Heart and Chest Hospitals	0	0	0	0	0
The Royal Marsden Hospital	0	0	0	0	0
Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's	0	0	0	0	0
The Eastman Dental Hospital	0	0	0	0	0

[1] Data not available. Imputed figures shown for Non-urgent cases on the waiting list for more than one year.
[2] Figures not available.

Mental Illness (North-West)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what have been the levels of spending on the mentally ill in all the health authorities in the north-west region for each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 12 February 1988]:* Information on health authority expenditure by type of patient is not collected centrally. Hospital cost returns submitted to the Department show expenditure on hospitals of different types and costing returns in respect of community health services show expenditure relating to the areas of activity only.

Hospital cost returns submitted by district health authorities in the North Western region, since their establishment on 1 April 1982, show total current expenditure on hospitals categorised as mental illness as follows (Districts having no hospitals in this category have been excluded):

Health district	*1982-83* £	*1983-84* £	*1984-85* £	*1985-86* £	*1986-87* £
Bolton	421,463	435,586	461,313	488,433	597,916
Central Manchester	—	—	—	[1]1,420,171	1,658,503
Lancaster	876,038	884,737	923,538	1,254,329	1,304,985
Preston	13,318,178	13,583,528	13,439,427	13,106,404	13,356,038
Rochdale	326,400	369,529	410,166	446,303	[2]84,626
Salford	13,955,531	14,784,169	15,343,857	15,970,384	17,632,609
Stockport	488,102	512,560	555,080	572,547	587,401

[1] Three units for mentally ill patients opened in 1985-86.
[2] The decrease in expenditure reflects reduced patient activity at Springfield Park Hospital in 1986-87.

Schizophrenics

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his current estimate of the total number of people certified as schizophrenics.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* People have not been certified under mental health legislation since 1959. A proportion of the people detained annually under the Mental Health Act 1983 have a diagnosis of schizophrenia, but our statistics at present do not show the number with that diagnosis who are currently detained in hospital. New information systems in the NHS will provide such statistics as from 31 March 1988.

Health Statistics

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list by district health authority *(a)* the establishment figure of medical laboratory scientific officers for each year since 1979, *(b)* the number in post for each year since 1979, and *(c)* the number who have left the National Health Service in the last year.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 2 February 1988 c. 591]: Establishment figures *(a)* and numbers of MLSOs leaving *(c)* are not available centrally. The table shows the number of medical laboratory scientific officers (including unqualified grades) employed by each district health authority at 30 September for the years 1982-1986. Comparable figures for 1979, 1980 and 1981 are not available.

NHS Medical Laboratory Scientific Officers at 30 September

Whole-time equivalent [1]

Health Authorities	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Northern Region					
Hartlepool	30	30	30	30	31
North Tees	50	50	53	50	48
South Tees	72	76	75	73	75
East Cumbria	33	33	32	33	32
South Cumbria	29	30	31	29	29
West Cumbria	27	29	28	28	31
Darlington	33	34	34	32	31
Durham	35	35	34	36	35
North West Durham	24	24	25	26	24
South West Durham	21	23	22	24	25
Northumberland	37	38	39	40	41
Gateshead	42	43	44	45	48
Newcastle-Upon-Tyne (T)	268	277	282	279	273
North Tyneside	26	26	29	28	30
South Tyneside	33	34	36	36	39
Sunderland	69	71	71	76	77
RHA HA and HQ units	69	67	63	68	67
Regional Totals	897	918	926	931	934
Yorkshire Region					
Hull	96	97	96	96	93
East Yorkshire	28	30	29	28	30

Health Authorities	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Grimsby	47	50	52	55	52
Scunthorpe	32	34	36	39	41
Northallerton	19	19	20	19	18
York	57	58	59	59	59
Scarborough	31	29	32	32	31
Harrogate	32	32	31	32	32
Bradford	93	88	92	93	89
Airedale	39	38	38	41	39
Calderdale	56	54	56	56	57
Huddersfield	58	56	56	56	57
Dewsbury	33	32	31	39	41
Leeds Western (T)	194	204	205	208	203
Leeds Eastern (T)	107	112	115	112	116
Wakefield	44	45	45	44	44
Pontefract	41	40	41	41	41
RHA HQ and HQ Units	44	45	44	50	49
Regional Totals	1,050	1,061	1,077	1,098	1,091
Trent Region					
North Derbyshire	49	53	58	59	63
South Derbyshire	110	109	112	110	111
Leicestershire (T)	161	183	196	198	208
North Lincolnshire	41	45	45	49	48
South Lincolnshire	59	59	62	60	58
Bassetlaw	28	28	29	27	29
Central Nottinghamshire	70	72	71	70	69
Nottingham (T)	212	210	205	211	205
Barnsley	50	51	52	49	50
Doncaster	56	61	59	56	60
Rotherham	55	54	55	54	56
Sheffield (T)	224	229	232	230	232
RHA HQ and HQ Units	71	70	72	72	72
Regional Totals	1,187	1,222	1,245	1,244	1,261
East Anglia					
Cambridge (T)	113	110	108	95	102
Peterborough	58	57	57	58	57
West Suffolk	38	36	35	52	53
East Suffolk	65	67	67	65	63
Norwich	74	118	114	81	83
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	50	52	54	55	54
West Norfolk and Wisbech	50	50	45	46	47
Huntingdon	28	40	47	51	50
RHA HQ and HQ Units	54	55	51	55	49
Regional Totals	530	584	577	557	559
North West Thames					
North Bedfordshire	44	44	43	44	53
South Bedfordshire	28	30	30	33	33
North Hertfordshire	41	42	42	43	45
East Hertfordshire	36	37	35	38	36
North West Hertfordshire	54	66	65	67	65
South West Hertfordshire	39	49	47	47	46
Barnet	89	96	88	85	83
Harrow	84	80	75	77	74
Hillingdon	91	88	89	89	91
Hounslow and Spelthorne	89	89	88	56	89
Ealing	43	48	47	49	47
Brent	57	65	62	59	60
Paddington and North Kensington (T)	88	96	96	91	89
Riverside	184	191	175	180	180
RHA HQ and HQ Units	—	—	—	—	—
Blood Transfusion Centre	17	18	19	20	21
Regional Totals	993	1,039	1,001	1,008	1,013
North East Thames					
Basildon and Thurrock	88	87	82	85	82
Mid Essex	60	63	62	61	68
North East Essex	73	71	72	75	69

Health Authorities	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
West Essex	64	62	56	53	55
Southend	72	71	64	64	65
Barking/Havering/Brentwood	154	158	59	164	164
Hampstead (T)	138	134	129	120	131
Bloomsbury (T)	103	120	125	131	128
Islington	71	75	71	73	68
City and Hackney (T)	196	205	192	184	190
Newham	64	64	63	59	60
Tower Hamlets (T)	131	129	127	118	123
Enfield	52	51	52	53	54
Haringey	96	91	87	74	76
Redbridge	50	51	47	50	46
Waltham Forest	74	76	76	74	71
RHA HQ and HQ Units	—	—	—	—	—
Regional Totals	1,486	1,507	1,463	1,437	1,451
South West Thames					
North West Surrey	49	47	48	48	47
West Surrey and North East Hants	48	49	49	49	49
South West Surrey	49	52	51	52	53
Mid-Surrey	49	52	53	49	44
East Surrey	62	60	55	51	48
Chichester	46	46	44	44	45
Mid-Downs	35	43	60	65	71
Worthing	50	48	47	49	53
Croydon	59	55	55	56	55
Kingston and Esher	60	54	51	52	50
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	39	46	45	45	50
Wandsworth (T)	67	62	58	55	50
Merton and Sutton	120	116	115	118	110
RHA HQ and HQ Units	60	54	57	62	66
Regional Totals	794	784	788	793	790
South East Thames					
Brighton	66	65	67	68	73
Eastbourne	51	56	52	50	52
Hastings	38	36	37	37	39
South East Kent	62	58	61	55	59
Canterbury and Thanet	76	78	75	68	70
Dartford and Gravesham	46	46	46	47	47
Maidstone	30	32	38	39	42
Medway	46	50	50	53	54
Tunbridge Wells	52	54	58	51	52
Bexley	29	29	34	32	35
Greenwich	106	109	106	106	103
Bromley	90	90	89	87	83
West Lambeth (T)	177	175	172	168	169
Camberwell (T)	108	103	101	100	99
Lewisham and North Southwark (T)	198	201	197	183	171
RHA HQ and HQ Units	—	—	—	—	—
Regional Totals	1,174	1,181	1,182	1,144	1,149
Wessex					
East Dorset	104	110	105	103	106
West Dorset	40	39	39	38	37
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	105	98	114	112	115
Southampton and South West Hampshire (T)	204	211	212	216	200
Winchester	54	54	51	52	54
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	41	41	41	42	42
Salisbury	48	48	47	51	49
Swindon	57	57	56	56	59
Bath	73	69	69	67	70
Isle of Wight	31	31	32	34	33
RHA HQ and HQ Units	—	—	—	—	—
Regional Totals	762	757	765	771	764
Oxford					
East Berkshire	85	74	71	68	71

Health Authorities	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
West Berkshire	77	76	78	76	78
Aylesbury Vale	67	69	67	65	63
Wycombe	58	57	54	56	60
Milton Keynes	—	—	33	39	38
Kettering	63	67	66	65	62
Northampton	95	94	93	95	86
Oxfordshire	194	205	204	201	203
RHA HQ and HQ Units	45	45	43	40	43
Regional Totals	684	686	709	706	704
South Western					
Bristol and Weston (T)	122	113	110	110	114
Frenchay	50	43	42	43	44
Southmead	95	85	85	86	84
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	54	57	56	60	58
Exeter	71	72	73	73	74
North Devon	33	36	34	35	33
Plymouth	73	73	76	79	79
Torbay	54	61	62	63	66
Cheltenham	49	50	51	56	58
Gloucester	66	58	58	59	60
Somerset	66	62	62	62	62
RHA HQ and HQ Units	60	62	47	46	50
Regional Totals	792	772	755	772	781
West Midlands					
Bromsgrove and Redditch	36	34	36	34	38
Herefordshire	33	35	36	34	31
Kidderminister and District	23	24	20	24	24
Worcester and District	54	54	55	59	61
Shropshire	82	84	78	82	82
Mid-Staffordshire	41	44	42	42	42
North Staffordshire	115	114	105	110	106
South East Staffordshire	30	32	40	44	47
Rugby	21	22	22	23	24
North Warwickshire	32	32	32	39	40
South Warwickshire	33	36	34	33	40
Central Birmingham (T)	219	224	213	210	211
East Birmingham	102	104	104	101	103
North Birmingham	60	59	61	65	62
South Birmingham	66	67	65	63	62
West Birmingham	94	92	89	91	93
Coventry	117	115	112	109	109
Dudley	102	100	100	89	92
Sandwell	82	83	80	80	78
Solihull	51	49	47	49	50
Walsall	43	46	48	50	50
Wolverhampton	64	65	69	69	70
RHA HQ and HQ Units	96	93	87	94	96
Regional Totals	1,596	1,606	1,573	1,593	1,610
Mersey					
Chester	42	44	42	43	38
Crewe	48	45	49	47	48
Halton	—	—	—	—	—
Macclesfield	36	36	38	37	39
Warrington	42	44	47	58	64
Liverpool (T)	263	282	273	262	289
St. Helens with Knowsley	65	61	63	61	61
Sefton North	23	21	22	23	23
Sefton South	98	101	100	101	104
Wirral	96	96	95	96	98
RHA HQ and HQ Units	45	44	42	43	49
Regional Totals	756	773	772	771	811
North Western					
Lancaster	38	38	41	39	41
Blackpool Wyre and Fylde	65	64	66	67	69
Preston	74	74	77	76	83

Health Authorities	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	46	48	52	49	52
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	35	36	35	33	36
West Lancashire	31	31	29	29	30
Chorley and South Ribble	3	2	2	2	2
Bolton	61	59	64	63	63
Bury	38	41	38	39	36
North Manchester	116	113	116	117	112
Central Manchester (T)	157	165	164	164	164
South Manchester (T)	296	302	213	205	200
Oldham	58	59	59	65	65
Rochdale	43	40	39	39	36
Salford (T)	116	123	123	115	114
Stockport	56	56	57	57	57
Tameside and Glossop	36	37	37	37	36
Trafford	56	58	53	57	56
Wigan	61	63	61	66	67
RHA HQ and HQ Units	83	86	83	83	87
Regional Totals	1,467	1,493	1,407	1,400	1,406

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest whole-time equivalent.
[2] —Indicates nil.
Source: DHSS Annual Census of NHS Non-Medical Manpower.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Stock Market Crash

Mr. Wells: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implications for economic stability of the growth in domestic demand since the stock market crash.

Mr. Lilley: The United Kingdom economy remains strong despite the stock market fall. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor will be publishing a new forecast at the time of the Budget.

Accountants

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many accountants who are qualified members of United Kingdom professional bodies were employed within the Civil Service in financial and accounting roles in 1974, 1979 and 1988.

Mr. Brooke: At 31 December 1987 there were in the Government accountancy service approximately 740 members of one of the professional bodies forming the Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies (CCAB) — that is, the Institutes of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, of Scotland and in Ireland, the Chartered Association of Certified Accountants, the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. About 90 per cent. were in financial or accounting roles. At the same time there were another 60 staff who had passed the final examination, but were not yet members and 500 staff studying for the examinations of one of these professional bodies.

In July 1982, when the Government accountancy service was set up on its present basis, there were on a comparable basis a little over 600 members and 250 trainees. Figures for earlier years are not available on a consistent basis but the indications are of a rise in numbers in the mid to late 1970s.

The figures exclude qualified accountants in certain departmental grades. There are currently about 80 professional accountants in the Inland Revenue tax inspectorate and the DTI insolvency service. The figures also exclude members of accountancy bodies outside the CCAB, or of specialised bodies such as the Institute of Internal Auditors.

Excise Duty

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received seeking changes in excise duty payable on non-alcoholic beers and lagers and dealcoholised wines.

Mr. Lilley: No excise duty is payable on non-alcoholic beers and lagers and dealcoholised wines. No recent representations have been received on this matter.

EC (Payments)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update the information in his reply to the hon. Member for Norfolk North of 22 April 1987, *Official Report*, columns 577-78, for each year since 1973, concerning *(a)* the overall payments by the Treasury to the European Economic Community, *(b)* the total payments and refunds made to the Treasury and *(c)* the net cost to the Treasury.

Mr. Brooke: The additional information required in respect of the United Kingdom's contribution to and receipts from the 1987 Community budget is as follows:

	£ million
Gross payments	5,202
Receipts other than negotiated refunds	2,336
Negotiated refunds	—
VAT abatements	1,153
Net total	1,713

The increase in the net total figure compared with the estimate of £1,347 million in the "statement on the 1987 Community budget" (Cm. 194) is mainly accounted for by higher than expected payments of levies and duties, the autumn supplementary budget for 1987 and the August 1987 VAT adjustment.

£1 Notes

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Bank of England £1 notes are still in circulation as at the latest convenient date; and how many were in circulation five years earlier.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* On 3 February 1988, some 108 million £1 notes remained in circulation, of which 69·9 million were series D £1 notes (those issued since 1978). There were 641 million £1 notes in circulation at the end of February 1983.

CIVIL SERVICE

Opposition Whips' Office

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how many civil servants are employed in the Opposition Whips' Office in the House of Commons; and what are their salaries.

Mr. Richard Luce: There are four, one chief clerk superintendent (salary scale £8,469 to £9,841) and three office assistants (salary scale £5,880 to £6,971). In addition, both grades receive inner London weighting (£1,527 per annum) and night duty allowance (£3,803 per annum).

SCOTLAND

Housing

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of new housing developments which have been planned to commence in the current year in Angus.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Angus district council's January 1986 housing plan sets out its general strategy for housing provision in its area. It is, however, for the council to deploy resources available for capital expenditure according to the priorities it determines on a year-to-year basis, and details of council projects programmed are not held centrally.

The Scottish Special Housing Association has no plans to commence any projects in the current year in Angus. The Housing Corporation in Scotland has implemented one scheme in the district, comprising 10 units, in the current year.

No detailed information is available centrally on private sector housing developments.

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of new housing developments which have been planned to commence in the current year in Perthshire.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Perth and Kinross district council's October 1986 housing plan sets out its general strategy for housing provision in its area in the current year. It is, however, for the council to deploy resources available for capital expenditure according to the priorities it determines on a year-to-year basis, and details of council projects programmed are not held centrally.

The Scottish Special Housing Association is currently providing 50 special needs in Perth. The Housing Corporation in Scotland has approved five housing association projects in Perthshire, comprising 40 houses, which have started or are expected to start in the current year.

No detailed information is available centrally on private sector housing developments.

Criminal Offenders (Tayside)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether individuals charged with criminal offences by the Tayside police have their names put on public record, open for public inspection.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No.

Dunkeld Cathedral

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provisions are made by him to make bell ringing possible in the part of Dunkeld cathedral which is run and controlled by him.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Arrangements can be made for teams of bell-ringers to ring the bells in the tower of Dunkeld cathedral which is in the care of the Secretary of State. A charge is payable to cover costs.

Infant Mortality

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the six health authorities in Scotland with the highest percentage of post neonatal deaths, for each year since 1975.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

Health Board Areas[1] with the highest post-neonatal mortality rates,[2] Scotland, 1975-86

Health Board Area	*Rate per 1,000 live births*
1975	
Lanarkshire	8·1
Greater Glasgow	6·8
Fife	6·7
Dumfries and Galloway	6·3
Argyll and Clyde	6·2
Ayrshire and Arran	5·8
1976	
Greater Glasgow	6·0
Ayrshire and Arran	5·5
Lothian	5·0
Dumfries and Galloway	5·0
Lanarkshire	4·5
Highland	4·5
1977	
Fife	5·9
Ayrshire and Arran	5·8
Greater Glasgow	5·5
Highland	5·4
Lothian	5·2
Grampian	5·0
1978	
Western Isles	7·2
Highland	5·8
Greater Glasgow	5·7
Tayside	4·4
Lothian	4·0
Orkney	3·9

Health Board Area	Rate per 1,000 live births
1979	
Borders	7·9
Fife	6·0
Highland	5·7
Dumfries and Galloway	5·6
Shetland	5·5
Forth Valley	5·1
1980	
Dumfries and Galloway	6·7
Highland	6·2
Ayrshire and Arran	6·1
Lothian	4·6
Greater Glasgow	4·6
Grampian	4·5
1981	
Orkney	7·9
Borders	6·0
Forth Valley	5·4
Lanarkshire	5·0
Grampian	5·0
Greater Glasgow	4·9
1982	
Orkney	8·5
Dumfries and Galloway	8·2
Shetland	5·8
Greater Glasgow	5·0
Lothian	4·5
Lanarkshire	4·5
1983	
Shetland	12·7
Borders	7·2
Dumfries and Galloway	6·0
Argyll and Clyde	5·6
Highland	4·6
Lothian	4·6
1984	
Grampian	5·7
Forth Valley	5·5
Dumfries and Galloway	5·1
Lanarkshire	4·6
Fife	4·3
Orkney	4·2
1985	
Orkney	8·6
Shetland	6·5
Highland	6·1
Dumfries and Galloway	5·1
Greater Glasgow	4·6
Borders	4·3
1986	
Orkney	9·0
Borders	5·6
Grampian	4·6
Dumfries and Galloway	4·2
Greater Glasgow	4·2
Lothian	4·0

Notes:

[1] Figures for the smaller health board areas, in particular Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles, are based on small numbers of live births and therefore rates vary considerably with small changes in the number of deaths.

[2] Deaths four weeks and over but under one year per 1,000 live births.

Fire Service Training School

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to what extent the recommendations made by his Department's inspector for changes in procedures at the Scottish fire service training school at Gullane were based on the evidence received during his Department's inquiry into allegations about conduct at the school; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The recommendations made by Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire Services were based on views formed by the inspector during his inquiry taking into account the evidence given to him by recruits and instructors and the surrounding circumstances.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what evidence he has as to the veracity of complaints made by fire service recruits about practices at the Scottish fire service training school at Gullane; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Complaints were received from one brigade only; I am satisfied that these have been properly investigated and that the conclusions reached by the independent inspector were reasonable.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when his Department published the report of the inquiry into allegations of malpractices at the Scottish fire service training school at Gullane; and when the report was made available to the Lothian and Borders fire brigade.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The report of the inquiry was not published nor was it made available to Lothian and Borders fire brigade, but a very full news release was issued on 16 September 1987, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if a Fire Brigades Union representative was present at all interviews with recruits and other staff in connection with his Department's inquiry into complaints about the Scottish fire service training school at Gullane; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Fire Brigades Union was invited to be represented at all the 24 interviews. I understand that a local office bearer was present at 20 of these but elected not to attend the other four and further that he expressed himself satisfied with the way in which the interviews were conducted.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will explain the reason for changes in procedures at the Scottish fire service training school at Gullane which have been introduced following the recent inquiry into complaints about that establishment.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The changes in procedures were introduced following recommendations made by the inspector in his report.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the procedure used by a senior officer of the Strathclyde fire brigade to interview 12 recruits about allegations of humiliating and degrading treatment at the Scottish fire service training school at Gullane.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No special procedures were used. The senior officer of Strathclyde fire brigade

interviewed 13 recruits from his brigade, including one who has now left the service at Strathclyde's training establishment. None had any complaint to make nor had they seen anyone abused.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if any senior officers of the Lothian and Borders fire brigade were formally interviewed in connection with his Department's inquiry into complaints about the Scottish fire service training school at Gullane; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The inspector interviewed the third officer of the brigade on 17 June 1987.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he is satisfied with the way in which the firemaster and staff of the Lothian and Borders fire brigade dealt with complaints about the Scottish fire service training school at Gullane; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the investigation carried out by the Lothian and Borders fire brigade into allegations of humiliating and degrading treatment of recruits at the Scottish fire service training school at Gullane; and if he is satisfied with the conduct of the brigade in relation to these complaints and the subsequent inquiries.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The inspector in his report commented on the handling of the matter, and these comments have been passed to the firemaster.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide the firemaster of the Lothian and Borders fire brigade with a copy of the report and associated evidence of his Department's inquiry into complaints about the Scottish fire service training school at Gullane; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. The report was private and contained information which was given to Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire Services on the understanding that confidentiality would be observed. However, the findings and recommendations of the report were contained in a very detailed Scottish Office news release published on 16 September 1987, copies of which have been placed in the Library. Subsequently, Lothian and Borders fire board was given a detailed resume of the inquiry and I met representatives of the board on 29 January 1988 to discuss the matter further.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration was given to allegations about dangerous practices in his Department's recent investigation concerning the Scottish fire service training school at Gullane.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am unaware of any allegations of dangerous practices.

Parkhead Stadium

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last made an official visit to a football match at Parkhead stadium; whether he has received any report from the Strathclyde police concerning crowd control arrangements at Parkhead; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend has not been invited to the stadium. He has not received a report from Strathclyde police on crowd control arrangements there, nor does he see a need to ask for one.

Modern Languages

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what plans he has to implement the recommendations of European Community document 7706/84 on the teaching of modern languages in Scottish schools;

(2) if he has any plans to include the teaching of a foreign language in the core curriculum for S3 and S4;

(3) what future role he plans for the teaching of modern languages in Scottish secondary schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) on 12 February at columns *369-70*.

In Vitro Fertilisation

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* those hospitals which are equipped to offer in vitro fertilisation services.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In vitro fertilisation (IVF) services are provided at centres approved by the Voluntary Licensing Authority. There are four such centres in Scotland. Clinical IVF services are provided at Ninewells hospital, Dundee, and at the Royal infirmary, Glasgow, and clinical IVF services in association with research work are provided at the Royal infirmary, Aberdeen, and the Simpson memorial maternity pavilion, Edinburgh.

Winter Mortality

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish tables in the manner of those in the answer to the hon. Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley) of 9 February, *Official Report*, column *170*, relating to excess winter mortality in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

'Excess' winter mortality: Scotland, 1958-87

Year	*Winter Deaths A*	*Summer Deaths B*	*Differences A-B*	*Percentage Excess* $\frac{(A-B) \times 100}{B}$
1958	18,622	12,667	5,955	47·0
1959	21,048	12,900	8,148	63·2
1960	17,194	13,705	3,489	25·5
1961	18,752	13,514	5,238	38·8

Year	Winter Deaths A	Summer Deaths B	Differences A-B	Percentage Excess (A-B) x 100 / B
1962	18,516	13,460	5,056	37·6
1963	20,711	13,775	6,936	50·4
1964	16,510	13,644	2,866	21·0
1965	17,806	13,860	3,946	28·5
1966	19,471	13,655	5,816	42·6
1967	15,834	13,365	2,469	18·5
1968	19,264	13,482	5,782	42·9
1969	18,148	13,970	4,178	29·9
1970	19,271	14,157	5,114	36·1
1971	16,712	14,145	2,567	18·1
1972	19,108	14,349	4,759	33·2
1973	18,171	14,303	3,868	27·0
1974	17,093	14,490	2,603	18·0
1975	17,338	14,114	3,224	22·8
1976	19,780	14,071	5,709	40·6
1977	17,049	13,859	3,190	23·0
1978	19,112	14,433	4,679	32·4
1979	18,810	14,580	4,230	29·0
1980	17,304	14,246	3,058	21·5
1981	17,293	14,269	3,024	21·2
1982	19,364	14,165	5,199	36·7
1983	18,108	14,245	3,863	27·1
1984	17,225	13,831	3,394	24·5
1985	17,466	14,354	3,112	21·7
1986	18,456	14,273	4,183	29·3
1987[1]	16,878	14,088	2,790	19·8

[1] Provisional

Five Year Period	Percentage Excess Winter Mortality
1958-1962	42·1
1963-1967	32·3
1968-1972	32·0
1973-1977	26·2
1978-1982	28·2
1983-1987	24·5

Notes:

Winter: deaths registered in months January to March inclusive.
Summer: deaths registered in months July to September inclusive.

Catering and Domestic Services

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will place in the Library an account of the discussions of the seminar on 2 October 1987 addressed by representatives of the trade associations for catering and domestic services contractors, referred to in his letter from general managers of Scottish health boards in December 1987;

(2) if he will list the names and companies of participants in the seminar on 2 October 1987 addressed by representatives of the trade associations for catering and domestic services contractors, referred to in his letter dated December 1987 sent to general managers of Scottish health boards.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to my replies of 19 January at columns *664-65*, to the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith).

Clydesdale (Population)

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the population of each town and village in the Clydesdale constituency since the 1983 boundary change.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 10 February 1988 at column *142*.

The term "Clydesdale constituency" was taken to mean the constituency following the 1983 boundary reorganisation, since there was no constituency of that name before then.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the population of each of the villages in the Clydesdale constituency with fewer than 500 people.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: 1981 census population figures are available for various predefined areas and for user-specified aggregations of postcode unit areas. Villages were not included in the former category because they did not have easily-defined boundaries.

D and C Operations

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has concerning the total number of D and C operations performed in Scotland in each of the last 25 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[pursuant to his reply, 2 February 1988, c. 575]:* The number of D and C operations performed in NHS hospitals in Scotland from 1961 to 1985 (the latest year for which information is held centrally) is given in the following table:

Year	Number of operations
1961	18,167
1962	19,218
1963	18,524
1964	19,464
1965	18,918
1966	20,271
1967	20,255
1968	20,210
[1]1969	19,000
[1]1970	19,300
1971	19,538
1972	15,380
1973	13,824
1974	13,836
1975	13,016
1976	13,540
1977	11,916
1978	11,757
1979	10,889
1980	15,281
1981	12,931
1982	10,841
1983	13,031
1984	12,828
1985	13,210

[1] Estimated figures.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Official Opposition

Mr. James Wallace: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will set out *(a)* the number of employees, *(b)* the machinery and equipment and *(c)* other benefits in kind which are provided to the official Opposition from public funds in addition to the assistance to Opposition parties, indicating the estimated annual value in each case.

Mr. Wakeham: The current annual cost to public funds of staff and benefits in kind provided to the official Opposition in addition to the moneys provided under the scheme for financial assistance to Opposition parties ('Short money') is estimated to be as follows:

	Estimated cost £
(i) *Opposition Whips Office (House of Commons)*	
4 staff	[1]55,000
Office equipment (photocopier)	1,500
Postal services	[1]15,000
(ii) *Opposition Whips Office (House of Lords)*	
Postal services	12,000
HMSO supplies	1,500

[1] Pay and Earnings Related National Insurance Contributions.

In addition, a car is available to the Leader of the Opposition from the Government car service. The cost of this in the current financial year is estimated to be about £36,000.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list *(a)* the salary of the Leader of the Opposition, *(b)* the salaries of any Opposition Whips who receive a salary in excess of the salary of an ordinary hon. Member and *(c)* the annual cost to public funds of the use of the Government car service by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wakeham: The information is as follows:

		Salary at 1.1.1988 £ per annum
(a) (i)	Leader of the Opposition (Commons)	[1]48,148
(ii)	Leader of the Opposition (Lords)	28,688
(b) (i)	Chief Opposition Whip (Commons)	[1]40,798
	Assistant Opposition Whips (Commons)	[1]31,738
(ii)	Chief Opposition Whip (Lords)	25,618
(c)	The annual cost to public funds of the use of the Government car service by the Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons is included in Class XX, Vote 1 and is estimated to be about £36,000 in the current financial year. The Leader of the Opposition in the House of Lords is not provided with the use of the Government car service.	

[1] The salaries quoted for office holders in the House of Commons include a reduced parliamentary salary of £16,911 per annum.

Members' Pensions

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Lord President of the Council what Exchequer contribution will be payable to a personal pension scheme in respect of a right hon. or hon. Member who elects to withdraw from the parliamentary contributory pension fund; and what is the current Exchequer contribution to the parliamentary contributory pension fund.

Mr. Wakeham: In a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) on 4 December 1987, column *731*, my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General explained that from July 1988 the Social Security Act 1986 will require employers to make a contribution for personal pension optants, as part of their national insurance contributions, at a rate no less than the contracted-out rebate (which currently stands at about 4 per cent. of the individual's salary). The Government consider that an employer's contribution at that level would be appropriate for public service employees opting for personal pensions, and that the same approach should be followed with the parliamentary pension scheme. The Exchequer currently makes a contribution of 13 per cent. of salary to the parliamentary contributory pension fund.

ENVIRONMENT

Residuary Bodies

15. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he plans to take any action, in the light of the latest annual reports of the seven residuary bodies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The 1986-87 annual reports show that all seven residuary bodies are making good progress in discharging the functions they inherited from the former metropolitan county councils and the Greater London council. I congratulate all seven on their work.

Young People (Homelessness and Crime)

18. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department will conduct a study on the alleged link between homeless young people and crime, drug abuse and alcohol abuse.

Mr. Waldegrave: We published research in 1981 which suggested that only a very small percentage of young homeless people suffer from alcoholism and drug addiction.

Land Disposal

19. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the performance of local authorities in disposing of unused and underused land.

Mr. Trippier: By the end of 1987 local authorities had disposed of over 16,000 acres of the unused and underused land entered on the registers of such land which the Department maintains.

In its recent report on local authority property management the Audit Commission has drawn attention to the ways in which the management practices of local authorities can be improved, which I am now considering.

Rate Capping

20. **Mr. John M. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the effectiveness of the rate capping of precepting authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Department has received numerous representations about rate and precept limitation, including a recent letter from the leader of the metropolitan borough of Solihull about the effectiveness of precept control in the west midlands next year to which we will be replying shortly.

72. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to be in a position to announce his final decisions on rate limits for authorities selected for rate limitation for 1988-89.

Mr. Chope: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) on 12 February, at column *384*.

Fulmer (Sewerage)

21. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next expects to meet the chairman of the Thames water authority to discuss mains sewerage in Fulmer.

Mr. Ridley: The provisions of mains sewerage in Fulmer is a matter for the Thames water authority and South Buckinghamshire district council.

Planning Policy

22. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals to increase the effectiveness of town and country planning laws relating to development commencing without the granting of permission, or in breach of conditions attached to permissions.

Mr. Waldegrave: Effective enforcement of planning control depends on the local planning authority's vigilance and resolution in using its statutory powers in the Town and Country Planning Act 1971. So far as enforcement appeals are concerned, we have recently completed an efficiency scrutiny, and an action plan, to achieve all-round improvements, will be published shortly.

34. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will investigate the practice in the outer London boroughs whereby estate developers demolish residential buildings to create large-scale development sites; and whether he will consider proposing changes in the planning laws in the light of this practice.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. My right hon. Friend is satisfied that no extension of control for this purpose is necessary. It is already necessary to obtain permission to demolish listed buildings of architectural or historic interest, and unlisted buildings in conservation areas; and redevelopment requires planning permission in the usual way.

35. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received about improving planning procedures.

Mr. Waldegrave: Hon. Members and others are rightly concerned about delays in reaching decisions on planning applications and appeals. We have recently urged local authorities to ensure that their procedures for dealing with planning applications operate efficiently and do not impose unwarranted delays. A substantial programme of measures is in hand to improve appeals procedures and to speed decision times.

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that local planning authorities comply with the advice within circular 13/87 in general and paragraphs 11 and 12 in particular.

Mr. Waldegrave: The advice in my Department's circulars about town and country planning is not mandatory, but it is a material consideration in decisions about development proposals. An applicant may appeal from a local planning authority's decision and an authority which has acted unreasonably on a case which goes to appeal by inquiry may face an award of costs. We are monitoring the extent to which local authorities impose conditions on planning permissions so as to restrict the freedoms in the general development order and the use classes order.

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he and his inspectors will award costs against local authorities on appeal when evidence is laid before him that local planning authorities frustrate the spirit of circular 13/87.

Mr. Waldegrave: The power, in section 250(5) of the Local Government Act 1972, for my right hon. Friend or a planning inspector to award a party's costs in appeal proceedings is discretionary in relation to the particular facts of any appeal and the parties' behaviour during the appeal proceedings. Paragraphs 7 and 13 of circular 2/87 make it clear, respectively, that if, without reasonable planning grounds, planning authorities fail to follow relevant advice given in departmental circulars, or they impose conditions which are unnecessary and unreasonable, an award of costs may be made against the planning authority when it is justified in the circumstances.

Homelessness

23. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the Government's latest estimate of the number of people who are homeless as a result of mortgage defaults.

Mr. Waldegrave: In the year to September 1987 English local authorities accepted an estimated 10,300 households as homeless because of mortgage arrears.

25. **Mr. Ashdown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the total cost at 1986-87 prices to local authorities of housing homeless families in emergency accommodation *(a)* in 1986-87 and *(b)* in 1979-80.

Mr. Ridley: From information supplied by authorities in England and Wales and calculations made by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, net expenditure on hostels and bed and breakfast, when expressed at 1986-87 prices, amounted to £1,697 and £472 per 1,000 population in 1986-87 and 1979-80 respectively.

40. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to seek to amend the homeless persons legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Roe: No.

52. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further steps he proposes to reduce levels of homelessness.

Mrs. Roe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning gave to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 2 December 1987, at column *927*.

60. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to publish and distribute the leaflet giving guidance on homelessness which was circulated for consultation purposes on 8 April 1987.

Mrs. Roe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) on 8 February, at column *22*.

66. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give figures for the number of households accepted as homeless in England *(a)* in 1980 and *(b)* in 1987 or the latest year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Roe: English local authorities are estimated to have accepted responsibility under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Acts for finding accommodation for 62,900 households in 1980 and for 108,100 in the 12 months to September 1987. The estimate for 1980 is not strictly comparable with more recent figures, because of a change in the method of reporting.

Environmental Protection

24. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals to issue a revised planning circular to provide clearer protection of the environment of the communities affected by opencast mining and similar activities; and what further consideration has been given to this subject since the Government's response to the recommendations of the Energy Committee's report on the coal industry.

Mr. Trippier: The Department issued revised draft planning guidelines for opencast coal mining for consultation in April last year. We are currently considering all the representations received and propose to publish revised guidelines in the near future.

Farm Buildings

26. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take further steps to ensure that planning authorities respond positively and quickly to applications for the alternative use of redundant farm buildings.

Mr. Waldegrave: Our planning policy since 1980 has been that permission should be granted for the conversion of redundant farm buildings to alternative uses unless there are specific and convincing planning objections. We re-emphasised this most recently in two planning policy guidance notes entitled "Green Belts" and "Rural Enterprise and Development", issued on 20 January. We continue to urge planning authorities to process all planning applications as quickly as possible.

Peak Park Planning Board

27. **Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to review the way in which members are appointed to the Peak Park planning board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend has no plans for such a review.

Planning Appeals

28. **Mr. Sean Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many planning appeals have been decided by himself since 1986; and how many have been determined on his behalf by inspectors.

Mr. Waldegrave: In 1987, 655 planning appeals were decided by the Secretary of State and 16,458 by inspectors acting on his behalf.

Housing Improvement Schemes

29. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many housing improvement schemes involving Estate Action have been approved so far in the present financial year.

Mr. Waldegrave: With the schemes I have announced today, 112 new Estate Action schemes will have been approved in the current financial year. Substantial financial support has also been given to some 70 schemes which were started last year.

62. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the potential for using Housing Corporation funds to support developments complementary to Estate Action programmes.

Mrs. Roe: There is considerable potential for housing associations to contribute to Estate Action programmes and this will be expanded by the provisions in the Housing Bill extending the power of registered associations to help with the regeneration of rundown areas and in providing services to other bodies such as tenants' groups. Decisions on whether to fund any particular association or project remain of course a matter for the Housing Corporation, but I am confident that its consultations with local authorities and associations will have alerted it to opportunities for funding association developments which will complement Estate Action programmes.

Rates Collection

30. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to meet the leader of the London Boroughs Association to discuss rates collection; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has not received any request from the leader of the London Boroughs Association for such a meeting.

Football (Membership Schemes)

31. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will reconsider his policy on membership schemes for football clubs, in the light of representations made by senior officers of the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Ridley: I want to see football clubs make further progress on membership schemes, including where necessary by making appropriate structural alterations to their grounds. Representations from the Metropolitan police have largely been in respect of constraints imposed on membership schemes at individual clubs by the present configuration of their grounds.

Rating Reform

33. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the proportion of the adult population liable to pay the community charge who will pay the charge within due time.

Mr. Howard: All adults liable to the community charge will be invited to pay by 10 equal instalments each year, though collecting authorities will have discretion to agree other arrangements with chargepayers who prefer a different frequency.

I have every confidence that local authorities will collect the community charge from those liable as efficiently as they now collect domestic rates.

Bed-and-breakfast Accommodation

36. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the latest available figure of people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in urban areas.

46. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the number of families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in rural areas.

47. **Mr. John Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the latest available figure of people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in non-urban areas and the figure for the previous year.

Mrs. Ree: The quarterly publication "Local Authorities' action under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act: England, Supplementary tables" includes the numbers of households temporarily placed by authorities in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. The latest issue, with the results of the third quarter 1987, gives in table 4(a) estimates of the numbers being accommodated at the end of September 1987 and a year before, by London boroughs, by metropolitan district councils and by other councils.

38. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he plans to meet representatives of Britain's local authorities to discuss the proposed community charge.

59. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the local authority associations to discuss the proposals in the Local Government Finance Bill.

69. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he plans to meet representatives of Britain's local authorities to discuss the proposed community charge.

Mr. Howard: I refer to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Dunnachie) on 4 November 1987, at column *737*.

53. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide an up-to-date list of all those organisations supporting the community charge and uniform business rate proposals in the Local Government Finance Bill.

67. **Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities have made submissions to him in support of the Local Government Finance Bill.

Mr. Howard: A summary of 1,271 responses, received by my Department before 31 October 1986, when the consultation period on the Green Paper ended, was placed in the Library on 15 December 1986. Since June 1987 my Department has received some 3,800 letters, including about 200 from local authorities and local authority associations. The letters contain a variety of comments on specific aspects of our proposals or requests for further information, and for this reason do not readily lend themselves to an analysis of correspondents' views.

64. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the position of parish and town councils under the community charge proposals, in the light of their prospective loss of the proceeds of rates from commercial premises.

Mr. Howard: I received a large number of representations from parish and town councils to the effect that the proposals in the Green Paper "Paying for Local Government" would have deprived them of any benefit from business rate income. The introduction of the collection fund, whereby grant and redistributed non-domestic rates will be applied in support of the expenditure of all tiers of authority, should meet their concern.

70. **Mr. McCrindle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received on the uniform business rate from the Confederation of British Industry and the National Association of Chambers of Commerce.

Mr. Howard: The CBI has made representations about some aspects of the uniform business rate and has asked for a £1·8 billion reduction in the total burden of rates on businesses, but has stressed that it considers the Government's proposals a substantial improvement on the status quo. The Association of British Chambers of

Commerce has expressed support for the uniform business rate, but has made representations seeking improved transitional arrangements and enhanced consultation arrangements between local authorities and business, which we are considering.

Basildon District Council

37. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has yet received any request from Basildon district council for redetermination of his decision to rate cap the council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has received no request from Basildon district council for redetermination of his decision to rate-cap the council. He has, however, received representations from the council asking him to consider raising the rate limit proposed by him for 1988-89 and I met members and officials from the council on 27 January 1988 to consider the council's arguments for a higher rate limit in 1988-89.

The Secretary of State has considered all the information available to him and in an order laid before the House of Commons on 12 February he specified for Basildon district council a maximum rate of 49·68p confirming his original proposal made on 9 December.

Houses (Multiple Occupation)

39. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the Government's policy towards houses in multiple occupation.

Mrs. Ree: My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning met a delegation from the Campaign for Bedsit Rights last December. Some representations have also been made to the Department, and to our environmental health adviser in the course of his visits to local authorities.

Nature Conservancy Council

41. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met members of the Nature Conservancy Council; and what matters were discussed.

Mrs. Ree: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan) to the hon. Member for Meironnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) on Tuesday 9 February, at columns *128-29*.

Development Corporations

42. **Miss Emma Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the impact of the English urban development corporations since they were set up.

Mr. Trippier: London Docklands DC and Merseyside DC, which were both set up in 1981, have had a major impact on their areas. Information is contained in their annual reports, copies of which are laid before the House. The four English urban development corporations set up in 1987 have embarked on initial projects and have generated considerable interest in their areas.

54. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money he has awarded to each of the urban development corporations he set up on 7 December 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend announced on 7 December his intention to set up further urban development corporations. No decisions have been taken on financial allocations.

58. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to meet the chairman of Telford development corporation to discuss the future of the corporation's assets.

Mrs. Ree: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so at present.

75. **Mr. Kirkhope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will visit Leeds to discuss his proposals for a mini urban development corporation there.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend has no present plans to visit Leeds, but I visited the city on 18 January and discussed the UDC proposal with leading local figures.

76. **Mr. Bart:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to be in a position to establish a new mini urban development corporation for central Manchester.

Mr. Trippier: The order establishing the UDC will be made after my right hon. Friend has received the consultants' advice on the boundary in March and the views of local interests on the proposed boundary.

45. **Mr. Hayward:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response there has been to his recent announcement of a proposed mini urban development corporation in Bristol.

Mr. Trippier: Generally welcoming.

Nuclear Waste

43. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has yet been informed by Nirex as to when he can expect a copy of its proposals for the disposal of intermediate nuclear waste; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Ree: My right hon. Friend expects UK Nirex Ltd. to submit its proposals for a deep dual-purpose disposal facility for low-level and intermediate-level radioactive waste within a year, after careful consideration has been given to the response to the discussion document "The Way Forward" and to other technical factors.

Anti-litter Strategy

44. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on plans to tidy up Britain.

Mrs. Ree: The Tidy Britain Group has prepared proposals for a fresh anti-litter strategy, which we are currently considering.

Sulphur Dioxide Emissions

48. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, in the light of the evidence contained in the report of the United Nations Economic Commission for

Europe about the increased emissions by Britain of sulphur dioxide compared with the year before, he will make a statement on what the Government is to do effectively to reduce such emissions.

Mrs. Roe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my the Under-Secretary of State my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan) to my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) on 12 November 1987, at column *185*.

Rent Arrears

49. **Mr. Heddle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current cumulative amount owed in rent arrears to all local authorities in England; and what further steps he is taking to reduce this amount.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope) on 20 January, at columns *756-57*, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) today.

Housing Defects

50. **Sir John Biggs-Davison:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation so as to amend the Housing Defects Act to attach grants for repairs to the property and not to its owner.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have no plans to do so. I am writing to my hon. Friend, setting out our reasons for this.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has made in reviewing the national grant eligible expenditure limits under the housing defects legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have decided that the national limits set in 1986 need revision, given that a year and a half has passed since they came into force and that we now have much more experience of actual repair costs. In the light of all the information available, we are proposing the following new limits:

House type	*Proposed limit* £	*Present limit* £
Local designations and any new designations	14,000	14,000
Cornish unit: 1 storey PRC	17,000	14,000
Dorran: 1 storey PRC	17,000	16,000
Gregory	17,000	14,000
Myton: 1 storey PRC	17,000	16,000
Newland: 1 storey PRC	17,000	16,000
Tarran: 1 storey PRC	17,000	14,000
Unity and Butterly: 1 storey PRC	17,000	20,000
Wessex: 1 storey PRC	17,000	24,000
Cornish unit: 2 storey PRC	23,000	16,000
Stent	23,000	20,000
Unity and Butterly: 2 storey PRC	23,000	20,000
Airey	27,000	16,000
Boswell	27,000	14,000
Dorran: 2 storey PRC	27,000	16,000
Dyke	27,000	24,000
Myton: 2 storey PRC	27,000	16,000
Newland: 2 storey PRC	27,000	16,000
Reema Hollow Panel	27,000	20,000
Schindler and Hawksley SGS	27,000	24,000
Smith	27,000	20,000
Stonecrete	27,000	16,000
Tarran: 2 storey PRC	27,000	14,000
Underdown	27,000	20,000
Waller	27,000	24,000
Wates	27,000	20,000
Winget	27,000	20,000
Boot	31,000	20,000
Orlit	31,000	24,000
Parkinson	31,000	20,000
Wessex: 2 storey PRC	31,000	24,000
Woolaway	31,000	20,000

These changes should help speed up the administration of the scheme. At present, local authorities often have to apply for individual higher eligible expenditure limits for particular properties: the new limits should reduce considerably the need for that. My officials will now be consulting the local authority associations, home owners groups, approved repairers and other interested bodies on these proposals. We hope to have all responses by early April and to reach a final decision soon after that. Bringing the new limits into force requires a negative resolution of the House of Commons. We hope to make such an order by May, so that new limits can be in operation by June.

Structure Plan (Berkshire)

51. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on his proposed modifications to the management structure plan for central Berkshire.

Mr. Waldegrave: To date my right hon. Friend has received 10 representations to his proposed modifications to the replacement structure plan for Berkshire.

Berkshire county council is advertising the proposed modifications this week, specifying a six-week period, ending on 31 March, in which representations on the proposed modifications may be made to my right hon. Friend. All representations will be carefully considered.

HOTCHA Scheme

55. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the operation of the HOTCHA scheme, which provides opportunities for house purchase for tenants of housing association properties.

Mr. Waldegrave: The home ownership scheme for tenants of charitable housing associations was introduced in September 1984 to help tenants who would have had the right to buy but for the charitable status of their landlords. Tenants assisted under the scheme receive discounts, funded by housing association grant, on the purchase of homes on the open market. Over 5,000 properties have been purchased at discounts totalling some £80 million. Because demand outstrips the resources available a waiting list has been in force since 1 October 1986. At the end of December 1987 2,645 applications were being held. A further £19 million has been allocated for the scheme for 1988-89 to cover outstanding purchases set in hand before 1 October 1986 and a proportion of the applications received since that date. Applications received up to 31 May 1987 will now be allowed to proceed.

Water Authorities

56. **Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the chairmen of the water authorities of England and Wales; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Ridley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on Thursday 11 February, at column *298*, to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley).

71. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to meet the chairmen of the water authorities in England and Wales to discuss compliance with the relevant EEC directives.

Mr. Ridley: I meet the chairmen of water authorities regularly to discuss matters of current interest, including compliance with EC directives.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was discussed at his meeting with the water authority chairmen on 19 January.

Mrs. Rae: I refer the hon. Member for the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 11 February, at column *298*.

Planning Applications

57. **Mr. Simon Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is satisfied with the performance of local authorities in dealing with planning applications.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. I believe that local authorities should be able to deal with at least 80 per cent. of planning applications within eight weeks of receiving them. On 1 February we published figures which showed that in the three months January-March 1987 41 authorities achieved that, but on average during that quarter English local authorities decided only 59 per cent. of applications within eight weeks. I hope that all local authorities will examine their procedures for handling planning applications and introduce improvements where appropriate, to make the system work more efficiently.

Housing Associations

61. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give an estimate of the percentage by which he expects housing association rents to increase in real terms *(a)* over the next two years and *(b)* over the next four years.

Mrs. Rae: I can give no such estimate. Existing housing association tenancies will remain subject to rents registered by rent officers. Rents on lettings which take place after commencement of the relevant provisions of the Housing Bill will be for the associations to determine, taking account of their costs and of the grant available to them.

UK 2000

63. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much public money has been spent by UK 2000; what information he has as to how much private money has been spent; and what has been achieved.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend has paid grants to UK 2000 and its participating organisations totalling £600,000 in 1986-87 and £1·4 million in 1987-88. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have also paid smaller grants. In 1986-87, £400,000 of private sector support, in cash and kind, was secured by UK 2000 and in 1987-88 this has risen to £1·4 million. At the end of 1987-88 UK 2000 will be supporting over 400 projects offering over 12,000 community programme places and involving over 12,000 volunteers.

Westminster Pier

65. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in the light of the resolution of the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) of 2 February, he will now reconsider his earlier decision not to call in the planning application for Westminster pier; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. In considering whether to call in the Thames water authority's planning application for a new Westminster pier my right hon. Friend gave very careful consideration to all the material issues involved, including the impact of the proposed structure on the Palace of Westminster and its environs. We have looked again at the matter, in the light of the resolution referred to, but see no reason to take the decision out of the hands of Westminster city council, which is the local planning authority.

Consultative Document (North Devon)

68. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment upon what dates *(a)* the consultative documents on right to buy, deregulation of the private rented sector, housing action trusts, tenants' choice and home improvement policy were despatched to North Devon district council and *(b)* replies were required; and what length of time he treats as a resonable minimum for a local authority to receive, distribute, consider, discuss and provide reasoned comment on such papers.

Mr. Waldegrave: The table provides the information requested about each of the consultation and explanation documents.

	Issued	*Comments invited by*
Right to buy	2 October	30 October
Deregulation of the Private Rented Sector	2 October	30 October
Housing Action Trusts	8 October	6 November
Tenants' Choice	2 November	4 December
Home Improvement Policy	5 November	4 January 1988

In issuing these documents we thought it sensible to give respondents an indication as to when their comments would be most useful, as clearly the earlier the comments are made, the more helpful they are in developing policy. However, nothing absolute was intended about the target dates set for responses and all comments that we receive are being carefully considered. I am grateful to North Devon district council for the helpful comments it submitted on four of these documents.

It is not possible to generalise about the timetable for submitting comments on any other consultation and explanatory documents, since this will inevitably vary depending on the particular circumstances.

Derelict Land Grant

73. **Mr. Dickens:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much his Department has spent on derelict land grant since 1979-80.

Mr. Trippier: Between 1 April 1979 and 31 December 1987 the total amount of derelict land grant paid by the Department was £416·73 million.

Local Authorities (Property Management)

74. **Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he takes to monitor the performance of local authorities in managing their property assets effectively.

Mr. Chope: The recent major report from the Audit Commission, to which I referred in my answer given earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) sets out ways of making major improvements in property management. The local auditors will be following up and monitoring progress. Better property management can improve the performance of every local authority service, as well as generating increased capital receipts.

Nirex

77. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will next meet the chairman of the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive; and what matters will be discussed.

Mrs. Rae: My right hon. Friend has had discussions with the chairman of Nirex from time to time about the disposal of radioactive waste, but he has at present no plans to meet him.

Fire Authorities (Competitive Tendering)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received seeking the exemption of fire authorities from competitive tendering for maintenance of fire tenders, under the Local Government Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend received a number of representations on this subject. The Government announced during proceedings on the Local Government Bill on 15 February that, while we were not willing to remove references to fire vehicle maintenance from the Bill, we had decided to use the order-making powers in the Bill to exempt that activity from compulsory competition when we make the first set of regulations and orders under the Bill.

Water Supplies

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the areas that have provided bottled water to mothers feeding young infants when ground water supplies have exceeded limits in European Economic Community directives.

Mrs. Rae: Water undertakers are not required to inform my right hon. Friend when bottled water is provided for infant feeding because of high nitrate levels in public water supplies. However, I understand that bottled water was supplied to nursing mothers in a village in Worcestershire until July 1987 and will continue to be supplied to a village in the Yorkshire water authority area until the supply is replaced later this year.

Green Belt

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the area of designated green belt land in the Eddisbury constituency in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* the latest year for which information is available.

Mr. Waldegrave: Green belt within the Eddisbury constituency was broadly defined in the Cheshire structure plan approved in July 1979. It fell to local plans to establish the precise areas and this has been done for the following areas:

(a) In Vale Royal District:
- Frodsham and Helsby local plan (adopted May 1981)
- Northwich local plan (adopted May 1981)
- Tarporley local plan (adopted June 1982).

(b) Chester District:
- Chester rural areas local plan (adopted October 1985).

For those parts of the constituency not yet covered by local plans the green belt remains as broadly defined in the structure plan.

Home Ownership Scheme

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to make changes to the Housing Corporation's home ownership scheme for tenants of charitable housing associations in the light of his review of the operation and effectiveness of the scheme.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have no present plans to change the scheme.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest number of new home owners estimated to have been assisted by the Housing Corporation's home ownership scheme for tenants of charitable housing associations; and how many are now on the waiting list.

Mr. Waldegrave: Over 5,000 properties have been purchased through the home ownership scheme for tenants of charitable housing associations. At the end of December 1987 there were 2,645 applications on the waiting list.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what funds have been allocated for transferable discounts under the home ownership scheme for tenants of charitable housing associations for the financial year 1988-89.

Mr. Waldegrave: A further £19 million has been allocated for the home ownership scheme for tenants of charitable housing associations in the Housing Corporation's approved development programme for 1988-89.

Local Authority Services (Competitive Tendering)

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue draft regulations on the phasing-in of competitive tendering; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: We are currently considering the responses to the Department's consultation paper on the implementation of the competitive tendering provisions in part I of the Local Government Bill. The necessary regulations and orders will be made as soon as possible after Royal Assent. I see no need to issue them in draft first.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what the overall response was to the Government's proposals for the phasing-in of competitive tendering from local authorities; and whether those will be published.

Mr. Chope: Some 210 responses to the English consultation paper have been received so far. In general respondents welcome the proposed phasing-in, although many authorities consider that the overall period is too short and that they should be given greater local flexibility.

Where the authors have agreed, copies of responses will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Urban Programme

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what the level of urban programme resource allocation has been for Leeds for each year since 1982-83; and if he will give the corresponding figures for Bradford.

Mr. Trippier: The initial allocations are in the following table:

£ million

	Leeds	*Bradford*
1982-83	4·98	4·92
1983-84	4·93	4·98
1984-85	4·13	4·58
1985-86	4·14	4·78
1986-87	4·13	4·58
1987-88	4·50	4·50
1988-89	4·40	4·50

In addition, the following urban development grant projects have been approved since 1983:

	Number of projects	*Amount of grant £ million*	*Associated private investment £ million*
Leeds	14	6·265	15·035
Bradford	4	1·829	5·016

Ancient Woodlands

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to amend existing regulations on the protection of ancient woodlands; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rae: There are no present plans to do so, but we shall keep the position under review, in relation to both ancient woodlands and the amenity value of woodlands generally.

Housing and Planning Act 1986

Mr. Kirkhope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the provisions in the Housing and Planning Act 1986, which would enable local housing authorities to pay home improvement grants for works to the common parts of buildings containing flats, are expected to come into force.

Mr. Waldegrave: The orders required to bring into operation the provisions of the Housing and Planning Act relating to common parts grants came into force today. This will be of considerable benefit to flat-dwellers as, for the first time, discretionary grants will be available to help with the costs of repairing and improving those parts of buildings containing flats, such as roofs and staircases, which lie outside the flats themselves. Local authorities will be able to give common parts grants for a wide range of buildings from large purpose-built mansion blocks to small scale conversions.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the function and composition of the Royal Ulster Constabulary special support unit.

Mr. Stanley *[holding answer 12 February 1988]:* There are no longer units in the Royal Ulster Constabulary called special support units. The RUC does have headquarters mobile support units (HMSUs). They are mobile sections of uniformed officers, under the command of an inspector, and comprise specially trained personnel who are readily available for flexible and sustained duties against terrorist and other serious criminal activities.

Ulster Security Liaison Committee

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the function and composition of the Ulster security liaison committee.

Mr. Stanley *[holding answer 12 February 1988]:* It is not the practice to comment on the security arrangements of the Northern Ireland Office.

Discrimination

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many companies or public bodies in Northern Ireland have suffered Government sanctions for failure to observe the code on fair employment;

(2) how many manufacturing service and commercial organisations, local councils and Government departments who have signed the fair employment undertaking have had Government sanctions taken against them for alleged discrimination in employment practice.

Mr. Viggers *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* Government Departments in Northern Ireland and the major public bodies sponsored by them do not normally accept tenders from employers unless they are in possession of an equal opportunity certificate issued under section 7 of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1976, following the signature of a declaration of principle and intent. No central records are kept in respect of tenders not accepted.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Green Pound

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by what estimated

amount, to the nearest £100 million, British farmers' incomes have been depressed due to the discrepancy between the value of the green pound and the real pound sterling for the two years 1986 and 1987.

Mr. MacGregor: Farmers' incomes in 1986 and 1987 were affected by many factors. I regret that it is not possible to assess reliably what the aggregate income levels would have been in these years given that the changes in the green pound as envisaged could have affected many other decisions on support levels.

Intervention Stocks

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by how much British farmers have benefited from intervention purchases over the past five years.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Over the five years up to 1 April 1987 the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce spent £2,575 million buying surplus produce into intervention and received £870 million from sales out of intervention. During that period the board's costs of storing intervened produce, excluding financing charges, were £385 million.

Peanuts

Mr. Butler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce legislation to make mandatory the display of warning labels against human consumption upon peanuts sold in petshops; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I have no plans to introduce such legislation. I would have thought it self-evident to the public that feed sold in pet shops was not intended for human consumption.

Milk and Pigmeat

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will give the figures for the value of United Kingdom exports of *(a)* milk and milk products and *(b)* pork and pigmeat for each year since 1979.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The information requested on United Kingdom exports is as follows:

(a) Milk and milk products

Year	Exports to the world	Intra-Community	Exports to Third countries
		£ thousand	£ thousand
1979	187,147	141,671	45,476
1980	284,589	203,627	80,962
1981	315,695	203,039	112,656
1982	330,118	214,707	115,411
1983	301,284	175,684	125,600
1984	238,381	123,320	115,061
1985	273,459	161,082	112,377
1986	294,055	211,939	82,116
1987	274,010	184,217	89,793

Source: Eurostat.

(b) Pork and pigmeat

£ thousands

Year	Total	Intra-Community	Exports to Third countries
		£ thousand	£ thousand
1979	22,528	[2]19,595	2,933
1980	24,438	21,915	2,523
1981	26,726	22,637	4,089
1982	39,755	33,907	5,848
1983	58,050	50,216	7,834
1984	55,494	49,733	5,761
1985	66,315	56,922	9,393
1986	71,888	65,293	6,595
1987[1]	47,435	43,200	4,235

Source: Customs and Excise Overseas Trade Statistics.
[1] Figures to end of September.
[2] Spanish figures included in Third country total.

Milk

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures the Milk Marketing Board took to ensure the movement of milk and milk products during the trough months of milk production; and with what success.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The Milk Marketing Board collects milk from producers and arranges for its delivery to dairies and manufacturers: it is not responsible for the movement of milk products. The board allocates milk so that the important liquid market is given first priority. During the seasonal trough in milk production additional supplies to meet this priority market are normally drawn from milk allocated to butter and milk powder factories. However, last year's trough was unusually deep and prolonged, with the consequence that, for a period, some milk also had to be drawn from cheese manufacture, but this was kept to a minimum.

Butter

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the retail price of butter for each year since 1970, in actual prices and in constant prices, and also showing 1970 as 100.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The table below provides the information requested:

Average Retail Price of Butter[1]

	Current p/500 gm.	Constant[2] p/500 gm.	Constant[2] p/500 gm. (1970 = 100)
1970	18·9	18·9	100
1971	26·2	23·9	126
1972	29·3	25·0	132
1973	25·6	20·0	106
1974	26·5	17·8	94
1975	34·9	18·9	100
1976	48·3	22·5	119
1977	58·7	23·6	125
1978	66·1	24·5	130
1979	78·4	25·6	135
1980	85·5	23·7	125
1981	92·4	22·9	121
1982	99·4	22·7	120
1983	99·1	21·6	114
1984	100·5	20·9	111
1985	102·8	20·1	106
1986	104·0	19·7	104
1987	103·0	18·7	99

[1] Home-produced except for 1970-72 when no quotas were available and the price of New Zealand butter is used.
[2] Deflated by all items Retail Prices Index.

Grain Production

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total quantity of grain produced in each of the European Economic Community countries in 1987 and also the total amount of co-responsibility levy paid by each member state, in pounds sterling.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Figures for production and co-responsibility levy revenue collected are only available for the 1986-87 cereals marketing year (July/June).

Member state[1]	*Production million tonnes*	*Levy*[3] *£ million*[2]
Belgium	2·3	13·3
Denmark	8·0	6·9
West Germany	25·6	50·0
Greece	5·2	2·6
Spain	16·0	17·6
France	50·1	57·3
Ireland	1·8	3·3
Italy	17·8	24·5
Luxembourg	0·1	0·2
Netherlands	1·3	11·7
United Kingdom	24·5	39·4

[1] Portugal does not yet implement the EC cereals regime.
[2] Converted at spot rates for 31 July 1987.
[3] Collected by 31 July 1987 for transactions to 30 June 1987.

Farm Rents

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will update the information in the reply to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North of 3 March 1987, *Official Report*, column *540*, about average farm rents in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* England for each year since 1979.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The table gives average farm rents for *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* England. Information cannot be provided for the United Kingdom because Northern Ireland's land tenure system is not generally comparable with that of Great Britain.

Average farm rents (£ per hectare)

Year	*Great Britain*	*England*[2]
1979	38·23	42·13
1980	45·27	50·01
1981	52·91	58·36
1982	60·39	66·14
1983	67·70	73·93
1984	74·37	81·27
1985	80·42	88·01
1986	86·52	95·11
[1]1987	89·21	97·84

[1] Provisional.
[2] The figures for England are due to be published in a Ministry statistics release on 24 February 1988.

Milk Imports

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the monthly imports into the United Kingdom of fresh milk from European Economic Community member states for each year since such imports were first permitted.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Imports of UHT and sterilised milk have been allowed since November 1983. The latest data from Customs and Excise indicate that imports are running at about 500 tonnes a month, consisting mainly of skimmed milk from Belgium. More detailed information on this trade, and on Northern Ireland's imports of milk for processing, is given month by month in "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom".

Bovine Somatotropin

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many licences have been issued for experimental injections of bovine somatotropin into cows; what is the number of cows covered by such licences and the length of period of licensing; and what proportion of British cows' milk is likely to originate from the farms licensed to use bovine somatotropin.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Animal test certificates authorising trials of bovine somatotropin have been issued under the Medicines Act 1968 to three companies. These certificates are normally issued for a period of two years and are renewable. The certificates currently granted permit the treatment of a maximum of 1,130 cows. However, the number of cows treated at any one time is likely to be less than this. Information relating to the proportion of milk originating from farms involved in the trials is not available.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to which countries of the European Economic Community allow the experimental use of bovine somatotropin.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Information is not available for all member states of the EC as there is no requirement to notify the Commission of trials taking place. Nevertheless, it is understood that bovine somatotropin has been tested in Germany, Netherlands, France, Italy and Spain.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to whether artificial bovine somatotropin has been tested on humans and found to be safe.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Before the certificates for trials of BST were granted the applications were considered by the veterinary products committee which was satisfied that the use of this product in trials in milk cows would cause no risks to human health. No information has since become available which would cast any doubt on the evidence considered at that time.

Animal Medicines

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to receive the independent study carried out by the Mr. Peter Cuncliffe into the licensing of animal medicines; and when the results will be made known to the interested parties.

Mr. MacGregor: The study, which I announced on 3 July last year, has been completed. Mr. Cuncliffe presented his report to me earlier this month and I am

placing a copy in the Library. The report makes 25 recommendations aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the animal medicines licensing operation. I am giving careful consideration to Mr. Cuncliffe's recommendations, and am most grateful to him for the work he has undertaken. Consultation will be undertaken as necessary and I will report further to the House.

Wheat

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will update the information in his reply to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North of 22 April 1987, *Official Report*, column *638*, about the average price of wheat received by the producer in the United Kingdom, Germany, and France *(a)* in national currency and *(b)* converted to £ sterling at the market rates prevailing on the latest date for which this information is available.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* Producer prices are not available for the three countries. For the week ending 31 January 1988 market prices for milling wheat were as shown below:

	National currency per tonne	*£ per tonne*
Germany (Hamburg)	426·30 DM	143·50
France (La Pallice)	1,354·67 FF	135·20
United Kingdom (Hull)		144·20

Source: Commission of the European Community.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will update the information in his reply to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North of 11 March 1987, *Official Report*, columns *228-29*, about the average ex-farm price of wheat received by *(a)* British farmers, *(b)* French farmers and *(c)* German farmers, as well as the average intervention price for common wheat, in 1979, 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1987, in £ sterling.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* The information requested by my hon. Friend is not yet available for the 1986-87 and 1987-88 marketing years. I set out in the table the information for the 1979-80 and 1983-84, 1984-85 and 1985-86 marketing years. Ex-farm prices for the European Community as a whole are not available.

Producer Prices for Wheat

[1]*£/tonne*

	1979-80	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
United Kingdom	95·83	127·10	[3]112·00	110·15
West Germany	122·18	125·75	118·83	116·63
France	88·03	101·04	99·05	100·85
EC[2]	91·44	120·16	119·01	116·98

[1] Exchange rates based on average spot rate for marketing years except for EC prices which have been converted at the average UK green rate for the marketing years.
[2] Average intervention price for common wheat.
[3] Revised figure.
Source: "Agricultural Situation in the Community" 1981, 1986 and 1987 reports.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 18 February 1988

NORTHERN IRELAND

Human Rights (Report)

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has recieved the 13th annual report of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: The report has been published today, and copies have been laid before Parliament. It covers the period 1 November 1986 to 31 October 1987.

The report deals with a wide range of matters which the commission has considered during the year under review. These include emergency legislation, the European convention on human rights, the European and United Nations conventions for the prevention of torture, the European social charter, compensation for victims of terrorism and community relations.

Copies of my response to the commission's report and of the report itself have been placed in the Library.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Education Reform

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what number of administrators he estimates will need to be added to the current administrations of the 12 proposed inner London local education authorities for the purpose of administering education in their own areas following the abolition of the Inner London education authority;

(2) how many administrators he estimates will be needed by the proposed 12 inner-London local education authorities for the administration of student award schemes for the 12 separate authorities after the abolition of the Inner London education authority;

(3) how many additional administrators he estimates will be needed by the proposed 12 inner-London local education authorities for the purpose of recoupment arrangements between each of these boroughs, after the abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Dunn: Each inner London council will be responsible for deciding on the appropriate staffing levels to fulfil its duties as a local education authority from 1 April 1990.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the additional duties which the Government intend to impose on the inner London borough councils, in the period 1 April 1989 to 31 March 1991, as a result of the abolition of the inner London education authority.

Mr. Dunn: As my right hon. Friend explained in his statement on 4 February, we propose that the inner London boroughs should become the local education authorities for their areas on 1 April 1990. During 1989 they will be required to produce development plans, setting out the service they propose to provide and the arrangements they envisage for the transfer, as a basis for local consultation.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to ensure the maintenance and continuation of the innovation and research work undertaken by the Inner London education authority's research and statistics branch.

Mr. Dunn: Each inner London council will be required to produce, during 1989, a development plan setting out the service it proposes to provide. My right hon. Friend made it clear in his statement on 4 February, at columns 1178-79, that we will also be discussing with the boroughs which services, if any, might be provided on a co-operative basis.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what arrangements will be made by his Department to monitor and evaluate curriculum developments within the proposed new 12 inner London local education authorities, following the abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Dunn: The inner London education authorities will be covered by the requirements of the national curriculum as this is introduced, in the same way as all other education authorities in England. The information provisions will ensure that parents and others are kept fully informed about the curriculum offered to pupils and their achievements.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science why his statement to the House on the reorganisation of education in London did not define in detail which of the Inner London education authority's services are planned to be transferred to which successor bodies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: As my right hon. Friend made clear in his statement, this will be a matter for discussion with the inner London councils.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will indicate in detail what scope he envisages for the setting up of joint education boards under section 6 of and schedule 1 to the Education Act 1944 covering parts of the inner-London area following the abolition of the Inner London education authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend explained in his statement that each inner London council will become the local education authority for its area. We will be discussing with the councils which services, if any, might be provided on a co-operative basis. If necessary, powers under the Education Act 1944 enable the Secretary of State to require groups of boroughs to establish joint education committees in respect of certain services.

Professor Sigbert Prais

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the circumstances of the resignation of Professor Sigbert Prais from the mathematics working group for the new national curriculum.

Mrs. Rumbold: In his letter of resignation to my right hon. Friend Professor Prais explained that the calls that the mathematics working group had made on his time were affecting his other commitments. My right hon. Friend regrets that the working group will no longer have the benefit of Professor Prais' advice. However, he has asked the group to take into account in the further work the issues raised by Professor Prais in the note which Professor Prais submitted last November.

School Activities (Charges)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will now announce the outcome of his consultations on charging for school activities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I undertook consultations about charges for school activities in response to requests from parents, schools and LEAs for clarification of the effect of section 61 of the 1944 Education Act. We together received some 480 responses; we have also had further discussions with the local authority associations and others. Respondents to the consultations have generally endorsed our objectives, which are to preserve the principle of free education, to clarify the law and to maintain valued provision.

The consultations made clear that our proposals can be substantially simplified while still achieving these aims. We therefore propose to introduce new clauses to the Education Reform Bill on the following lines:

(a) to establish clearly that schools may invite but not require parents to make voluntary contributions to the school's activities in order to enhance what is otherwise provided. Such contributions should benefit all pupils in a group whether or not their parents have contributed, and might cover for example class trips in school time, or the provision of additional computer equipment.

(b) to permit schools to charge for the additional costs of activities provided outside school hours. But charging will not be allowed where provision organised out of school hours is specifically required by an external examination syllabus or national curriculum legislation.

(c) Except in the following two cases, to prohibit charging for any activity undertaken within normal school hours; and also prohibit "charging in kind" for such activities—though schools will not be prevented from encouraging pupils to bring in their own materials on a voluntary basis where appropriate, for example for cookery classes.

(d) to permit charges for individual instrumental music tuition, taken with a parent's agreement, even when it is provided during normal school hours.

(e) to confirm that charges may be made for board and lodging for residential courses such as field trips, as allowed under the 1944 Act. But the proviso in that Act that charges must be remitted if suitable education cannot be provided on an alternative non-residential basis is rarely practicable and will not be repeated.

(f) to provide that the full cost of board and lodging must be remitted where children of parents receiving family credit or income support are required to go on a field trip; and that more generally schools may use their powers to remit charges in the light of their own published policies.

The legislation will not require any charges to be made. Where charges are allowed it will be for the provider of the service (generally the school, but in some cases the LEA) to determine whether they should be made.

We believe that these proposals will be widely welcomed as a practical solution to a long-standing problem which has become increasingly difficult in recent years, and which all concerned have urged us to tackle. Such legislation will reaffirm the basic principle of free school education, will ensure that parents, schools and LEAs know clearly what is and is not permitted, and will enable worthwhile enhancements to normal provision to be retained.

ENERGY

Opencast Coal Mining

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what steps he takes to ensure compliance with the law dealing with the scale of private opencast coal operations laid down in section 36 of the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946 as amended by section 46 of the Opencast Coal Act 1958;

(2) if he has any plans to seek to amend the current legal limit on the scale of private opencast coal operation in the light of evidence given by Sir Robert Haslam to the Select Committee on Energy on British Coal's practice as regards interpretation of the current rules.

Mr. Michael Spicer: As I explained during the debate on the coalfields communities on 20 November 1987, at column 1362, the Government are committed to the development of a prosperous private sector for coal and are considering whether to raise the statutory limits applied to the licensed sector. In the meantime, I have asked Sir Robert Haslam to consider what scope exists for greater flexibility within the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act as it stands. Under existing legislation the British Coal Corporation is responsible for the granting of licences for private opencast mining operations.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the locations and dates of licences granted since 1981 by British Coal to private operators of opencast coal workings to excavate single sites believed to contain 35,000 tonnes of coal or more and contiguous sites believed to contain a combined total of 50,000 tonnes of coal or more.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This is a matter for the British Coal Corporation and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Research Expenditure

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of public expenditure for which he is responsible is spent on the research development, production and deployment of *(a)* nuclear energy and *(b)* other forms of energy.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The total amount of voted expenditure in 1986-87 for which the Secretary of State for Energy was directly responsible was £1,663·2 million. Of this, £188·3 million, or 11·3 per cent., was in connection with nuclear energy and £1,452·8 million, or 87·3 per cent., in connection with other forms of energy — the remainder being expenditure in relation to Departmental administrative costs. On the basis of our latest forecast outturn for 1987-88, the corresponding figures are: nuclear 12·3 per cent. and other forms of energy 86·1 per cent.

Electricity Supplies (Emergencies)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Linlithgow

(Mr. Dalyell), *Official Report*, 8 February, column *62*, what measures are in force physically to protect the Central Electricity Generating Board headquarters for the national grid control system in Southwark against malicious intruders; whether the Central Electricity Generating Board employs any security personnel at the site; what back-up system exists in the event of a total breakdown at Southwark; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The threat of terrorism and malicious damage at all CEGB installations is recognised and appropriate measures are taken. It would not be appropriate for me to reveal the details. If national control in Southwark were lost for any reason, plans exist for its functions to be transferred to an emergency control centre.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

RUC (Prosecutions)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received about the decision not to initiate prosecutions against members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

The Attorney-General: I have received a number of letters from hon. Members, various groups and from the general public commenting on the statement I made on 25 January.

Extradition

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Attorney-General how many requests for extradition have been made to the Irish Government since December 1987.

The Attorney-General: A total of 20 warrants, issued in respect of six persons, have been submitted to the Irish authorities since the date of entry into force of the Irish Extradition (Amendment) Act 1987.

Seventeen of those 20 warrants, issued in respect of four of those six persons, are not covered by section 44A of the Irish Extradition Act 1965 (added by section 2(1) of the Extradition (Amendment) Act 1987), which relates to directions to be given by the Irish Attorney-General concerning the backing of warrants.

One warrant, covered by section 44A, is to be withdrawn, the person in respect of whom it was issued having returned of his own volition to the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Attorney-General what is his policy as regards the requirements for establishing a case for extradition and the conditions he has to comply with and what information he has as to the policy of the Attorney-General of the Republic of Ireland on those matters.

The Attorney-General: The requirements for the backing of warrants in the Republic of Ireland are laid down in part III of the Irish Extradition Act 1965, the Extradition (European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism) Act 1987 and the Extradition (Amendment) Act 1987. Under the last mentioned Act, I understand that the Irish Attorney-General is required to give a direction that certain warrants for the arrest of a fugitive shall not be backed for execution by the Garda Siochana unless he is of the opinion that that there is a clear intention to prosecute or to continue the prosecution of the fugitive and such intention is founded on the existence of sufficient evidence. The Government have been concerned that these new provisions now inserted into the Irish Extradition Act 1965 would present impediments to extradition from the Irish Republic. (That Act before this amendment had effectively reciprocated the provisions of the relevant United Kingdom legislation, contained in the Backing of Warrants (Republic of Ireland) Act 1965.) The Government made those concerns known to the Irish Government when the terms of the amending legislation were first intimated. In particular, the Government were concerned that they might lead to a requirement that the Irish courts be furnished with the actual evidence supporting any warrant submitted for backing in the event of a challenge to the execution of such warrant. The Government considered, and still consider, that seriously damaging consequences for the intended criminal proceedings in the United Kingdom could follow if that were to occur.

I have notified my counterpart in the Irish Republic that I am entirely willing to provide him in each instance with a note from me confirming that the United Kingdom prosecuting authorities had considered the evidence, as they are required to do; that they were satisfied that it was sufficient to found a prosecution; and that there was a settled intention to prosecute accordingly. I have also agreed to his request that I provide him in each instance with a note setting out the relevant law.

I had hoped that these particulars would be sufficient to satisfy the requirements of the new Irish legislation, but the Irish Attorney-General has indicated that this is not the case. In these circumstances, I am considering with the Irish Attorney-General what practicable steps can yet be taken to secure the important mutual objective of enabling extradition between our two countries to proceed effectively.

WALES

Residential Homes

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many officers in each health authority area in Wales are appointed to inspect private and publicly owned residential homes *(a)* for the elderly, *(b)* for the mentally ill, *(c)* for mentally disabled people and *(d)* for physically disabled people; and if he will outline the training and guidance which such officers have received.

Mr. Grist: Information about the total numbers of local authority and health service staff engaged in this function in Wales is not held centrally. The training of such staff is the primary responsibility of the authorities concerned, but the Welsh Office has co-operated in the provision of suitable facilities and has issued general guidance from time to time.

Regional Assistance

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how his expenditure on regional aid in each of the next three years will be divided between *(a)* regional selective assistance, *(b)* regional development grant, and *(c)* the Welsh Development Agency, at constant prices.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 15 February 1988]*: Planned expenditure by my Department, as contained in the 1988 public expenditure White Paper and expressed at constant prices[1] is as follows:

£ million

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Regional selective assistance	42·1	46·1	52·7
Regional development grants	58·3	37·2	23·8

Gross planned provision[2] for the Welsh Development Agency on the same price basis, excluding £1·5 million per annum transferred to the Development Board for Rural Wales amounts to:

	£ million
1988-89	103·7
1989-90	101·5
1990-91	101·2

Expenditure provision for 1989-90 and 1990-91 will of course be considered in the 1988 survey.

[1] Cash figures adjusted for general inflation as measued by the GDP deflator at market prices (1986-87 base year).
[2] A combination of the direct taxpayer contribution and the expected proceeds from rents, sales and services.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Food Aid

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much food aid from European Community surplus stocks of cereals was sent abroad in the last three years; to which countries and in what amounts; what was the cost of transporting and administering the total amount of food aid; and what obstacles he sees to expanding food aid from European Community surpluses.

Mr. Chris Patten: The European Community has allocated over 1 million tonnes of cereals as food aid in each of the last three years; over 90 per cent. of it has been obtained from sources within the Community. Detailed statistics are included in the European Commission's annual report on food aid policy and management. The 1984 report was deposited with the Select Committee on European Legislation on 30 July 1987, and is available in the Library of the House. The 1985 and 1986 reports will be deposited shortly, when they are circulated by the Commission.

The European Commission has reported expenditure on the transport of food aid (not only cereals) in 1986 as £68 million. Figures for transporting cereals alone, and for the cost of administering food aid, are not separately recorded.

Provision of food aid from the EC is fully justified in famine situations. However, in the longer term food aid will not solve the problem of continuing food shortages in developing countries; production by local farmers must be encouraged. Food aid may increase demand for imported foodstuffs which can never be produced locally and hamper efforts to encourage local food production in recipient countries.

PRIME MINISTER

Little Lowford

Q43. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to make an official visit to Little Lowford, North Rugby.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Pensions

Q50. **Mr. Harry Ewing:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the under-calculation made in the cost of living increase due to be paid in 1987 to retired public sector pensioners; and how it is proposed to refund to such pensioners the shortfall in their pensions.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) on 18 December 1987, at columns 845-46. Details of the arrangements for making payments to charities are still being worked out and will be announced soon.

Scottish Schools and Colleges

Q72. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Prime Minister if she intends to review other proposed closures of Scottish schools and colleges in the light of her intervention over the proposed closure of Paisley grammar school.

The Prime Minister: The Secretary of State for Scotland has made regulations which will ensure that any proposals to close a school which is operating at over 80 per cent. of its capacity will in future require his consent.

RAF Lakenheath

Q73. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next expects to visit RAF Lakenheath.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Vacant Land

Q138. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to a publicly owned site of vacant land.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

European Council

Q144. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the outcome of the European Council in Brussels on 11 and 12 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I made on Monday 15 February.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister when the official communiqué of the European Council Heads of Government meeting was made available to Her Majesty's Government; at what time of which day it was placed in the Library; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The official conclusions of the European Council will take the form of a single text which will be prepared once agreement is reached at the Foreign Affairs Council on the non-arable stabilisers package.

These conclusions will be placed in the Library of the House as soon as they have been circulated by the presidency. For the benefit of the House, two documents —the overall agreement (SN 517/88) and the detailed draft conclusions prepared by the German presidency before the European Council (SN 461/88)—were placed in the Library yesterday. As explained in the cover note, document SN 461/88 was agreed except in so far as it was modified by SN 517/88. It is those two documents which will form the basis of the single text which has still to be produced. As I said to the House yesterday, I apologise that the documents were not availabe before my statement.

European Commission (President)

Q155. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next expects to meet the President of the Commission of the European Communities.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

EC (Agricultural Spending)

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a further statement setting out precisely the exceptional circumstances which can be used to justify agricultural spending in excess of the guidelines under the Brussels agreement of 11 and 12 February, in the light of the publication since her statement of 15 February, *Official Report*, column 706, of annex V of the note from the presidency (EEC document SN 461/88).

The Prime Minister: Document SN 461/88 was a draft of conclusions circulated by the presidency before the European Council. It was overtaken by decisions taken at the Council in a number of important areas. The agreed outcome of the Council is recorded in document SN 517/88. This contains no reference to provision for exceptional circumstances, since I and a number of others strongly opposed any such reference, and no such provision was agreed.

Surplus Food Stocks

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister what estimate was made by the European Council of the cost of depreciating and disposing of existing surplus stocks which are to be financed outside the guideline, and which she referred to in her statement on 15 February, *Official Report*, column 706; and if she will further publish a table showing the amounts of stocks of each commodity which the Council agreed would be covered by these arrangements outside the guideline.

The Prime Minister: EEC document SN 461/88 states that amounts will be inscribed in title 8 of the budget for depreciation of existing excessive stocks (1988 prices) as follows:

1988	1,200 mecu
1989-91	1,400 mecu per year

These were based on overall figures provided by the Commission, which is now preparing a detailed breakdown between commodities.

Surplus Butter

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if the special arrangements made in 1987 to transfer the cost of dumping butter surpluses from the European Economic Community to member states, which were covered by the report of the Court of Auditors to the Council of Finance Ministers, will continue following the Brussels agreement of 11 and 12 February; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: These arrangements are not affected by the agreement. Member states will receive reimbursement for the costs of disposal on the timetable previously agreed.

Cereals

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister on what basis the Council estimated that cereal production in the European Economic Community would reach the level of 168 million tonnes in the current year, as set out in her statement of 15 February, *Official Report*, column 705; and what information was supplied to the Council about actual cereal production in the European Economic Community in each of the previous four years, respectively.

The Prime Minister: The EC Commission provides all member states with details of Community cereals production for previous harvests and trend projections for future harvests.

The figures are as follows:

	million tonnes
1984	173·2
1985	160·5
1986	154·3
1987	[1]153·1
1988	[2]167·7
1989	[2]171·0
1990	[2]174·4
1991	[2]177·5

[1] Estimate
[2] Trend projection

Engagements

Mr. Cran: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 February.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 February.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 February.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 February.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 February.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 18 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Immigration

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current

average waiting time for the determination of entry clearance applications from fiancées and spouses in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

Mr. Mellor: The average waiting time from submission of an entry clearance application to first interview for fiancé(e)s and spouses in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh is as follows:

	Fiancé(e)s	*Spouses*
	Time in months	
New Delhi	7	3
Bombay	9	6
Islamabad	16	10
Karachi	10	5
Dhaka	8	8

Some applications are determined after first interview. No statistics are available on waiting times in cases where further information is required of applicants or where applications have to be referred to the Home Office.

Syrian Security Forces

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Syrian Government about allegations of torture by its security forces.

Mr. Mellor: None since October 1986 when we broke diplomatic relations with Syria.

Palestinian Refugees

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to *(a)* how many Palestinian refugees there were in 1958 and at the last available date, *(b)* how many Palestinian refugees have been provided with jobs and permanent housing by each of the Arab states since 1958, *(c)* how much financial assistance each of the Arab states gives to the Palestinian refugees and what this is as a percentage of their gross national product, *(d)* how many Palestinian refugee families have been provided with permanent housing by Israel since 1967 and *(e)* how the infant mortality rate in Gaza has altered since 1967 and what information he has about the rate in the Palestinian camps in other countries.

Mr. Mellor: *(a)* In 1950 just over 800,000 Palestinian refugees were registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA); in October 1987 the total was approximately 2,218,000. Figures for 1958 are not available.

(b) This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

(c) Contributions to UNRWA are set out in the report of the Commissioner-General, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

(d) UNRWA estimate that around 5,000 Palestinian families have moved from refugee camps in Gaza to Israeli Government-sponsored housing projects. Housing construction costs are met by the families concerned.

(e) UNRWA's health programmes have helped to reduce the infant mortality rate in Palestinian refugee camps over the past decade; the rate remains higher in Gaza than elsewhere.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Northumberland Ambulance Service

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many staff have been employed by the Northumberland ambulance service for each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Figures on a comparable basis are not held centrally for the years prior to 1982, due to the NHS reorganisation in that year. Such information as is available is given in the table.

NHS Ambulance Staff (including ambulance officers) employed at Northern Regional Health Authority Headquarters and Headquarters Units

At 30 September	*Whole time equivalents*[1]
1982	657
1983	661
1984	616
1985	591
1986	596

Source: DHSS annual census of NHS non-medical manpower.
Note:
[1] Figures are rounded to nearest whole-time equivalent.

District Health Authorities

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North on 26 November 1987, *Official Report*, columns *319-21*, if he will list in league order, with the highest at the top, by acreage of land held, district health authority areas within the National Health Service in England, showing the valuation in each case *(a)* before the recent revaluation and *(b)* at the present valuation as decided by the district valuer.

Mrs. Currie: Returns from district valuers are currently being checked for completeness before being aggregated. It is likely to be several weeks before the information sought is available, when I let my hon. Friend have a further reply.

St. Andrew's Hospital, Thorpe St. Andrew

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the total acreage of *(a)* St. Andrew's hospital, Thorpe St. Andrew, Norwich (North) and *(b)* St. Andrew's hospital, Thorpe St. Andrew, Norwich (South); and if he will give details in each case of the valuation prior to the recent revaluation and present valuation as decided by the district valuer.

Mrs. Currie: The acreages are 123 and 32 respectively. Valuations of these sites were not provided by the district valuer in 1985. As the sale of one of the sites is now under active consideration, I am not prepared to prejudice effective marketing by disclosing the current valuation.

NHS Property (Norwich)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all National Health Service property within the Norwich health authority district, stating acreage and valuation in each case *(a)* before the recent revaluation and *(b)* at the present valuation as decided by the district valuer.

Mrs. Currie: The property with a site area of one acre or more, currently held by the Norwich health authority is listed with their acreage, and where available, the district valuer's open market valuation of 1985. For commercial reasons we are not prepared to disclose the current valuations of particular sites.

Property	*Acreage*	*Valuation*[1] *£ million*
Norfolk and Norwich Hospital	16·262	3·300
Whittingham Hospital	8·400	0·250
Wayland Hospital	9·708	0·150
Colman Hospital	5·983	1·200
West Norwich Hospital	20·912	1·900
Drayton Hall Maternity Home	8·271	—
Hellesden Hospital	64·877	—
David Rice Hospital	35·778	—
Bethel Hospital	1·213	—
Land at Vale Hospital	15·750	0·010
St. Andrews Hospital	155·120	—
Eaton Grange	1·296	0·200
Hales Hospital	10·112	—
Little Plumstead Hospital	125·420	0·570
Croiner and District Hospital	3·700	0·200
North Walsham War Memorial Hospital	6·900	0·280
St. Michaels' Hospital	17·760	0·330
Kelling Hospital	31·975	0·580
Pine Heath Hospital	11·760	—
Fletcher Hospital	6·229	0·245
Mundesley Hospital	24·180	0·250
Dereham Hospital	14·500	0·243
Wells and District Hospital	1·707	0·225
North Walsham Health Centre	1·150	—
Thorpe Health Centre	1·750	—
Wymondham Health Centre	1·662	—

[1] These are open market valuations prepared specifically for Performance Indicators.

Single Payments (Leicester)

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table showing the number of people in receipt of single payments and the total amount of single payments made in each of his Department's offices in the Leicester area in each of the years 1983 to 1987.

Mr. Portillo: Information concerning the number of people in receipt of single payments is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The total number and cost of single payments made by each of the Department's local offices in Leicestershire is given in the table.

Number and cost of single payments made by Department of Health and Social Security local offices in Leicestershire during the period April 1983 to December 1987

	Office				
		Leicester			
Year	*Burleys Way*	*Lower Hill Street*	*Norton Street*	*Yeoman Street*	*Loughborough*
April 1983 to April 1984					
Number	3,138	5,438	4,630	6,137	3,100
Cost	£274,094	£614,589	£574,768	£683,905	£208,682
April 1984 to April 1985					
Number	4,475	8,920	9,508	9,419	4,943
Cost	£314,323	£724,558	£780,380	£784,057	£382,439
April 1985 to April 1986					
Number	6,825	11,032	12,969	12,168	6,291
Cost	£563,168	£904,285	£1,077,188	£1,042,317	£472,728
April 1986 to 7 April 1987[1]					
Number	8,363	10,828	12,521	14,642	5,345
Cost	£653,618	£813,747	£1,028,279	£1,321,734	£383,897
8 April 1987 to 15 December 1987[1]					
Number	2,327	3,358	3,836	4,728	1,708
Cost	£180,962	£224,912	£320,762	£375,584	£120,023

[1] The figures for April 1986–December 1987 are provisional and subject to amendment.

Benefit System (Data Protection)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that arrangements for the administration of the new benefit system are compatible with the requirements of the fourth and fifth data protection principles.

Mr. Portillo: The Department's standing instructions on data protection require that all computerised systems which contain personal data be identified and registered with the Data Protection Registrar. These instructions demand strict adherence to all the provisions of the Data Protection Act. Additionally, the Department has established a data protection unit whose responsibilities include monitoring to confirm compliance with all the data protection principles.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has had representations from local authorities concerning the difficulty of making arrangements for the processing of personal data in connection with the administration of the new benefit system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I am not aware of any representations arising from the use of personal data in the administration

of rebates or allowances from April 1988. If the hon. Member is aware of any particular difficulty perhaps he could let me know.

1991 Census

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether his Department has studied the impact of community charge legislation for the accuracy of the 1991 census.

Mr. Scott: The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys is taking steps to ensure that the 1991 census will be as accurate as possible. The likely effect of all possible causes of inaccuracy will be considered and monitored, both before the census in tests and after the census in post-enumeration checks. As in earlier censuses, it will be stressed that information provided by the public on census forms will be used only in the preparation of statistics.

Students (Benefits)

Mr. Ashdown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the cost of restoring the benefits which students have lost since 1979, showing separately the costs in respect of *(a)* transport benefits, *(b)* housing benefits and *(c)* supplementary benefit.

Mr. Portillo: On the cost of restoring assistance with student transport costs to its 1979 level, I refer the hon. Member to the reply of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) on 1 February 1988 at column *441*. The cost of reversing changes to the social security benefit rules for students cannot be calculated precisely because of the many variables. The total estimated net reduction in benefit expenditure in a full year arising from the changes made in 1986 and 1987 was, at 1985-86 benefit rates, £3½ million in unemployment benefit, £3½ million in supplementary benefit and £17 million in housing benefit. This takes no account of the £8 million cost of the related special increase in the accommodation element of the student grant. Expenditure on social security benefits paid to students is higher in real terms than in 1979, as relatively few students received help with rent and rates before the introduction of housing benefit in 1982-83.

Dual Laser Beam Sorter

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the reply of 25 January, which specialised laboratories in the United Kingdom have a dual laser beam sorter; and what plans there are to use such machines to test the radiation exposure of *(a)* workers, or former workers, in nuclear installations, *(b)* residents or former residents, of the areas around nuclear installations and *(c)* former members of the armed forces who served near nuclear bomb test sites.

Mrs. Currie: Of the laboratories in the United Kingdom with a dual laser beam sorter, we are aware of only one which is considering its use in estimating radiation exposure. I understand from the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid through the Department of Education and Science, that is clinical and population cytogenetics unit at Edinburgh has built such a device and one of its principal aims is to develop the technology so that the device can be used to detect the effects of radiation exposure on people. It is hoped that this may eventually be of use in assessing occupational radiation exposures.

Residential Homes

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many officers are appointed to inspect private and publicly owned residential homes in each health authority area in England *(a)* for elderly people, *(b)* for mentally disabled people, *(c)* for mentally ill people and *(d)* for physically disabled people; and if he will outline the training and guidance which such officers have received.

Mr. Newton: Information about the number of local authority staff engaged on these functions is not held centrally. The Department has issued general guidance to authorities about residential care and the registration system. The Secretary of State has commended to them the code of practice for residential care, "Home Life". This spring the Department's social services inspectorate is running jointly with the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work a series of workshops to support good registration and inspection practice and the handling of complaints. The Department is also arranging in conjunction with the Welsh Office the preparation of distance-learning material for the basic training of the staff of local authorities and health authorities engaged on the registration and inspection respectively of residential care homes and nursing homes.

Unemployment Benefit (Disqualifications)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if, in the light of his recent proposals to increase benefit suspension times from 13 to 26 weeks, he will give the percentage of those people disqualified for unemployment benefit on the grounds of being voluntarily unemployed without just cause or through misconduct who have imposed on them the full 13 weeks suspension; and what guidance is given to adjudication officers on imposing shorter disqualification periods.

Mr. Portillo: Information is not collected on the length of disqualifications and it could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Adjudication officers are advised that when considering the length of disqualification to be imposed they should give regard to the individual circumstances of each case and should exercise their discretion accordingly. They do not automatically apply a disqualification of the maximum period.

Urgent Case Payments

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether urgent case payments will still be available to those denied unemployment and supplementary benefit on grounds of being unavailable for work after the proposed change in legislation on 11 April.

Mr. Portillo: At present the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987 make no provision for payment of income support to a person who is required to be available for work as a condition of receiving income support but is found by an adjudication officer to be not available.

However, the Government plan amendment of the regulations so that payment of income support at a

reduced rate can be paid to such a person if hardship would otherwise be caused to that person or to a member of his or her family.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how, in view of his intention to substitute crisis loans for urgent case payments, he envisages such loans will be repaid; and if he will estimate the likely number of people who will be affected.

Mr. Scott: Where appropriate, social fund crisis loans will be recovered from future payments of certain social security benefits made to the recipient of the loan. Other arrangements for repayment will be made with recipients of crisis loans who are not in receipt of benefit. No firm estimates of numbers of crisis loans can be given in advance of experience.

Winter Mortality

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Sciences what information he has as to what research is currently taking place into winter mortality; how much of this is being funded by Her Majesty's Government; when the results of such research are expected; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The excess of winter deaths among the elderly is a matter of concern to the Government and we are anxious that the many factors involved should be carefully investigated to enable appropriate preventive action to be taken. The Medical Research Council, which is the main Government agency for biomedical and related research and receives its grant-in-aid through the Department of Education and Science, is at present setting up a working group to advise the council's physiological systems and disorders board on what scientifically valid studies could be carried out to address the reasons for the excess of winter deaths in the United Kingdom.

Maternity Statistics

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) of 11 December 1987, *Official Report*, columns *295-96*, if he will be able to provide the information requested after the new system for collecting maternity statistics, as set out by the steering group for health services information, comes into operation on 1 April.

Mrs. Currie: From 1 April 1988, information collected on all births, in NHS hospitals and elsewhere, will include: the method of delivery, the birth weight, the highest level of care received by the baby, the length of stay of the baby, the intended place of delivery, and the actual place of delivery.

Health Spending

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will give the capital spending on the hospital and community health services for each National Health Service region and for the special health authorities (i) in cash terms, (ii) adjusted using the gross domestic product deflator and (iii) adjusted using the National Health Service pay and prices index;

(2) if he will give the capital spending on hospital and community services in net terms after deducting proceeds from land and property sales (i) in cash terms and (ii) adjusted using the gross domestic product deflator.

Mr. Newton: Captial expenditure figures for the latest year available are given in the table.

Gross capital expenditure 1986-87

Regional and Special Health Authorities	*1986-87 (£000)*
Northern	52,686
Yorkshire	69,981
Trent	77,478
East Anglian	32,529
North West Thames	66,543
North East Thames	75,904
South East Thames	76,517
South West Thames	54,172
Wessex	70,999
Oxford	33,539
South Western	68,403
West Midlands	115,259
Mersey	48,443
North Western	73,394
Post-Graduate Special Health Authorities	28,165
Total Gross Expenditure	944,012
Less Capital receipts	137,805
Total Net Expenditure	806,207

Source: Health authority summarised accounts.

Health Authorities (Monitoring)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to the answer of 18 December 1987, *Official Report*, columns *936-37*, he will indicate whether the routine monitoring of regional health authorities spending has now been fully introduced; and to what extent it and the National Health Service Management Board have revealed a continuing deficit for health authorities on revenue account for the current financial year.

Mr. Newton: The first routine monitoring of regional health authority spending on an income and expenditure basis will cover the period from 1 April to 30 June 1988. As I announced in the House on 16 December the review carried out by the National Health Service management board in the autumn led to an additional £75 million being made available to English health authorities in response to the problem identified in the current financial year.

Hartley Hospital, Colne

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to announce his decision on proposals for closure of Hartley hospital, Colne.

Mrs. Currie: The regional health authority has decided that the transfer of out-patient services located at Hartley hospital and the future use of he building will be the subject of a public consultation exercise. A final decision on the proposals will be made by Ministers only if the community health council objects to them.

Camberwell Office (Post)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the figures for each successive

month from January 1987 to the present for the amount of post at the Camberwell office of his Department not yet linked with files, outstanding postal claims, single payment claims and other assessment work.

Mr. Portillo: The information is not available in the form requested. The amount of unlinked post over two days old at the Camberwell DHSS office is as follows:

Items of unlinked post over two days old at Camberwell DHSS office

Date	*Items*
13 January 1987	983
10 February 1987	4,399
10 March 1987	4,544
7 April 1987	3,292
5 May 1987	2,592
2 June 1987	3,242
30 June 1987	2,241
28 July 1987	2,996
25 August 1987	3,923
22 September 1987	2,673
20 October 1987	3,090
17 November 1987	2,228
15 December 1987	1,863
12 January 1988	2,413

Source: Regional Statistical Returns.

Urgent Needs Payments

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the figures for the number of urgent needs payments made in each successive month from January 1987 to the present, at the Camberwell office of his Department and the percentage which those figures represent of the total number of urgent needs payments made in the region.

Mr. Portillo: The information requested is as follows:

Date	*Number of urgent need payments*		*Camberwell's totals as a per-centage of the region's*
	Camberwell	*Region*	
13 January 1987	60	2,895	2·1
10 February 1987	103	3,843	2·7
10 March 1987	232	3,588	6·5
7 April 1987	245	3,447	7·1
5 May 1987	259	3,163	8·2
2 June 1987	648	3,520	18·4
30 June 1987	529	3,650	14·5
28 July 1987	482	3,919	12·3
25 August 1987	545	4,100	13·3
22 September 1987	576	4,233	13·6
20 October 1987	605	3,884	15·6
17 November 1987	435	3,827	11·4
15 December 1987	376	3,353	11·2
12 January 1988	371	3,305	11·2

Source: Monthly Statistical Returns.

Southend General Hospital (Radiotherapy)

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is now in a position to announce his decision on the appeal by the Southend community health council regarding the proposal by the North East Thames regional health authority to close the radiotherapy unit at Southend general hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: We hope to announce our decision very soon.

Single Payments

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the supplementary benefit single payment expenditure *(a)* for each local office and *(b)* nationally, for the 32-week period ended on 7 April 1987.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 11 February 1988]:* The supplementary benefit single payment expenditure nationally for the period for the 32 week period ending on 7 April 1987 was £167,385,633. This figure is provisional and subject to amendment. The information for each local office has now been placed in the Library.

Birmingham Children's Hospital

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many scheduled heart operations at Birmingham children's hospital were cancelled between 8 February and 19 February; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many children are on the waiting list for heart surgery in the west midlands; how many scheduled operations have been cancelled and how many emergency heart operations have been performed over the last 12 months at Birmingham children's hospital; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what is *(a)* the minimum number of intensive care unit beds recommended for the Birmingham children's hospital, *(b)* the minimum number of beds designated for heart operations and *(c)* the number of beds actually available in the week beginning 7 February for scheduled non-emergency operations; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* This detailed information is not held centrally. However, in 1987 a total of 288 cardiac operations were carried out at the Birmingham children's hospital compared with 155 in 1978 which represents an 86 per cent. increase. The total revenue allocation to the hospital under the supra-regional

services arrangements for neonatal and infant cardiac surgery in 1988-89 will be £1·032 million compared with £0·988 million this year. Decisions on the level of provision of beds are a matter for health authorities and the hon. Member may therefore wish to write to the chairman of the West Midlands regional health authority for the further information she seeks.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drug Traffickers

13. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to put in place bilateral international arrangements for the confiscation of assets of convicted drug traffickers.

33. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of discussions with foreign Governments about introducing reciprocal legislation to provide for the confiscation of all assets of drug traffickers.

Mr. Hurd: On 9 February my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I signed the first such agreement with the United States of America. We expect to conclude further agreements in the course of this year.

Dr. Frank Skuse

14. **Mr. Wall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to reinstate Dr. Frank Skuse in the light of the recent judgment of the Court of Appeal in the case of the Birmingham pub bombings.

16. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the light of the evidence of Dr. Frank Skuse at the Birmingham pub bombings Appeal Court hearing, he will order an inquiry into the Home Office forensic laboratory at Chorley; and if he will make a statement.

30. **Mr. Rees:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will order an inquiry into the Home Office forensic laboratory at Chorley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: No.

Prisoners (Welsh Language)

15. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines he has issued to prison governors in England and Wales concerning the rights of convicted prisoners and prisoners on remand to speak Welsh with visitors, to receive correspondence and printed matter in Welsh, and to send letters in Welsh; and whether these guidelines have been revised during the past year.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Prison standing orders provide that prisoners may speak the language of their choice at visits; and prisoners are free to send letters and to receive letters and publications in any language. The position, which has not changed recently, is the same for both unconvicted and convicted prisoners.

Chelmsford Prison (Staff)

17. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the current levels of prison officers at Her Majesty's young offenders prison, Chelmsford.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 9 February, there were 147 officers of grades VI to VIII at Her Majesty's Prison Chelmsford. We plan to post a further 17 officers there during March.

Crime Prevention

18. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will visit the Nottingham, North constituency to discuss crime prevention with local electors; and if he will make a report.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend has at present no plans to do so; but I hope to visit Nottingham, when an opportunity arises, to talk to those concerned with a wide range of local crime prevention activity. This includes a commendable increase in the number of neighbourhood watch schemes, the involvement of the private sector in local crime prevention initiatives through the local chamber of commerce, and last November's knives amnesty during which some 470 knives and other weapons were handed over to the police.

36. **Mr. Greg Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made by his Department in developing or stimulating crime prevention measures, particularly in the private sector.

Mr. John Patten: Good progress has been made on an increasingly wide range of crime prevention initiatives at local and national level. Home Office funding of the five local projects at Bolton, Croydon, Wellingborough, Swansea and north Tyneside has now ceased, but the projects will continue with funding from other sources. We have encouraged professional bodies and other groups and organisations to identify their crime prevention potential and to act. A great deal can be achieved through the dissemination of good practice, and bodies such as the Royal Institute of British Architects and the National House Building Corporation have arranged conferences or produced sound practical advice for architects and builders. The other way in which the private sector can help in the development and stimulation of crime prevention measures is through sponsorship. Recent examples include Rolls-Royce, which will be funding a local crime prevention project in Crewe, Barclays bank, which is meeting the salary cost of a project co-ordinator at Knowsley, and National Westminster bank, which has met the costs of providing domestic security equipment for schemes running in Avon and Birmingham.

British Broadcasting Corporation

19. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the future of the BBC.

Mr. Renton: In recent months we have received many representations about the future of broadcasting, including that of the BBC. A number have suggested new methods of financing the BBC. On this our policy remains that we accept the view of the Peacock committee that the

television licence fee should remain for the time being the principal means of financing the BBC, with the fee indexed to the retail prices index to encourage the BBC to use its resources efficiently and to determine priorities in carrying out its duties under its charter.

Police Cells

20. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will invite the Chief Inspector of Prisons to submit a report on the situation in police cells used to house prisoners on remand; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to his question on 15 February at column *437*.

50. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of people being held in police cells on 1 February.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 1 February 1988, 758 prisoners were held in police cells in England and Wales.

Television (Programme Content)

21. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to have any further discussions with the BBC and the independent television companies about the effectiveness of their self-imposed regulation of the content of programmes shown before 9 pm and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We shall keep in close touch with the broadcasting authorities over the next few months on a wide range of issues including their responsibility for enforcing programme standards. The Government recognise the need for stronger and more effective oversight of standards relating to the portrayal of violence and sex on television. My right hon. Friend has announced our intention to set up the Broadcasting Standards Council which will provide a focus for public concern about these matters.

Prevention of Terrorism

22. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce his response to Lord Colville's report on the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

41. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to seek to amend the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1984 in order to assist in combating terrorism.

Mr. Hurd: I refer my hon. Friends to what I said during the debate on the renewal of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984.

47. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions during 1987 he employed his powers to authorise an extension of detention under the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1984.

Mr. Hurd: In 1987 I authorised 41 extensions of detention under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984.

Charities

23. **Mr. McCrindle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to introduce amending legislation on charities.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend announced on 21 January, at column 1089, in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), that the Government intend to bring forward legislation to implement the recommendations of Sir Philip Woodfield's efficiency scrutiny for the supervision of charities.

27. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he proposes to seek to make any changes to the way in which the Charity Commission adjudges whether a purportedly religious organisation should be granted charitable status; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: This is a matter of common, rather than statute, law. The Government propose to improve the supervision and monitoring of all charities, in line with the recent efficiency scrutiny report by Sir Philip Woodfield. We are considering the scope of this legislation.

Prisons (Crown Immunity)

24. **Mr. Ashley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department has estimated the cost of removing Crown immunity from prisons with regard to health and safety and kitchen hygiene legislation.

Mr. Hogg: We are satisfied that existing arrangements are effective and can see no justification for the removal of Crown immunity from prisons with regard to kitchen hygiene legislation. The cost of removing Crown immunity has not been estimated.

Prisons (Private Sector Involvement)

25. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had regarding the involvement of the private sector in the building and management of prisons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) on 12 February at column *363*.

Police Manpower

26. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to how many non-white police officers are currently employed on uniform duties in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool, respectively; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested is in the table:

Number of non-white police officers employed on uniform duties

Force[1]	*As at 31 January 1988*
Metropolitan police	390
West Midlands police	[2]138
Greater Manchester police	78
Merseyside police	30

[1] The information is only available on a force basis.
[2] This is the total west midlands figure. Separate figures for uniformed officers are not available.

55. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement on his response to the report of the review of police manpower in Leicestershire, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On the basis of the review, the Leicestershire police authority has sought approval for an increase of establishment of 45 posts in 1988-89, 33 posts in 1989-90, and 13 posts in 1990-91. The application will be considered in the light of advice from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary along with applications which have been received from other police authorities.

Alcohol Abuse

28. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the licensed trade to discuss the recommendations of the Government's ministerial working group on alcohol abuse.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend has not recently had an opportunity to do so; I met representatives of the licensed trade to discuss these matters on 26 January.

Trial Verdicts (Review)

29. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will implement the recommendation of the Home Affairs Select Committee in its report on "Miscarriages of Justice" to the effect that an independent review body be set up to review cases of alleged miscarriage of justice; and if he will make a statement.

51. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will implement the recommendation of the Home Affairs Committee's report on "Miscarriages of Justice" that an independent review tribunal be set up to examine alleged miscarriages of justice; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: No. The Government's response to this recommendation was set out in paragraphs 7 to 16 of our reply to the Home Affairs Committee (Cmnd. 8856).

34. **Mr. Meale:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the recommendations of the Home Affairs Select Committee report on "Miscarriages of Justice" which have been implemented.

Mr. John Patten: The Select Committee's recommendation for the establishment of a public prosecution service was implemented in the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985. The other principal recommendations concerning an independent review body have not been accepted, for reasons given in the Government's reply to the report (Cmnd. 8856), to which I refer the hon. Member for further details.

42. **Mrs. Wise:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he proposes to refer any further cases of alleged miscarriages of justice to the Court of Appeal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend will continue to exercise the power given him by section 17 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968 in accordance with established practice where he is satisfied that there is some new evidence or other new consideration of substance which has not previously been taken into account by a court and which the Court of Appeal can properly consider.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

31. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will refer the case of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings to an independent review body of the sort recommended by the House Select Committee on Home Affairs report on "Miscarriages of Justice".

35. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set up an independent review body to examine evidence that the persons responsible for the Birmingham pub bombings are living in Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

38. **Mr. John Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish an independent review tribunal to examine evidence in relation to the Birmingham pub bombings that was not admissible before the Court of Appeal.

44. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set up an independent review body, along the lines recommended by Lord Devlin and the Home Affairs Select Committee, to review evidence by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) that he has traced and interviewed the four persons solely responsible for the Birmingham pub bombings and that they are all in Ireland.

57. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will refer the case of the Birmingham pub bombings to an independent tribunal; and if he will make a statement.

58. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will refer the case of the Birmingham pub bombings to an independent review body.

Mr. John Patten: I refer hon. Members to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Deptford and Lewisham (Ms. Ruddock) on 15 February at column *437*.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish an independent review body to consider evidence that the persons actually responsible for the Birmingham pub bombings are not in custody; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Deptford and Lewisham (Ms. Ruddock) on 15 February at column *437*.

I understand that on application by the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings the Court of Appeal has certified that there has been raised a point of law of general public importance. I understand further that the court has refused the six men leave to appeal to the House of Lords, but that it is now open to them to apply to the House of Lords for leave to pursue the point. Consequently, the matter is now sub-judice.

Deportation Orders

32. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons are subject to deportation orders in Liverpool at the latest date.

Mr. Renton: Information on deportation orders is not readily available by area or city.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

37. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the working of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

Mr. John Patten: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) on 20 November 1987 at columns 716-17. Further information is contained in the board's latest annual report (Cm. 265), a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Ground: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to reduce the backlog of cases awaiting resolution by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

Mr. John Patten: The Government provided £77 million for the criminal injuries compensation scheme in the Estimates for this financial year—an increase of £33 million over previously planned provision—and plans to make available £81 million in 1988-89 and £89 million in 1989-90. This increased provision will finance an increase in the number of compensation payments and has enabled the board to recruit 90 additional staff at its new office in Glasgow who will help to deal with the backlog of claims.

Passports

39. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is satisfied with the speed and manner in which passport applications and renewals are currently being processed.

Mr. Renton: With the exception of the London passport office, where continuing heavy demand is causing some abnormal delays, the passport offices are processing straightforward, non-urgent passport applications for all types well within the four-week minimum period of notice specified on passport application forms. Urgent applications are given priority.

Computerisation of the passport issuing system, which is due to commence at the Glasgow passport office in the late summer of this year, extending to all offices by the end of 1989, should speed up the passport-issuing process and reduce delays.

Television Licences

40. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek to widen the provisions of residential care licences to permit the reduced television fee to be charged in all warden-controlled accommodation, in addition to those premises housing people of pensionable age with physical disabilities or mental disorders; and if he will also seek powers, to provide lower prices and free television licences for those with no other resources than the basic retirement pension.

Mr. Renton: There are no plans to do so.

Charitable Trusts

43. **Mr. Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has plans to seek to amend the law on charitable trusts.

Mr. John Patten: The Government have already announced their intention to propose legislation to strengthen the powers of the Charity Commission and improve the supervision and monitoring of charities. We are considering the scope of this legislation.

Independent Radio

45. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to safeguard the opportunities for drama and live music under the new regulations which will govern the expansion of radio.

Mr. Renton: The extent to which independent stations' programmes include drama and live music will be for the stations themselves to determine when applying for a licence to the radio authority. When making their applications they will no doubt have regard to the criteria which the authority will apply and to their obligation to maintain their promise of performance. The best safeguard for these opportunities will lie in the expansion of radio itself which the Government propose to make possible.

DNA Testing

46. **Mr. Randall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further discussions he has had on DNA testing in immigration control.

Mr. Renton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 5 February at column *781*.

Parole

48. **Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to change the working of the parole system.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The parole system is being reviewed by a committee under the chairmanship of Lord Carlisle. The terms of reference of the review were announced by my right hon. Friend on 16 July 1987 at column 1294.

Game Licences Act 1860

49. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the level of compliance with the Game Licences Act 1860; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend gave to a previous question from the hon. Member on 25 January, at column 2, giving details of the convictions for offences under the Game Licences Act 1860.

The level of compliance is of course very difficult to ascertain with precision. However, the Government are concerned that poaching offences should be pursued with all posible vigour, and we believe that the police share this concern.

Basildon (Ministerial Visit)

52. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recent visit to Basildon by the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten).

Mr. John Patten: I visited Basildon on Tuesday 2 February to open a crime prevention exhibition organised

by Allders department stores. The exhibition showed a range of security equipment and provided an opportunity for the police and the local crime prevention panel to give advice and information on crime prevention matters. The exhibition was due to run at Basildon until Saturday 13 February, and then to be transferred to other parts of the country. The Allders initiative is an excellent example of the way in which the private sector can contribute to crime prevention.

Young Persons (Non-custodial Treatment)

53. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives he is supporting that are aimed at replacing custody for 17 to 19-year-olds.

Mr. John Patten: Our policy is to encourage the use of non-custodial measures whenever they are suitable. The Government have recently offered grants to the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders and the National Children's Home for work on alternatives to custody for 17 to 20-year-olds. This is part of our wider consideration of punishment in the community for offenders over 17.

Immigration (Primary Purpose Rule)

54. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to abolishing the primary purpose rule.

Mr. Renton: The primary purpose requirement is kept under continuing review but there are at present no plans to amend the relevant provisions of the immigration rules.

West Mercia Constabulary

56. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to how many people are currently employed by the West Mercia constabulary; and how many of these are police officers.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As at 31 December 1987, there were 1,949 police officers and 746 civilians (counting part-time staff as half) working for the West Mercia constabulary.

Independent Television Network

59. **Mr. Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next plans to meet the chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority to discuss the future structure of the Independent Television network.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. Friend meets the chairman of the IBA from time to time to discuss matters of current interest, which include the structure and operation of the ITV network.

Prison System (USA)

60. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has held following his noble Friend, the Earl of Caithness's visit to America to study the prison system there.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Both before and since my noble Friend's visit to America, there have been extensive discussions at official level with private companies which have expressed an interest in the design and building of prisons or the provision of management or other services.

Metropolitan Police

61. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about manpower and police recruiting in the Metropolitan police area.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The strength of the Metropolitan police on 18 January was 27,488; the highest ever. This is about 250 short of establishment. Recruitment is buoyant, although it continues to be offset to a great extent by wastage. Intakes of about 200 recruits take place every five weeks at the Hendon training school and there will be an additional intake at the Wanstead centre in the spring. The Metropolitan police have also taken special initiatives to encourage recruits from the ethnic minorities.

Immigration

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from Tower Hamlets council concerning immigration matters; and what account he took of these representations when formulating his policy on immigration.

Mr. Renton: When my right hon. Friend visited Tower Hamlets in December 1986, the local council made representations to him about the problem of housing people who had been temporarily admitted to the United Kingdom while their claims were examined. The pressure on services in areas such as Tower Hamlets was one of the factors which we took into account in bringing forward clause 3 of the Immigration Bill which makes universal the requirement that those claiming the right of abode here should establish their claims before coming here.

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received any representations regarding the right of hon. Members to intervene in immigration cases.

Mr. Renton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given earlier today to a question from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Dunnachie).

Under-age Drinking

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young people under the age of 18 years have been prosecuted for obtaining or attempting to obtain alcoholic drink over the past 10 years up to the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information held centrally, which may be incomplete, is given in the following table. Data for the years prior to 1979 are not available.

Persons found guilty of offences under Section 169(2) of the Licensing Act 1964—England and Wales

Year	Total found guilty
1979	4,091
1980	3,954
1981	2,647
1982	1,862

Year	Total found guilty
1983	1,577
1984	1,095
1985	744
1986	538

Settlers

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what information he has as to how many people from Northern Ireland settled in each local authority area in England in each year from 1982 to 1987, inclusive, for each of the age groups 16 to 18 years, 18 to 25 years and 25 years and over;

(2) what information he has as to how many people from the Republic of Ireland settled in each local authority area in England in each year from 1982 to 1987, inclusive, for each of the age groups 16 to 18 years, 18 to 25 years and 25 years and over;

(3) what information he has as to how many people from Northern Ireland settled in each local authority area in Scotland in each year from 1982 to 1987, inclusive, for each of the age groups 16 to 18 years, 18 to 25 and 25 years and over;

(4) what information he has as to how many people from the Republic of Ireland settled in each local authority area in Wales in each year from 1982 to 1987, inclusive, for each of the age groups 16 to 18 years, 18 to 25 and 25 years and over;

(5) what information he has as to how many people from Northern Ireland settled in each local authority area in Wales in each year from 1982 to 1987, inclusive, for each of the age groups 16 to 18 years, 18 to 25 years and 25 years and over;

(6) what information he has as to how many people from the Republic of Ireland settled in each local authority area in Scotland in each year from 1982 to 1987, inclusive, for each of the age groups 16 to 18 years, 18 to 25 years and 25 years and over.

Mr. Renton: The information requested is not available.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what estimates exist for the numbers of people from the Republic of Ireland who will settle in England, Scotland and Wales in each year for the next five years, and for each of the age groups 16 to 18 years, 18 to 25 years and 25 years and over;

(2) what estimates exist for the numbers of people from Northern Ireland who will settle in England, Scotland and Wales in each year for the next five years, and for each of the age groups 16 to 18 years, 18 to 25 years and 25 years and over.

Mr. Renton: No such estimates exist.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will publish an estimate of the staffing and financial consequences for the monitoring and approval of bids under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 submitted by inner London boroughs after the proposed transfer of education responsibilities to them following the abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Hurd: Details of the administrative arrangements for section 11 posts following the proposed abolition of ILEA have not yet been settled. I do not expect any significant staffing or financial consequences for the Home Office. Boroughs which take responsibility for existing ILEA posts funded under section 11 would take over responsibility for satisfying the Home Office of the effectiveness of those posts. They would be eligible to apply for section 11 grant for further posts, as they now do for posts in other services.

"Some Mother's Son"

Mr. Nicholas Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will raise at his next meeting with the chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority the circumstances in which the film "Some Mother's Son", containing deception and misleading assertions about the British Army's activities in Ulster, was shown on Channel 4.

Mr. Renton: The Independent Broadcasting Authority has the statutory responsibility for ensuring that the programmes it broadcasts maintain a high general standard in all respects and in particular in respect of their content and quality. I am sure the authority will have taken due note of the lessons of this unfortunate incident, for which Channel 4 has already apologised publicly.

Work Permits

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to introduce legal sanctions against employers who offer jobs to people without authorisation to work.

Mr. Renton: We have no present plans to do so.

Murder (Convictions)

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give, for each year since 1979, the figures for *(a)* the number of people convicted of murder, *(b)* the number of people given life sentences, *(c)* the number of people serving life sentences who were released from prison having served less than 10 years in prison and *(d)* the number of people given life sentences having already served a life sentence.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 4 February 1988]:* The information requested is given in the following table. More detailed information about life sentence prisoners is given annually in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales" (table 1*(f)* of the latest issue for 1986 Cm. 210) and in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales", (Supplementary tables section 2.1(A) and section 2.4 of the latest issue for 1986). Copies of both publications are in the Library.

England and Wales

Number of persons

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Persons convicted of murder:	136	169	126	184	132	150	173	179
Persons given life sentences[1]:	183	203	175	245	167	184	208	241
Life sentence prisoners[1] released from Prison Department Establishments having spent less than 10 years in such establishments under sentence[2]								
By type and date of release:								
On licence	49	24	38	50	52	40	29	17
Other[3]	35	39	39	43	32	40	44	49
Persons released from Prison Department Establishments on life licence who were later given a further life sentence:								
By year if further sentence:	1	1	4[4]	1	2[4]	—	3	2

[1] Including custody for life and detention during Her Majesty's pleasure or for life under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933.
[2] Excluding any time spent on remand in custody, in non-Prison Department establishments or following any subsequent recall.
[3] Including successful appeals, deaths and transfers to psychiatric hospitals or outside England and Wales.
[4] Including one person given life sentence in Scotland.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Bottles

Mr. Irving: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what action he is taking to encourage distributors of glass and plastic bottles and containers to mark each with a deposit charge, to be returnable, to reduce litter, broken glass and waste.

Mr. Butcher: The Government consider that the use of deposit schemes should be decided by producers and distributors in the light of their assessment of the market implications. The Government welcome schemes such as bottle banks for the collection and recycling of consumer waste. As a direct result of a commitment conference I chaired on glass recycling, the glass industry and local authorities gave an undertaking to double the number of bottle banks in the five years from 1986.

House of Fraser

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he now expects to receive the inspector's report into the House of Fraser.

Mr. Maude: The inspector's interim report on the membership of the House of Fraser plc was published on 9 August 1984. His investigation under section 172 of the Companies Act 1948 is concluded, and no further report will be published.

The investigation into the affairs of Fraser Holdings plc under section 432(2) Companies Act 1985 continues and I am unable to say when a report will be received.

Departmental Computer System

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster why, when his Department's Minstrel 1 computer system was replaced the manufacturers of Minstrel 4 were not invited to tender for its replacement.

Mr. Butcher: There was no simple replacement of the Department's Minstrel 1 computer system. Its correspondence management functions were subsumed within a wider networked system for all DTI Ministers designed to provide additional facilities, including engagements management, word processing and links into ICL-Mail (on which the Department's electronic mail service is based).

Arms Sales

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those countries on which Her Majesty's Government have imposed trade restrictions on the sale of arms.

Mr. Alan Clark: Arms and other military equipment described in group 1 of part II of schedule I to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1987 (SI 1987 No. 2070) require a licence for export to any destination except as provided in article 4 of that order.

EC (Trade Policy)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the suspension of the tariff concessions enjoyed by the Republic of Korea under the generalised scheme of preference.

Mr. Alan Clark: The European Community suspended Korea's GSP benefits following the Korean Government's decision not to extend to EC member states the same concessions on intellectual property rights as those given to the United States. Despite lengthy and concerted protests from EC member states that this discrimination was unacceptable, the Korean Government have still not extended the same concessions to countries other than the United States.

Following the failure to reach agreement, the Community, fully supported by the British Government, decided to suspend Korea's GSP benefits. In the context of negotiations with Korea it was necessary for the Community to take immediate decisions. The suspension was approved by the Council of Ministers on 18 December and came into effect from 1 January 1988.

Differences between the European Economic Community and the European Coal and Steel Community mean that the procedural steps are not the same and the ECSC suspension will take effect from 15 February.

I would like to take this opportunity to express the hope that the House understands the special reasons why the

Government agreed to these measures before it was possible for the House to complete its scrutiny of the proposals.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish a list detailing the various measures approved by the EEC Council and implemented by the Commission which had the effect of removing or suspending trade concessions to foreign nations or otherwise restricting imports in each of the past three years.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* I am writing to my hon. Friend and will place a copy of the reply in the Library of the House.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster why he agreed in January to the EEC Commission suspending the tariff concessions enjoyed by the Republic of Korea under the general system of preferences; what will be the effect of this suspension on the price of imported goods from Korea; what action the Commission is calling upon the Republic to undertake so that the suspension can be terminated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* The suspension of Korea's benefits under the European Community's GSP scheme was made in response to the Korean Government's decision not to extend to EC member states the same concessions given to the United States in the field of intellectual property rights.

New Korean legislation giving better protection for intellectual property came into effect from 1 July 1987. However, the Korean Government entered into a bilateral arrangement with the United States Government which gave United States firms certain special concessions related to the implementation of the legislation. These concessions were not intended to be made available to Community firms. Despite lengthy and concerted protests from EC member states that such discriminatory action was unacceptable, the Korean Government have still not extended the same concessions to countries other than the United States.

Following the failure to reach satisfactory agreement, the Community, fully supported by the British Government, decided to suspend Korea's GSP benefits. The Council regulation stated that it would not be appropriate for Korea to benefit from GSP as long as it discriminated against the Community in this way.

The Government's support for the measure took into account the likely effect of suspension both on United Kingdom manufacturers and on United Kingdom consumers, importers, and distributors. Import prices remain a commercial matter for the companies concerned and include many elements beside import duties. The suspension was approved by the Council of Ministers on 18 December and came into effect from 1 January 1988.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster why he has agreed to support a further measure to suspend Korean tariff concessions under the general system of preferences concerning steel products; what will be the effect of the suspension on import prices; what action the Commission is calling upon the Republic to undertake so that the suspension can be terminated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to his earlier question today.

The Commission published its proposal to suspend European Coal and Steel Community GSP benefits for Korea at the same time and for the same reason as the proposal to suspend European Economic Community GSP benefits. Differences between the two Communities mean the procedural steps are not the same and the ECSC suspension took effect from 15 February.

Earnings

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the average wages or salaries of *(a)* female and *(b)* male workers in (i) the industrial, (ii) the services and (iii) the agricultural sectors.

Mr. Lee: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested, relating to April 1987, is provided in the table.

Average gross weekly earnings of full-time employees on adult rates whose earnings were not affected by absence—Great Britain

	Males £	*Females* £
Manufacturing industries (SIC 2-4)	222·3	133·4
Service industries (SIC 6-9)	227·6	151·9
Agriculture, forestry and fishing (SIC 0)	145·1	122·3

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has for each year since 1975 on the average wage increases in percentage terms for women (i) manual workers and (ii) non-manual workers in *(a)* Belgium, *(b)* France, *(c)* the Federal Republic of Germany, *(d)* Italy, *(e)* the Netherlands, *(f)* the United States of America and *(g)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lee: I have been asked to reply.

The following table sets out the available information published by the International Labour Office covering average hourly wages of females in manufacturing industry. These are mainly manual workers as salaried employees are excluded. Separate information for non-manual workers is not available. Italy and the United States of America do not provide separate figures for females.

Average hourly wages of female employees in manufacturing industry[1]

	Belgium		*France*		*Federal Republic of Germany*		*Netherlands*		*United Kingdom*	
	Francs[2]	*Percentage increase*	*Francs*[2]	*Percentage increase*	*Deutschmarks*[2]	*Percentage increase*	*Guilders*[2]	*Percentage increase*	£[3,4]	*Percentage increase*
1975	111·06	17·9	[5]9·84	15·8	7·51	8·8	8·39	15·6	0·930	27·9
1976	121·85	9·7	11·33	..	8·01	6·7	9·11	8·6	1·094	17·6

	Belgium		France		Federal Republic of Germany		Netherlands		United Kingdom	
	Francs[2]	Percentage increase	Francs[3]	Percentage increase	Deutschmarks[3]	Percentage increase	Guilders[3]	Percentage increase	£[3,4]	Percentage increase
1977	133·39	9·5	12·80	13·0	8·62	7·6	10·02	10·0	1·195	9·2
1978	140·92	5·6	14·50	13·3	9·13	5·9	10·63	6·1	1·346	12·6
1979	151·68	7·6	16·26	12·1	9·62	5·4	11·13	4·7	[5,6]1·571	16·7
1980	164·61	8·5	18·78	15·5	10·25	6·5	11·71	5·2	1·834	17·0
1981	188·31	14·4	21·88	16·5	10·84	5·8	12·23	4·4	2·019	10·1
1982	201·26	6·9	24·73	13·0	11·36	4·8	13·03	6·5	2·200	9·0
1983	213·80	6·2	28·09	13·6	11·70	3·0	13·22	1·5	2·372	7·8
1984	223·25	4·4	[5]29·86	6·3	12·00	2·6	13·41	1·4	2·529	6·6
1985	232·25	4·0	31·78	..	12·54	4·5	13·53	0·9	2·710	7·2
1986	..	..	33·02	3·9	13·03	3·9	..	..	2·897	6·9

[1] Average gross earnings per hour of women of all ages (except salaried employees) unless otherwise indicated. See notes for each country. Figures relate to annual averages unless otherwise indicated.
[2] October of each year.
[3] Includes family allowance paid directly by employer.
[4] Full time female manual workers on adult rates of pay—includes all adults prior to 1980.
[5] Change in coverage of series.
[6] On a basis consistent with 1980, the 1979 figure was £1·567.
.. Not available.

Source: International Labour Office:
'Year Book of Labour Statistics 1986'
'Bulletin of Labour Statistics 1987-8'.

EMPLOYMENT

YTS

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many requests have been made by youth training scheme trainees for communications support under the communication service for the deaf;

(2) what information he has as to the number of youth training scheme trainees who have been provided with communication support under the communication service for the deaf.

Mr. Cope: Since the communication service for the deaf was introduced in April 1986, a total of 172 trainees have been provided with communication support. I am not aware of any application for such support having been refused.

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much money has been allocated by his Department to fund the communication service for the deaf on the youth training scheme since it was established; and how much of this has actually been spent.

Mr. Cope: The communication service for the deaf was introduced in April 1986 and in the first year of its operation £248,000 was allocated to the service and £73,588 was spent. In the current financial year, £254,000 was allocated and £160,884 had been spent up to the end of January 1988.

Youth Training

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many people from the Republic of Ireland took up places on community programmes, YTS and other young persons programmes in England, Scotland and Wales in each year from 1982 to 1987, inclusive, for each of the age groups 16 to 18 years, 18 to 25 years and 25 years and over;

(2) what information he has as to how many people from Northern Ireland took up places on community programmes, YTS and other young persons programmes in England, Scotland and Wales in each year from 1982 to 1987, inclusive, for each of the age groups 16 to 18 years, 18 to 25 years and 25 years and over.

Mr. Lee: I regret that the information requested is not available. The Manpower Services Commission which runs the community programme, YTS and other programmes does not collect information on the number of participants who come from the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland.

Labour Statistics

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what information he has as to how many people from the Republic of Ireland took up full-time or part-time employment in England, Scotland and Wales in each year from 1982 to 1987 inclusive, for each of the age groups 16 to 18 years, 18 to 25 years and 25 years and over;

(2) what information he has as to how many people from Northern Ireland took up full-time or part-time employment in England, Scotland and Wales in each year from 1982 to 1987 inclusive, for each of the age groups 16 to 18 years, 18 to 25 years and 25 years and over.

Mr. Lee: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Women

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the present proportion of women workers in the total working population of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lee: Women in work are estimated to represent 38 per cent. of the working population of the United Kingdom in September 1987, the latest date for which figures are available.

ENVIRONMENT

Planning Appeals

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average length of time it has taken him to decide an appeal against local planning authorities decisions in each of the last three years; what steps he is taking to speed the process; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. William Waldegrave: The median time from receipt to decision for all appeals in each of the last three years is as follows:

	weeks
1985	20
1986	21
1987	24

The number of planning appeals received has been increasing in the past three years at about 11 per cent. per year. A total of 21,548 were received in 1987. The increased number of appeals has meant that processing times have not improved as planned. The following steps have been taken, or are in hand to remedy this:

—regulations setting a timetable for the variable stages of the written representations procedure and offering the opportunity of a simplified process, if appropriate, were made in May 1987;

—additional resources have been allocated to the planning inspectorate (more inspectors and administrative staff) in order to deal with the additional work;

—the Department has invested in information technology in order to speed up the preparation of decision letters; and

— revised inquiries procedure rules will soon be introduced, which will, inter alia, contain timetabling provisions to speed up the process of fixing inquiries and which will help the inspectorate to make better use of existing resources.

There has been a reduction to 22 weeks in the overall median time from receipt to decision of those appeals decided in December 1987.

Home Improvements

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has made with consultations on the paper "Home Improvement Policy" of November 1987; when he expects to bring forward legislation to implement his proposals; and why no legislative action in this regard has taken place since the publication of the Green Paper "Home Improvements—a New Approach" (Cmnd. 9513) in May 1985.

Mrs. Rae: Aspects of the Green Paper were reconsidered in the light of the comments received and revised proposals were published in the housing White Paper (Cmnd. 214) and subsequent consultation paper on home improvement policy. We are now considering the responses to these with a view to legislation at the next practicable opportunity.

Urban Regeneration Grants

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a further statement on the payments to date of urban regeneration grants.

Mr. Trippier: Since urban regeneration grant was introduced, five offers of grant totalling £9·85 million have been made for projects in Manchester, Dudley and Liverpool. This grant is expected to attract £42·3 million of private investment into these areas. Approval in principle has been given to a project in Blackburn.

Heveningham Hall

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what conditions were attached to the sale of Heveningham hall; if these have been complied with; what information he has as to how often Heveningham hall has been open to the public since July 1981; and if he will make a repair order on Heveningham hall.

Mrs. Rae: The following three conditions were attached to the conveyance of Heveningham hall to permit public access to the principal rooms and to the gardens on at least 30 days each year unless prevented by circumstance outside the owner's control; to complete within five years the restoration of the orangery; and to use best endeavours to complete a tree planting scheme recommended by Dame Sylvia Crowe in 1975. In addition, the owner entered into a hiring agreement whereby certain items of furniture in the house which remained in the Secretary of State's ownership were to be hired to him for a nominal rent, subject to conditions relating to their care.

Restoration of the orangery was completed in 1985, but the tree planting scheme remains to be done. Most of the furniture covered by the hiring agreement is currently in store, under the custody of English Heritage. Precise records of opening times are not available, but I understand that the position has been as follows:

1982 house and gardens open for 30 days
1983 gardens only open, because of building work
1984-6 house open by appointment only to bona fide visitors, again because of building work.
1987 house and gardens open throughout August

Despite the regrettable delay, my right hon. Friend has no reason on present information to doubt the owner's intention to complete the outstanding repairs. Should there be serious doubts about this we would have to consider serving a repairs notice.

PSA (Civil Accommodation Vote)

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to increase the cash limit on the Property Services Agency civil accommodation vote during the current financial year.

Mr. Chope: Further to my reply on 2 February *Official Report*, column *551*, the cash limit on PSA's civil accommodation Vote, Class XX, Vote 19, in 1987-88 should now be increased by £67,699,000 from £230,377,000 to £298,076,000 subject to approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate. The increase will be charged to the Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure. The increase is to enable PSA to purchase additional freehold office accommodation.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Pensions

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what tax yield he estimates would be lost in the financial year 1988-89 if the limit set by the Inland Revenue on pension policies whose contributions qualify

for tax remission were increased to *(a)* 75 per cent. and *(b)* 80 per cent. of final salary or pay in the year of retirement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I regret that this information is not available.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will set out in tabular form, for each year since 1978-79, corporation tax receipts *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* in constant price terms and *(c)* as a percentage of total tax receipts.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The information is as follows:

Net receipts of corporation tax[1]

	Cash terms £ *million*	*At constant (1978-79) prices*[2] £ *million*	*As percentage of total taxes and royalties* Per cent.
1978-79	3,940	3,940	8·1
1979-80	4,646	3,980	7·6
1980-81	4,645	3,350	6·5
1981-82	4,930	3,240	5·7
1982-83	5,679	3,480	6·2
1983-84	6,184	3,620	6·4
1984-85	8,341	4,680	7·8
1985-86	10,708	5,670	9·4
1986-87	13,495	6,940	11·3

[1] Including advance corporation tax.
[2] By reference to movements in the GDP deflator.

Covenants

Mr. Ashdown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of tax revenue forgone as a result of covenants made out to students.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Tax revenue forgone as a result of covenants to students is estimated to be about £150 million annually.

Government Data Network

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the specifications concerning the throughput on the Government data network in terms of packets per second or Baud rate, have been calculated in the absence of centrally held information concerning the annual rate of inter and intra-departmental data transfer at the Department of Health and Social Security, the Inland Revenue, the Home Department and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Mr. Brooke: The four Departments each provided information on their potential use of the Government data network. This has allowed prospective suppliers to determine the shape and capacity of the network design each has proposed. This information had not previously been held centrally.

The four Departments' current requirements for GDN as set out in the statement of service requirement do not involve any data transfers between them. There is thus no information on such data to hold centrally.

Police National Computer

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated increase in throughput specifications in terms of packets per second or Baud rate that will be required if the police national computer is connected to the Government data network.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department is considering the suitability of the Government data network for the police national computer. The PNC requirements are being defined and, if GDN were to be used, suppliers would need to take account of these in their enhancement plans.

The GDN is being designed to allow for expansion and resilience.

Public Expenditure (Private Finance)

Mr. Squire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make available the paper on the role of private finance in public expenditure which was recently sent to the National Economic Development Office.

Mr. Major: I am arranging for copies of the paper, "Private Finance in Public Expenditure", to be placed in the Library of the House.

Taxation

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the sum paid in tax per year of a person on average earnings.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 11 February 1988]:* A married man on average earnings of £11,950 per annum pays £2,202 per year in income tax under the 1987-88 tax regime. A single person on the same earnings pays £2,572 per year. Average earnings are those for full time men in all occupations paid at adult rates whose pay is unaffected by absence. The calculations assume that the taxpayer has no reliefs or allowances other than the appropriate personal allowance.

Benefits (RPI Error)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the special payments being made to social security beneficiaries on account of the miscalculations of the retail prices index are being treated as exempt from tax.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* These special ex-gratia payments are not taxable.

Agriculture (Tax Concessions)

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what tax concessions are made to agriculture which are not available to manufacturing industry; and what is his estimate of the annual value of such concessions.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* There is one statutory tax relief applying to agriculture which is not broadly mirrored by an equivalent relief for manufacturing industry. This is section 28 of the Finance Act 1978, which allows farmers to average their profits over two years for tax purposes, in certain circumstances. The estimated cost of this relief for 1987-88 is £10 million. There are also several extra-statutory concessions affecting agriculture; the cost of most of these cannot be reliably estimated, but is likely to be very small.

Building Industry (Tax Exemption Certificates)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the operation of the 715 tax exemption certificate in the building industry in the light of reports that it enables paramilitary groups to defraud the Revenue; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* The operation of the special tax regime for the construction industry, including its effectiveness in deterring and detecting tax evasion, is kept under regular review.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what checks are made on building companies before they are allowed to obtain tax exemption certificates from the Inland Revenue; and how many such certificates have been issued in London in the last three years.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* The Inland Revenue should satisfy itself—from its own records, from information provided by the applicant or through other appropriate enquiry—that the applicant meets the requirements of section 70 and parts I and IV of schedule 12 to the Finance (No. 2) Act 1975.

The figures requested by the hon. Member are not readily available. However, on the basis of a sampling exercise, the number of companies holding 714P or 714C exemption certificates whose tax affairs are dealt with by tax offices in the London regions are roughly:

	Number
January 1986	16,500
January 1987	17,300
January 1988	17,600

Many construction firms undertake work outside the immediate area of their tax office.

Irish Republican Army

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his Department's estimate as to the sums lost to the Revenue through Irish Republican Army and other paramilitary extortion rackets in the last three years; what efforts have been made to ensure co-ordination between the Revenue, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and other police forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* I can make no reliable estimate of such sums. The Inland Revenue co-operates with police forces investigating suspected tax offences.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Gastropods

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what research is planned into the use of carnivorous slugs, beetles, glow-worms, frogs and microbes as environmentally acceptable methods of controlling gastropods;

(2) if any alternative research is planned by his Department to continue the work recently stopped at Cleppa Park, Newport, Gwent, into the search for a less toxic substitute to metaldehyde for the control of gastropods;

(3) what evidence he has of changes in the level of resistance of gastropods to the toxic effects of metaldehyde; and what evidence he has of subsequent changes in the use of *(a)* metaldehyde and *(b)* the more toxic methiocarb;

(4) what information has he of research, currently being undertaken or planned, in the private sector to provide an environmentally benign alternative to the chemical substances now used to control gastropods;

(5) what information he has on research in France of the effect of an increased use of metaldehyde and methiocarb in controlling gastropods on plant growth;

(6) if he is considering introducing legislation to restrict the use of metaldehyde as a control agent for gastropods because of the danger to children and to wildlife;

(7) if he is encouraging research into alternatives to metaldehyde for use in the control of gastropods.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The use of pesticides, including those based on the active ingredient metaldehyde, is subject to detailed statutory controls under part III of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985. Under these arrangements, the effects of pesticides on human safety and that of wildlife and the environment are all carefully considered by independent experts before any approvals for use are granted by Ministers.

In the case of slug pellets based on metaldehyde, the potential risks to children and animals are well understood. Product labels are required to draw attention to these risks and formulations contain repellants and dyes to make them less attractive to mammals and birds. Reports of accidents are also carefully monitored and do not justify the introduction of new controls at present.

Nevertheless, it is the Government's policy to reduce pesticide use to the minimum consistent with efficient food production. The main Government-funded research work on slug control is taking place at the Institute of Arable Crops Research, Long Ashton. This includes the prediction of slug damage in crops and the effects of cultivation methods on control. There is also research into biological control, though this is concentrating on the

pathogens which specifically attack slugs rather than on the use of natural predators such as slow worms or hedgehogs.

My Department's own laboratories at Slough are investigating the effects of metaldehyde on wildlife and I am aware of industry-funded work at Rothamsted into the production of alternative and more specific molluscicides. I believe that there is also some industry-funded work at Long Ashton on the potential for microbial control, but I do not have details of this.

I am also aware of similar work in France but do not have any information about results in relation to plant growth.

We have no evidence of resistance to metaldehyde in land molluscs and particularly slugs. However, its efficiency as a molluscicide is very dependent on weather conditions at the time of baiting, with humidity likely to reduce mortality. Pesticide usage data for 1983 (latest available data) show use on cereals, arable crops and horticulture of 600,000 ha and 94,000 ha respectively for methiocarb and metaldehyde. The survey of pesticide usage in arable crops scheduled for this year will give an indication of recent changes in usage.

Food Prices

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will show the average price to the consumer of *(a)* a pint of milk, *(b)* a 2lb loaf of bread and *(c)* a pint of beer in 1960, 1970, 1980 and 1987; and what was the percentage increase between 1980 and 1987 in each case.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The information requested is as follows:

	Milk[1] per pint	*Bread[2] per loaf*	*Beer per pint*
Average Prices			
1960	3·3	4·8	8·8
1970	5·0	9·1	12·9
1980	16·5	33·7	43·4
1987	25·3	43·7	81·2
Percentage change 1980-87	53	30	87

[1] *Whole pasteurised*
[2] *Large white sliced loaf.*

Chemicals

Mr. Flynn : To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what controls he will introduce to prevent the more intensive use of chemicals to increase production on the reducing areas of cultivated land produced by the 'set-aside' proposals.

Mr. MacGregor: I have received views on this and other related points in response to the consultation document issued on 8 December. In the light of these and of the eventual Community legislation, the Government will be taking decisions on the details of the United Kingdom scheme, including the controls applying to participating farmers.

Milk Quota

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by how many million litres his Department estimates the 1987-88 national United Kingdom milk quota will be exceeded.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given on Tuesday 2 February 1988, at column *566*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett).

Wheat

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will update the information contained in the reply to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North of 26 of February 1987, *Official Report*, column *368*, about the average ex-farm selling price of wheat in the United Kingdom for each of the years 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1987 and also at constant prices, showing the 1979 price as 100.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The information is as follows:

	Ex-farm price of home-grown wheat[1] (£ per tonne)	*Price index in real terms[2] (1979 = 100)*
1979	95·92	100
1980	99·30	86·5
1981	108·92	85·1
1982	113·74	82·2
1983	124·80	86·2
1984	114·58	76·1
1985	112·25	70·4
1986	111·18	67·2
1987	112·35 (forecast)	65·0

Notes:
[1] weighted average price at first point of sale. (Source: Annual Review of Agriculture.)
[2] deflated by price deflator of CDP at market prices.

Battery Hens

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, following the implementation of Council directive 86/113/EEC under S.I. 1987, No. 2020, on the welfare of battery hens, he will estimate *(a)* the percentage of battery farmers who are currently producing under the new regulations; *(b)* the percentage of battery farmers who are currently producing using old-style cages before the final enforcement date in 1995 and *(c)* his Department's current figure of the number of battery farmers found to be producing illegally.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The Welfare of Battery Hens Regulations lay down various specific requirements on cage design, which do not apply to existing cages until 1995. There is also a schedule of further requirements which applied from 1 January. All the provisions of the regulations apply immediately to new cages. My staff will continue to visit battery units to check that farmers are complying with the regulations and to advise on any necessary changes.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, pursuant to the remarks of the

Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) on 15 February, *Official Report*, column 796, he will identify the section of the last agreement on budgetary restraint of 4 December or any previous Community agreement, which gave the Council the same powers as are set out in annex V to the note from the presidency (EEC document SN 461/88) to increase agricultural expenditure in excess of the agreed guideline; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: This annex refers to existing provisions in the treaty and does not confer any new powers on the Council.

Food Labelling

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy towards nutrition labelling, in the light of the recent report of the Coronary Prevention Group entitled "European Community An Analysis of the United Kingdom Government's Position on Nutrition Labelling".

Mr. Donald Thompson: Officials from my Department have met representatives of the CPG and their legal advisers. My officials explained that it is the EC food labelling directive (79/112) rather than the treaty of Rome which is directly relevant in this case. The ability of a member state to act unilaterally on grounds of public health is restricted to non-harmonised food labelling provisions. What may alone be required to appear on a food label is harmonised and this does not include nutrition information. Whilst therefore it is possible for the United Kingdom to set up a system of voluntary nutrition labelling, it is not open to it under Community law to make the giving of fat or nutrition information on labels a statutory requirement without the consent of the other member states. Thus we continue to seek with the European Commission a solution to our proposals for fat labelling regulations within the context of Community law. I believe that the Coronary Prevention Group now understands better the legal position held by the Government on this issue. This position also results from discussions with the legal services of the European Commission.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Beverages (Saccharine)

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will take steps to ensure that no beverages containing saccharine are on sale in refreshment rooms in the curtilage of the House, and that those currently on sale are withdrawn; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: No. I do not consider such action to be necessary. The use of saccharin in foods is permitted by the Sweeteners in Food Regulations 1983 following advice on need, by the Government's Food Advisory Committee, and on safety, by the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Protection and the Environment (COT).

SCOTLAND

Job Creation

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of any public initiatives which are planned to improve work and job prospects in north Angus, Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The Government's policies to keep inflation down, to stimulate enterprise, to restore competitiveness to industry and to establish a strong private sector have resulted in a significant fall in the unemployment levels in north Angus, as over Scotland as a whole, during the past year.

In north Angus, as throughout Scotland, the full range of Government training and employment programmes, including a rural job club, are continuing to assist the unemployed to find jobs and to start new businesses; and both indigenous and incoming firms benefit from the range of Government assistance to help industry create and improve job opportunities.

"Cabinet"

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his reply of 27 January, *Official Report*, columns *294-5*, who in the Government the BBC consulted before deciding not to show the programme entitled "Cabinet."

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I understand that the BBC did not seek advice from the Government about that programme.

Police (Computers)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will list the constabularies which will have computers connected to the upgraded police national computer network, and those constabularies that have an existing mainframe computer linked to the police national computer.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The eight Scottish police forces have access to the police national computer and it will be maintained once the PNC network has been upgraded.

The mainframe computer of Lothian and Borders police has an interface with the PNC which will also be maintained with the upgraded PNC network.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will list mainframe computers belonging to constabularies, indicating whether they are for command and control or criminal information purposes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: One Scottish force, Lothian and Borders police, has a mainframe computer (this term being taken as excluding mini and micro computers). It is used for criminal information purposes, and has no command and control functions.

School Closures

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will take steps to prevent Colstor secondary school, Springburn, from closing;

(2) if he will take steps to prevent Elmvale primary school, Springburn, from closing.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Decisions about the closure of schools are primarily for education authorities and they require my right hon. and learned Friend's consent only in the circumstances prescribed under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to prevent St. Bede's primary school, Balornock, from closing.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Decisions about school closure are primarily a matter for the relevant education authority subject to my right hon. and learned Friend's consent in prescribed circumstances. Because St. Bede's is a denominational school, his consent would be required if the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church were to object to any decision to close it.

Fishing Stock Licences

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current total number of fishing stock licences held in Scotland by *(a)* individuals, *(b)* share/joint owners and *(c)* companies; and if he will give comparative totals for each year for which such statistics are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Numbers of pressure stock and non-pressure stock licence holders in Scotland are available for 1987 and 1988. Details are shown in the table.

	Individuals		*Joint owners*		*Companies*	
	PSL	*Non PSL*	*PSL*	*Non PSL*	*PSL*	*Non PSL*
1988	262	78	865	25	48	2
1987	268	78	885	25	44	2

Where companies, for example fish selling companies, hold a minor share in a vessel, together with an individual or individuals, such licences are shown under joint ownership.

It should also be noted that, in a few cases, the company holding the licence is composed entirely of the crew of the vessel or of the skipper and family.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average current cost of purchasing a stock licence for a fishing vessel of *(a)* an under 40 ft boat and *(b)* an under 80 ft boat; and what have the comparative figures been in each of the last five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are a number of conditions that have to be fulfilled before a fisherman can obtain licences to catch certain fish stocks. If my officials, and those of other fisheries Departments, are content that these conditions have been met, appropriate licences are issued without cost to the fisherman concerned.

Residential Homes

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many officers in each health authority area in Scotland are appointed to inspect private and publicly owned residential homes *(a)* for elderly people, *(b)* for mentally disabled people, *(c)* for mentally ill people and *(d)* for physically disabled people; and if he will outline the training and guidance which such officers have received.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The registration and inspection of residential homes is the responsibility of local authorities, and health boards have no supervisory functions in relation to such homes. Information on the number of local authority staff engaged on these functions is not held centrally.

Hospital and Ward Closures

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give figures showing the numbers of *(a)* hospital closures and *(b)* ward closures in Scotland for each year since 1979; and if he will also provide a breakdown of these figures for each health board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information for complete hospital closures is set out in the table. Records on partial closures and ward closures are not held centrally. In the same period, 51 major new hospital developments providing some 5,770 beds have been opened.

	Number of hospitals
Year	
1979	7
1980	3
1981	3
1982	3
1983	4
1984	4
1985	3
1986	8
1987	3
Health Board	
Argyll and Clyde	12
Ayrshire and Arran	3
Borders	2
Fife	2
Forth Valley	2
Grampian	1
Greater Glasgow	5
Highland	1
Lanarkshire	2
Lothian	1
Shetland	2
Tayside	5

Salmon Farming

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department is at present assessing the efficacy of the sonic seal scarer used on some marine salmonid farms; if he has any plans to curtail, modify or extend the predator control research programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland is currently assessing the efficacy of the sonar seal scarer used on some marine salmonid farms. Several sonar scarers designed by the Department's scientists are presently on trial. There are no plans to curtail, modify or extend the current research programme but this is kept under review.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department has recently commissioned a survey, or research, into the efficacy and design of predator nets used to protect the stock at marine salmonid fish farms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland has not commissioned or done any such research which is seen as more appropriate for the fish farming industry itself to undertake.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent advice has been given by his officials to the owners and managers of marine salmonid farms, on the subject of predators; and if he will place copies of such memoranda in the Library.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland has not produced any specific written information or advice on this subject. Advice is however given on an ad hoc basis to reflect particular circumstances.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department has any recent information regarding the effect of predators on the incidence of disease, levels of stress and the overall productivity at marine salmonid farms.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland has no recent information on this subject.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to commission further surveys of the economic cost of predation in marine salmonid fish farming, including birds, mink and otters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend has no such plans.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to devote extra resources to the research of production methods, design of equipment, protection against predators and the health and safety of those employed in the salmonid fish farming industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to devote extra resources to such research.

Seals

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to change the current licensing scheme for the shooting of seals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to do so.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is in a position to give the approximate number of seals killed, either by shooting or entanglement in nets, at marine salmonid fish farms in each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not collected. The numbers of seals killed under licence are reported to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland. Outwith the close season, however, licences to shoot seals and returns to the Department of seals shot are not required.

Community Education

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what amount within the total rate support grant settlement for each local authority is provided for community education, including expenditure on youth service, in respect of the year 1987-88 and for 1988-89.

Mr. Lang: Rate support grant is paid in support of authorities' income generally. It is not attributed to particular services.

Shetland Islands (Housing)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from the Shetland Islands council about the proposed transfer of ownership of Scottish Special Housing Association houses in the Shetland Islands; and what is his policy towards the transfer of all or any of those houses to the Shetland Islands council at the request of tenants concerned.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Shetland Islands council has recently written to the Scottish Development Department indicating that it wishes to discuss whether appropriate arrangements could be made for the transfer to it of Scottish Special Housing Association houses in the Shetland Islands. I wish to give full consideration to the particular circumstances of this request and to the views of all the interests concerned, including the SSHA as owners and the tenants. I am not, therefore, in a position to indicate our likely response to the inquiry from Shetland Islands council.

Eye Tests

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has now received concerning the Government's proposals to introduce charges for opticians' eye tests: and how many of them have been supportive.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: To date my right hon. and learned Friend has received 81 representations expressing concern about the introduction of charges for sight tests. No one has written to my right hon. and learned Friend specifically to support the introduction of such charges, but a number of representations have been generally supportive of the Government's plans as set out in the White Paper, "Promoting Beter Health" for developing and improving the primary health care services.

Dyslexia

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secetary of State for Scotland how many schoolchildren in Scotland have been indentified as affected by dyslexia.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally.

Tayside Crime Prevention Panel

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give detail of the composition of the Tayside crime prevention panel; how the individuals are selected for appointment; and whether they have been vetted with regard to criminal charges and for written warnings from procurators fiscal.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are three separate panels covering the Angus, Dundee, and Perth and Kinross districts of Tayside region. I will invite the chief constable of Tayside police to let my hon. Friend have details of the membership. Each currently has between 12 and 14 members, all appointed by the chief constable. Individuals are usually invited by him to serve either directly, or following nomination. In respect of proven criminal charges much would depend upon the nature of the offence, when it took place, and the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. Written warnings are confidential to the procurator fiscal.

Women Workers

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which economic sector in Scotland has the highest percentage of women workers; and what information he has as to its wages and salaries level in respect of other sectors of the economy.

Mr. Lang: The latest available estimates of employees in employment in Scotland are for September 1987. Of the five main industry sectors, the service sector is the one in which women account for the highest percentage of employees.

Information from the new earnings survey, which covers a 1 per cent. sample of employees who are members of PAYE schemes, is provided in the table.

Average gross weekly earnings (including overtime) of full-time employees on adult rates

Scotland, April 1987	*Services £ per week*	*All industries £ per week*
Men		
Manual	161·2	179·7
Non-manual	245·7	256·4
Women		
Manual	104·1	111·7
Non-manual	150·3	149·0

Labour Statistics

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* female and *(b)* male workers are in the (i) agricultural, (ii) industrial and (iii) services sectors in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The table gives the available information.

Number of employees in employment in Scotland: September 1987

1980 SIC		*Thousands Male*	*Female*
0	Agriculture, forestry and fishing	25	5
2-4	Manufacturing	266	128
6-9	Services	545	728

These figures are provisional estimates, and subject to revision when further information becomes available. The number of employees in employment includes both manual and non-manual employees.

Parliamentary Constituencies

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Boundary Commission for Scotland intends to conduct any interim reviews of parliamentary constituencies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: The Boundary Commission for Scotland has informed me that it intends to conduct interim reviews of 16 parliamentary constituencies under section 3 of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986. The constituencies are as follows:

Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley CC and Galloway and Upper Nithsdale CC;
Central, Fife CC, Dunfermline, East CC, Fife, North-East CC, and Perth and Kinross CC;
Clydesdale CC, East Kilbride CC and Glasgow, Cathcart BC;
East Lothian CC, Midlothian CC and Edinburgh, East BC;
Monklands, East BC and Falkirk, East CC;
Strathkelvin and Bearsden CC and Glasgow, Maryhill BC.

In each case, I understand that the review has been occasioned by alterations to local authority boundaries so that they no longer follow exactly those of the parliamentary constituencies concerned.

Wages

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give, for each year since 1975, figures for the average wages for agricultural, industrial and services workers respectively in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 9 February 1988]:* Information from the Department of Employment's new earnings survey, which covers a 1 per cent. sample of employees who are members of PAYE schemes, is provided in the table.

Average gross weekly earnings (including overtime) of adult[1] full-time manual employees[2]

Scotland *£ per week*

April	*Males Industry group[3] Agriculture forestry and fishing*	*Manufacturing industries*	*Service industries*	*Females Industry group[3] Agriculture forestry and fishing*	*Manufacturing industries*	*Service industries*
1975	42·7	58·2	52·7	..	32·9	31·1
1976	53·9	68·2	61·3	..	40·8	37·9
1977	61·4	75·0	66·8	..	46·4	40·5
1978	67·6	86·2	72·5	..	52·8	46·2
1979	74·9	99·2	84·6	..	59·1	48·7
1980	85·4	117·5	102·8	..	70·1	62·1
1981	93·3	130·0	114·4	..	77·4	69·1
1982*(a)*	102·2	144·4	124·6	..	85·7	73·0
1982*(b)*	101·7	143·0	125·1	..	85·3	73·0
1983	107·1	151·0	132·1	..	92·1	78·2
1984	114·8	163·7	138·8	..	97·6	84·7
1985	121·9	176·3	145·3	..	107·4	90·9
1986	133·2	186·1	153·2	..	110·9	95·9
1987	132·6	194·0	161·2	..	119·6	104·1

.. indicates that the sample cannot provide a reliable estimate.
[1] for 1983 and earlier, males aged 21 and over and females aged 18 and over; for 1984 and later, those on adult rates.

[2] those whose earnings for the survey pay period were not affected by absence.
[3] figures for 1975 to 1982*(a)* are based on the 1968 Standard Industrial Classification (SIC); those for 1982*(b)* to 1987 are based on the 1980 SIC.

DEFENCE

YTS

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many YTS places are currently on offer with Her Majesty's forces; how many have been taken up; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: In the present financial year (1987-88) there are 1,769 places available on the scheme. Between April and the end of December 1987 we received 1,746 applications of which 585 were accepted and 526 young people were admitted for training during that period.

Applicants are offered places only on condition that they meet successfully both the MSC YTS eligibility criteria and the normal service recruiting standards.

Frigates

Mr. Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the number of Royal Navy frigates currently deployed on seagoing duties.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) on 26 January 1988 at column *189*. The number of ships actually at sea at any one time constantly fluctuates.

Inner-city Task Forces

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action is being taken by the Army to encourage liaison between Army cadet forces and inner-city task forces; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Last month, with the support of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster I asked TAVR associations with inner city responsibilities to liaise with local inner city task forces to determine the scope for local community or commercial assistance towards the expansion of the Army Cadet Force within their respective areas, and to submit proposals. Reports are awaited shortly and will be given urgent and sympathetic attention.

Royal Naval Stores Depot, Llangennech

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies his Department has in hand for the future military use of the whole or part of the royal naval stores depot of Llangennech.

Mr. Freeman: A number of options are being studied for the future use of part or all of the RNSD site at Llangennech, including the possibility of the location of forms and publications storage operations. These are all at a very early stage of consideration and it is too soon to say whether any will be adopted.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what incidents have been reported in the past five years involving nuclear submarines from Faslane and the Holy Loch.

Mr. Ian Stewart: As with any other equipment, nuclear submarines suffer occasional defects. However, maintenance, operating and safety standards are exacting. As a consequence, there have been no incidents involving nuclear submarines at Faslane or Holy Loch over the last five years where there was any radiological hazard to service men, base personnel or members of the public.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements there are for informing the public in the west of Scotland, in the event of danger arising from an incident involving a nuclear submarine in the Clyde.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The public notification procedures to be followed in the unlikely event of any accident in the Clyde which might lead to a radiation hazard are detailed in the Clyde area public safety scheme. Similarly, the Scottish special safety scheme details procedures for other nuclear submarine berths on the west coast of Scotland.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether any of the reactor cladding was damaged on HMS Resolution during 1988;

(2) if any of Her Majesty's submarines departed from the Clyde submarine base at a time later than their scheduled departure date during January.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1988]:* It is not our policy to comment on matters affecting the operation or operational movements of Her Majesty's submarines.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he intends to make amendments to the Clyde public safety scheme in order to make provisions in the event of any radioactive leak arising from accidents to nuclear submarines in the River Clyde or nearby waters.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1988]:* The Clyde area public safety scheme already makes provision for any such accidents in the River Clyde and nearby waters.

HMS Resolution

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he proposes to take as a result of the recent incident involving HMS Resolution.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The electrical malfunction which occurred on board HMS Resolution on 26 January posed no danger to the submarine's reactor, its crew or the public. It will therefore be the subject of a routine technical report which will investigate the causes of the malfunction and make any necessary recommendations.

Falkland Islands (Exercise)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements he is making for overseas observers to attend the exercise in the Falkland Islands in March; and which countries he expects to be included.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Foreign observers will not be invited to attend Exercise Fire Focus.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the purpose, nature and extent of the exercise to

be held in the Falkland Islands from 7 to 31 March 1988; what vessels, aircraft and land forces will be involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Exercise Fire Focus will practise the United Kingdom's ability to reinforce the Falkland Islands rapidly in case of emergency. The exercise will involve the deployment to the islands of RAF Phantom air defence aircraft, Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft, and a significant number of troops, mainly from the Light Infantry, but with support from the Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers and other land force units. Following the reinforcement phase, there will be some unit exercises to take advantage of the excellent training facilities in the islands.

Nuclear-powered Vessels (Clyde)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations of all holding berths certified to handle nuclear-powered vessels in the Clyde area.

Mr. Ian Stewart: There is one holding berth in the Clyde area, at the Clyde submarine base, Faslane.

Category X Berths (Clyde)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations of all category X berths in the Clyde area.

Mr. Ian Stewart: There are five category X berths in the Clyde area, all within the Clyde submarine base at Faslane.

Clyde Submarine Base

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there has been a Naval Emergency Monitoring Organisation team employed at the Clyde submarine base during the current year.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1988]:* No Naval Emergency Monitoring Organisation teams have been activated at the Clyde submarine base in 1988.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any civilian or naval personnel have been contaminated with radiation at Clyde submarine base in the course of January.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1988]:* No.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what detailed information is available to the Clyde local liaison committee on the consequences of an accident involving a nuclear reactor on the nuclear-powered submarines based at the Clyde submarine base.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1988]:* The possible consequences of a nuclear submarine accident involving the Clyde submarine base are detailed in part 1 of the Clyde area public safety scheme, which is available to the Clyde local liaison committee.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements exist for the disposal of nuclear material arising from an accident to a nuclear submarine in or around the Clyde submarine base.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1988]:* It is not our policy to discuss such arrangements in detail. However, depending on the severity of the incident, there would be a range of options, all of which would take full account of the interests of public safety.

Naval Emergency Monitoring Organisation

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where in Scotland the Naval Emergency Monitoring Organisation is based; whether it was on active deployment during January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1988]:* The Naval Emergency Monitoring Organisation (Scotland) is based at the Clyde submarine base. It has not been actively deployed during 1988.

Clyde Local Liaison Committee

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements exist for the evacuation of the population both in and beyond the area covered by the Clyde local liaison committee.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1988]:* Evacuation of the civilian population in the unlikely event of a nuclear reactor accident is addressed in the Clyde area public safety scheme. There is little likelihood of evacuation being required beyond the area of the Clyde local liaison committee; but the scheme provides the framework on which the response to an accident with more widespread effects would be based.

Clyde Public Safety Scheme

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to revise the procedures contained in the Clyde public safety scheme.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1988]:* The Clyde area public safety scheme is kept under constant review and amendments are issued as necessary.

Fitness Enhancing Courses

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider introducing a system of income-generating fitness enhancing courses of up to four weeks' duration for civilian executives and others, run by the services and financed by the private sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 4 February 1988]:* There are at present no plans for such a system which would not be an appropriate use for Defence manpower. I would be happy, however, to consult private sector companies involved in the provision of fitness training in order to establish what advice and facilities, if any, they believe the armed forces might have to offer in this field. I should also emphasise that personnel regularly leave the services with experience in both fitness and adventurous training activities. The service resettlement branches would be pleased to hear from civilian organisations which may wish to avail themselves of the skills which these personnel have acquired during their service.

Air-Sea Search and Rescue

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate has been made of the total annual cost to the Royal Air Force of air-sea search and rescue services over each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 10 February 1988]:* The figures requested do not fall naturally out of normal Ministry of Defence costings, and could be produced only with disproportionate effort. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the then Member for Ynys Môn, Mr. Best, on 14 July 1986, at column *425*, giving the full costs of the military SAR service in the financial year 1985-86. The full costs of the military SAR service in 1987-88 are approximately £57·7 million.

TRANSPORT

Dangerous Substances (Harbours)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will amend the 1987 regulations covering dangerous substances in harbour areas, so that in future the berthing of ships at harbour facilities are subject to the Notification of Installations Handling Hazardous Substances Regulations and the Town and Country Planning General Development (Amendment) Act 1983.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what will be the total cost of the penalties that the Government will impose on the Merseyside passenger transport authority for the operation of the Mersey ferries and tunnels in 1988-89; and what is the projected accumulation of penalties over the next 10 years.

Mr. David Mitchell: The precept limit of 27p recently set for Merseyside passenger transport authority for 1988-89 takes into account the need for expenditure on the Mersey ferries and tunnels in that year. The limit is 1·49p lower than that for 1987-88. For spending at its revised expenditure level (EL), Merseyside PTA would have a grant entitlement for 1988-89 of £19·8 million, — significantly higher than for 1987-88.

It is not possible to apportion grant entitlement between particular services, nor is it possible to project future years' grant entitlement.

Anti-oil Pollution Patrols

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what aircraft were considered for use on anti-oil pollution patrols; why each was rejected; and why a foreign aircraft was chosen.

Mr. David Mitchell: The aircraft to be used on anti-pollution patrols is one of a number being provided and operated by a firm which has been contracted to undertake a varied package of aerial counter-pollution work, including patrolling and dispersant spraying. The choice of contractor was made, after full competitive tendering, on the basis of competence, ability to meet a performance specification, and the cost of the total service. No stipulation was made of the make of aircraft to be provided except insofar as they should be capable of meeting the specified performance criteria. The company awarded the contract is British and of the eight aircraft committed to the overall contract five are of British manufacture.

Mersey Tunnels

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy with regard to the capitalisation of the interest on the debt on the Mersey tunnels.

Mr. David Mitchell: As my right hon. Friend announced in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope) on 18 December 1987, he has decided to extend the current power to capitalise interest charges to 30 September 1988 and this was notified to the Merseyside passenger transport authority. My right hon. Friend is awaiting information from the PTA on long-term projections of revenue and expenditure with a view to discussing with them ways of dealing with the problem of accumulated debt.

British Rail

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next expects to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss British Rail's policy on sales of its land; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have no immediate plans to do so. Our policy is for the railways board to dispose of all its surplus land and property as rapidly as possible at a proper commercial price. I discussed progress with the chairman of the British Rail Property Board in December.

PSV Drivers

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, for the last five years for which figures are available, he will give the number of public service vehicle drivers taken ill on duty, whether or not an accident resulted.

Mr. David Mitchell: This information is not available.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will seek to provide medical examination of public service vehicle drivers every two years after the age of 50 years, and yearly beyond the age of 60 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: No. We have no reason to believe the present arrangements are not effective in identifying drivers whose medical condition makes them unfit to hold a licence. I shall be glad to hear from the hon. Member if he has evidence to the contrary.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the regulations which govern the form and content of the training course and examination which precede the issue of a public service vehicle licence.

Mr. David Mitchell: The requirements of the public service vehicle driving test are set out in the Public Service Vehicles (Drivers' Licences) Regulations 1985. The form and content of training courses are not prescribed in regulations.

Public Service Vehicles (Inspections)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the numbers of public service vehicle examinations conducted under the auspices of a bus or coach operating company, as opposed to one of his Department's inspectors, in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. David Mitchell: All public service vehicle annual test examinations are conducted by the Department's vehicle examiners. In 1986-87, 20,684 examinations (70 per cent.) were done at operators' premises, 47,692 (30 per cent.) at the Department's heavy goods vehicle test stations.

Long-distance Buses (Seat Strength)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of international consultations on seat strengths for long-distance buses.

Mr. David Mitchell: International discussions in the Economic Commission for Europe on a standard for the strength of coach seats were successfully concluded last year.

As soon as the United Nations secretariat publishes an ECE regulation incorporating the standard we will consult interested parties on a national regulation to make it mandatory for new British-registered coaches.

Channel Tunnel Workings (Waste Disposal)

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many drums of soil contaminated by polychlorinated biphenyl from the Channel tunnel workings in Kent have been stored by his Department at the Royal Army Ordnance Corps depot at Moreton-on-Lugg; where these drums will be removed for incineration; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: A total of 2,990 drums of soil contaminated by polychlorinated biphenyls are currently stored at the RAOC depot, Moreton-on-Lugg, Herefordshire. The material is being analysed to determine whether any of it is suitable for landfill at a licensed waste disposal site. Soil which is contaminated above the maximum level which is acceptable for landfill will be destroyed by high temperature incineration. The destruction contract, which has been let to Rechem International Ltd. of Pontypool, requires the incineration programme to be completed by 15 January 1989.

Motorway Traffic

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates have been made of the likely growth in motorway traffic in the next 10 years; and what percentage of motorways it is estimated will have to carry more traffic than their design capacity in 1988.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The national road traffic forecasts, published in 1984, provide a range for total traffic growth nationally. They do not distinguish between traffic on motorways and that using other roads. Since the forecasts were produced, actual traffic growth has been at the upper end of the forecast range. If it continues in that way some sections of motorway will become congested. In our regular reviews of the national road programme we assess what additional capacity is needed to cater for future growth. The White Paper published last April added 12 motorway widening and improvement schemes to the programme.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which sections of the M25 already carry a greater volume of traffic than their design capacity; what forecasts have been made of future traffic flows on the M25; and when he expects to make a decision on the proposal by private developers to augment the capacity of the M25.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Traffic flows on some sections of the M25 are very heavy and congestion occurs. Last year's roads White Paper announced a review of the whole of the M25 and details are to be announced shortly. This will assess future traffic levels, identify potential problem areas, and suggestion solutions. Costains recently published in outline a scheme for a second tier on the M25. We have not yet received firm proposals.

War Risks Insurance

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what agreements he proposes to enter into with British war risks insurance associations.

Mr. Channon: I have today entered into separate agreements with 10 British mutual war risks insurance associations under the Marine and Aviation Insurance (War Risks) Act 1952, to provide reinsurance against war risks to shipping. They replace agreements entered into in 1954 and 1959, and provide similar cover for the reinsurance of British-owned ships against war risks arising from hostilities involving the United Kingdom.

They include, however, an important new provision that ships on foreign registers may be covered when I give my consent. This will allow the benefits of government reinsurance for war risks to shipping to be extended to shipping beneficially owned by British interests and registered in foreign states. The new agreements are in line with the new rules that the associations have adopted this year; the rules and the agreements both reflecting the changes that have in recent years taken place in the marine insurance market. They are, though, more closely integrated with the rules and considerably simpler than those they replace.

M20

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects to place the main contract for the building of the M20 Holfingbourne to Ashford motorway.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Subject to the satisfactory completion of the remaining statutory procedures, we plan to let two contracts in the summer and autumn this year, for completion at about the same time in late 1990.

Arundel Bypass

Mr. Michael Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received since 1 October 1987 regarding commencement of work on the Crossbush section of the A27 Arundel bypass; and what responses he has made to these representations other than interim postcard acknowledgements.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I have received representations from my hon. Friend, the chairman of the Lyminster parish council and the local district councillor.

I wrote to my hon. Friend in December to explain that the case for building the Crossbush section of the bypass in advance was still being examined. I have written to the chairman of the parish council, with a copy to my hon. Friend, to say that I will visit Crossbush during my visit to West Sussex on 2 March. We will make an announcement on the representations as soon as possible.

London Regional Passengers Committee

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many members of the London regional passengers committee he has appointed; and if he will list their names and the organisations they represent.

Mr. Butcher: I have been asked to reply.

Membership of the London regional passenger committee currently stands at 28 and their names are as follows:

Dr. E. C. Midwinter *(Chairman)*
Mr. S. J. Beavan
Mr. S. Bradshaw
Mrs. B. E. Carroll-Brown
Mr. R. J. Caton
Mrs. D. Chaney
Mrs. H. M. Fogg
Mr. R. P. Govindia
Miss J. Harvey
Mr. C. S. Heaps
Mr. M. J. Kilker
Miss. F. C. Lawson
Mr. L. A. Mack
Mrs. D. Manley
Mrs. S. C. May
Mrs. J. Phillips
Mrs. F. M. P. Rea
Mr. M. J. Seddon
Mr. D. J. H. Senior OBE
Mr. G. P. Theobald
Mrs. J. Williams
Ms. M. Winterbotham
Mrs. K. Wood

Membership of the committee is drawn from a wide range of bodies and organisations, but members are appointed as individuals and not to represent the interests of the body which nominated them.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 19 February 1988

WALES

Education Expenditure

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what, in constant prices, was the level of spending per pupil in Wales in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in 1978-79 and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information is as follows:

Net recurrent institutional costs[1] at 1986-87 prices[2]

	Pounds per pupil	
	Primary	*Secondary*
1978-79	749	1,036
1986-87[3]	909	1,320

[1] Net recurrent institutional costs exclude expenditure on school meals and milk, school transport and pupil support.
[2] Figures have been expressed at 1986-87 prices, using the GDP deflator.
[3] Provisional.

Hospital Charges

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what sums were collected by each of the Welsh area health authorities from non-United Kingdom residents for hospital charges in 1985-86 and 1986-87; and what is the estimated net sum after deduction of costs of administration.

Mr. Grist: The income collected from charges to overseas visitors by each district health authority in Wales in the past two years was as follows:

£ Thousand

District Health Authority	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Clwyd	5·2	−2·9
East Dyfed	6·6	2·0
Gwent	19·7	9·3
Gwynedd	12·0	2·4
Mid Glamorgan	0·0	0·0
Pembrokeshire	3·8	0·2
Powys	0·4	0·0
South Glamorgan	17·6	−0·4
West Glamorgan	−0·1	0·1
Wales	65·2	10·6

Source: Health Authorities' Annual Accounts.
Notes:
1. Figures may not add up due to roundings.
2. Figures relate to charges authorised by regulations made under Section 121 of the National Health Service Act 1977 (which provides for the recovery of charges in respect of services provided to persons not ordinarily resident in Great Britain.

The structure of the health authorities' annual accounts does not allow the associated administration costs to be estimated.

Welsh Grand Committee

Mr. Ray Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to invite all the members of the Welsh Grand Committee to attend the press conferences organised by himself or his officials and held during the sittings of the Grand Committee on the subject being discussed by the Grand Committee.

Mr. Peter Walker: I will continue to have the courtesy to speak to any person who wishes to question me on a speech I have made, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman would if he had ever been asked.

TRANSPORT

Airports (Noise)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, in view of his Department's undertaking to bring about a progressive improvement in noise climate around airports, he will list the exceptions granted to foreign airlines, enabling them to continue to operate non-noise certificated subsonic jet aircraft to and from United Kingdom airports after the date from which such aircraft were banned, as detailed in the 1985 airports White Paper; and if he will give his reasons for doing so.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The exemptions are as listed in the table. Foreign-registered non noise-certificated subsonic jet aeroplanes have been banned from the United Kingdom 1 January under the Air Navigation (Noise Certification) Order 1987. Exemptions under article 16 of the order are made by the Civil Aviation Authority in consultation with my right hon. Friend. All exemptions are limited to day time operations. So far, 44 applications for exemption have been turned down.

Under the terms of EC directives 80/51 and 83/206 exemptions have been granted by the CAA where a non noise-certificated aeroplane is to be replaced by one meeting the stringent Chapter 3 ICAO noise certification standard. (The period of exemption is dependent on the delivery date of chapter 3 replacement aeroplanes. The exemption for each aeroplane expires on 31 December 1988 or when the replacement aeroplane is delivered, whichever is the sooner).

Country	*Airline*	*Aircraft type*	*Period of exemption*
Cyprus	Cyprus Airways	1 Boeing 707	31 December 1988
Portugal	TAP	1 Boeing 707	31 December 1988
Sudan	Sudan Airways	3 Boeing 707s	31 March 1988 (2 flights)
Belgium	Trans European Airways	1 Boeing 707	31 December 1988
Netherlands	KLM	11 McDonnell Douglas DC9s	31 December 1988
France	Minerve	1 Caravelle	6 February 1988

Exemptions have been granted in exceptional circumstances beyond the airlines' immediate control. Such circumstances include the late delivery of hush-kits or hush-kit parts, the unavailability of a compliant aeroplane for technical reasons and cases where passengers would otherwise suffer serious hardships. In additions two flights by the Saudi royal flight and one flight by the royal Brunei executive were exempted for diplomatic reasons in January and early February.

Country	*Airline*	*Aircraft type*	*Period*	*Reason*
Lebanon	Middle East Airlines	2 Boeing 707s	11 January 1988 (4 flights)	Hush-kit delays
Nigeria	Flash Airlines	1 McDonnell Douglas DC8	31 January 1988 (5 flights)	Hush-kit delays
Uganda	Uganda Airlines	1 Boeing 707	1 January 1988 (1 flight)	Flight delay. Hardship to passengers
Saudi Arabia	Prince Talol	1 BAe 1-11 (1 flight)	3 January 1988	Picking up hush-kit parts, en route for hush-kit fitment
Zimbabwe	Air Zimbabwe	5 Boeing 707s	3 to 7 February 1 to 10 June 1 to 20 June	Hush-kits being fitted pending delivery of Chapter 3 aircraft
Lebanon	Middle East	1 Boeing 707	26-27 January (1 flight)	Noise compliant aircraft grounded due to technical problems
Kenya	Kenya Airways	1 Boeing 707	27-28 January (1 flight)	Noise compliant aeroplane grounded due to engine damage
Switzerland	Jet Aviation Business Jets	1 BAe 1-11	29 January 1988-31 March 1988 (9 flights)	Hush-kit delays
Saudi Arabia	Aviation Management Consortium	1 BAe 1-11	11 February 1988-30 June 1988	Hush-kit delays
Lebanon	Middle East Airlines	1 Boeing 707	23-26 January (2 flights)	En route hush-kitting
Zambia	Zambia Airways	1 Boeing 707	29 February-5 March (2 flights)	Compliant aeroplane being maintained
Gambia	Gamair	1 McDonnell Douglas	12 February-25 March (6 flights)	Hush-kits
Lebanon	Middle East Airlines	1 Boeing 720	1 February 1988	Compliant aeroplane unavailable due to technical problems

Exemptions have been granted for flights to and from the United Kingdom specifically for maintenance purposes. Such exemptions stipulate that the aeroplane is flown empty, in both directions, to reduce its environmental impact to a minimum. A total of 19 maintenance flights have been exempted involving 13 airlines and 15 aircraft—eight B707, five BAel-11 and two DC8.

Transport Studies

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list all transport studies relating to London and the south-east *(a)* proposed, *(b)* under way or *(c)* completed within the last year by or on behalf of his Department, British Rail and London Regional Transport; and if he will give details of each inquiry of the estimated time scale, the estimated cost and the names of any consultant firms involved;

(2) if the will list all transport studies relating to London and the south-east *(a)* proposed, *(b)* under way or *(c)* completed within the last year by or on behalf of his Department or the London Docklands Development Corporation; and if he will give details for each inquiry of the estimated time scale, the estimated cost and the names of any consultant firms involved.

Mr. David Mitchell: It would not be practicable to list the many studies relating to transport in London and the south-east in which my Department is involved by reason of its day-to-day responsibilities. Studies conducted by LDDC, BR and LRT are matters for the managements of those organisations.

A6 Disley High Lane Bypass

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the representations which he had received about the line of route of the proposed A6 Disley high lane bypass before he recommended his preferred choice.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We consulted local councils and public bodies before announcing the preferred route choice. There was general support for a bypass and most authorities supported the proposed option.

M62-M1 Link

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce the outcome of the study he has commissioned on a possible new link between the M62 in the area of junction 25 and the M1 in the area of junction 40.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The feasibility study into a possible trunk road link between junction 38 or 39 on the M1 and the M62 in west Yorkshire is now being examined. This scheme will be considered for inclusion in the national trunk road programme at the next major review.

Passenger Transport Authorities (Financing)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many replies his Department has received to its consultation paper on financing passenger transport authorities; how many of the replies support his Department's proposals; if he will now reconsider the proposals in the light of the comments received; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: As of 18 February 1988, my Department had received 20 responses to the consultation paper, containing a number of comments on the proposal. I will of course take all these comments into account in coming to a decision on the proposal.

Tyre Treads (EC Directive)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he now intends to introduce legislation to bring into effect the European Community directive on the introduction of a minimum tread depth regulation of 1·6 mm over the entire tread surface of tyres.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) on 15 January *Official Report*, columns *457-8*.

London Buses (Colour)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any proposals to introduce legislation for the control of the colour of London buses.

Mr. David Mitchell: No.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Fair Employment Commission

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will describe the likely staffing procedure for the proposed Fair Employment Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: Final decisions have not yet been taken on new measures to promote equality of opportunity in employment. My right hon. Friend intends to make an announcement shortly on the Government's proposals.

Fishing

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been employed in the fishing industry in the ports of Ardglass and Kilkeel in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Viggers: The information is as follows:

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Total*
Ardglass			
1978	n/a	n/a	n/a
1979	162	58	220
1980	n/a	n/a	n/a
1981	205	61	266
1982	219	58	277
1983	215	57	272
1984	224	49	273
1985	257	60	317
1986	265	58	323
1987	259	54	313
Kilkeel			
1978	n/a	n/a	n/a
1979	587	226	813
1980	n/a	n/a	n/a
1981	656	168	824
1982	729	220	949
1983	932	216	1,148
1984	928	256	1,184
1985	855	232	1,087
1986	848	220	1,068
1987	996	210	1,206

No records are held for 1978 or 1980 as their compilation did not become a regular annual exercise until 1981.

Electricity (Installations)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what rate of interest Northern Ireland Electricity charges on extended credit for installation costs.

Mr. Viggers: The current rate of interest is 34 per cent. APR: the facility is available only to domestic consumers.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of electricity installation charges are on average attributable to *(a)* labour, *(b)* material and *(c)* other costs.

Mr. Viggers: This information is not readily available and could only be provided by Northern Ireland Electricity at a disproportionate cost. The proportions sought vary widely depending on the nature of the installation and an average figure would therefore have little meaning.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the basis on which charges for electricity installation are made by Northern Ireland Electricity.

Mr. Viggers: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Gentleman, the Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) on 16 February 1988 at column *595*.

PRIME MINISTER

Kurt Waldheim

Mr. Rhodes James: To ask the Prime Minister whether she will instruct Her Majesty's ambassador to the United States to seek access to any American copies of records relating to the alleged interrogation of British service men in the Balkans by Lieutenant Kurt Waldheim: with a view to making a statement on them to the House.

The Prime Minister: We now have a copy of the relevant file from the United States authorities, and are examining it.

Mr. Rhodes James: To ask the Prime Minister whether, in the course of the Government's review of the fate of the captured British service men in the Balkans, allegedly interrogated by the then Leiutenant Kurt Waldheim, she or her representatives will meet Professor Gerald Fleming, the British member of the historian's commission established by the Austrian Government.

The Prime Minister: Arrangements are in hand for Government research staff to meet Professor Fleming.

Mr. Rhodes James: To ask the Prime Minister whether she will institute an inquiry into the reasons for the destruction in 1978 of British Foreign and Commonwealth Office files relating to the alleged interrogation of British service men in the Balkans by the then Lieutenant Kurt Waldheim.

The Prime Minister: No. The files were destroyed in accordance with the guidelines for the preservation and destruction of public records.

Mr. Rhodes James: To ask the Prime Minister whether she will instigate inquiries into the information available

to Her Majesty's Government in 1971 concerning the war record of President Kurt Waldheim prior to the decision to support his candidature for Secretary General of the United Nations; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No. It has been the practice of successive Governments not to reveal how they voted in secret ballots in the United Nations, or why they voted as they did. I am informed that at the time of Dr. Waldheim's election as United Nations Secretary-General no doubts were raised about his wartime record.

Forestry Commission

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the present division of ministerial responsibility for the Forestry Commission as between the Scottish Office and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The Prime Minister: The Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food exercise their responsibilities for the Forestry Commission's territorial activities in relation to Scotland and England respectively. General policy and other matters affecting Great Britain as a whole are dealt with by the two Ministers and the Secretary of State for Wales, acting jointly, with the Secretary of State for Scotland taking the lead.

"Security and Counter Intelligence"

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister when she intends to announce her decision on the approval for publication of the book "Security and Counter Intelligence," by Mr. Anthony Simkins.

The Prime Minister: No decision has made been with regard to publication of "Security and Counter Intelligence."

ENVIRONMENT

Water Authorities

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* showing the external financing limits for each water authority for each year from 1978-79 to the latest available date; and, if he will also give the same information in real terms using 100 as a base for 1978-79.

Mrs. Roe: The information requested by the hon. Member is contained in the table.

External finance limits for water authorities: 1979-80 to 1988-89

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
Northumbrian										
Cash	33·9	41·0	48·5	35·8	20·0	20·0	22·0	18·2	2·0	3·0
Real	100·0	104·0	110·4	76·0	40·6	38·6	40·1	32·2	3·4	4·8
North-West										
Cash	52·6	72·0	86·9	84·0	79·0	87·0	84·5	58·0	49·4	44·0
Real	100·0	117·7	127·5	114·9	103·3	108·3	99·3	66·1	53·8	45·9
Severn-Trent										
Cash	55·3	49·4	67·3	61·9	66·3	40·0	55·2	7·9	−7·5	−11·5
Real	100·0	76·8	93·9	80·6	82·5	47·4	61·7	8·6	−7·8	−27·8
Yorkshire										
Cash	34·7	40·0	42·5	53·4	30·0	34·0	31·0	32·8	20·0	15·0
Real	100·0	99·1	94·5	110·8	59·5	64·2	55·2	56·6	33·0	23·7
Anglian										
Cash	69·5	70·0	74·9	87·4	85·0	60·0	46·0	45·7	34·0	23·5
Real	100·0	86·6	83·2	90·5	84·1	56·5	40·9	39·4	28·1	18·6
Thames										
Cash	18·1	22·0	6·0	−3·0	−10·5	−34·0	−60·0	−82·0	−95·0	−100·0
Real	100·0	104·5	25·6	−11·9	−39·9	−123·0	−205·0	−271·5	−300·9	−303·1
Southern										
Cash	37·4	45·0	52·0	40·7	33·5	23·0	11·0	2·0	−5·0	−13·5
Real	100·0	103·4	107·3	78·3	61·6	40·3	18·2	3·2	−7·7	−19·8
Wessex										
Cash	13·8	13·3	16·0	21·7	27·3	16·0	21·0	26·8	23·0	19·5
Real	100·0	82·9	89·5	113·2	136·1	75·9	94·1	116·4	95·6	77·5
South-West										
Cash	9·4	11·0	13·0	13·8	12·5	11·0	4·9	4·7	0·7	2·0
Real	100·0	100·6	106·8	105·7	91·5	76·6	32·2	30·0	4·3	5·8
Wales										
Cash	29·3	24·0	29·0	25·2	23·0	22·6	21·0	17·3	13·3	9·1
Real	100·0	60·9	66·0	53·5	46·7	43·7	38·3	30·6	22·5	14·7

Notes:

1. Cash figures are in £ million.
2. Real figures are in index form: 1979-80 = 100·0
3. The inflation index used is RPI.
4. EFLs were introduced for most authorities in 1979-80.

Woolwich Polytechnic Lower School

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to reach a decision on any request from the Inner London education authority for assistance towards the cost of rebuilding the boundary wall at the Woolwich polytechnic lower school under the inner urban programme for 1988-89.

Mr. Trippier: This project was not included in the inner area programme for 1988-89 submitted by the London borough of Greenwich.

Rural Areas (Assistance)

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish figures on assistance through the Development Commission or its equivalents for rural areas on a per capita basis for *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales.

Mrs. Roe: I regret that it is not possible to do this, because accurate information for England, Scotland and Wales is not available on a comparable basis.

Nuclear Waste Management

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in each of the six tasks and three projects being developed in nuclear waste management under the European Council decision of 12 March 1985, programme number 85 199 Euratom.

Mrs. Roe: Work on the six tasks has been proceeding and will continue until the end of the current research programme in 1989. Projects 1 and 2 are also proceeding, but no progress has been made in project 3. As a result the programme for tasks 1-6 is being extended slightly in 1988 and 1989.

Metropolitan Residuary Bodies

Mr. Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on metropolitan residuary body appointments.

Mr. Chope: The following have been reappointed to the metropolitan residuary bodies for the period 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1990 or until dissolution of the body, whichever is sooner:

Greater Manchester Residuary Body
Chairman: J. P. B. Hadfield, JP, DL
Members: K. J. Alford, OBE
Councillor A. B. Coyle, JP
B. Scholes, OBE, DL
C. H. Singleton, OBE
R. M. Willan

Merseyside Residuary Body
Chairman: N. G. Brodrick
Members: P. D. Carter, CBE
J. D. M. Forbes
W. C. W. Hughes
L. O. Jones
Councillor J. R. Lloyd
G. B. Marsh

South Yorkshire Residuary Body
Chairman: B. E. Cotton, CBE
Members: Councillor R. Rigby
M. C. Simpson
The Hon. Neil Turner
P. I. Wolf

Tyne and Wear Residuary Body
Chairman: A. S. Robertson
Members: K. Douglas
Councillor V. Fitzpatrick, JP
W. H. Foakes
R. A. S. Sisterson
R. C. Spoor

West Midlands Residuary Body
Chairman: Dr. M. D. Skillicorn
Members: Councillor J. Adams, OBE
G. N. Jackson, CBE
J. P. Meering
W. S. Page, CBE
K. Williams

West Yorkshire Residuary Body
Chairman: T. McDonald, OBE
Members: K. J. Bridge
D. Hanson
F. A. Mallet, CBE
Councillor G. E. Mudie
R. W. Suddards, CBE

These reappointments reflect my right hon. Friend's satisfaction with the impressive progress made so far by the residuary bodies and his confidence in members' ability to maintain the momentum towards the bodies' eventual wind up.

The financial benefits resulting from the removal of an unnecessary tier of local government are now being realised. Within three years of abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils successor boroughs and districts can expect to receive from the residuary bodies some £240 million in revenue balances that can be directly applied to reduce the rates, and approximately £305 million in capital receipts from property that can be used to enhance capital programmes. Taken together with the estimated annual long-term savings of £100 million resulting from staff savings, this brings direct benefits to the ratepayers of London and the metropolitan areas.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement about the status of the Rate Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) (No. 4) 1983-84.

Mr. Ridley: I laid the fourth supplementary report for 1983-84 before the House on 5 February (HC 252). It emerged, however, that a number of figures in appendix I to annex IV had been wrongly printed. I therefore withdrew the report on 15 February, and I have today laid before the House a new report.

I have taken the opportunity to incorporate a revised rateable value for block grant purposes for one rating authority, and as a result the national grant-related poundage (GRP) for spending at GRE has increased by 0·0004p. GRPs at GRE for all classes of authority have been adjusted accordingly and the abatement multipliers of four authorities have been slightly altered as a consequence. Otherwise all the determinations remain as they were in the report which was withdrawn.

The supplementary report requires the approval of the House of Commons. Subject to that, I plan to make the revisions to grant payments to reflect this report and two others approved by the House on Wednesday 17 February early in April.

Copies of the report and tables showing revised grant entitlements are being sent to local authority associations and to each authority.

Asbestos (Housing Estates)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will establish special funds for councils undertaking removal of asbestos from housing estates where the health of tenants is threatened; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. Local authorities have the opportunity to draw any special needs to the attention of the Department in their annual housing investment programme submissions and meetings. Funds are not made available specifically for asbestos removal programmes, but rate support grant is paid in support of local authorities revenue expenditure generally, including expenditure on asbestos. It is for local authorities themselves to determine their own priorities for expenditure within the resources available.

DEFENCE

Military Equipment (United States Procurement)

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will meet the United States Secretary of Defence to discuss the scope for an increase in United States procurement of British military equipment, including within the NATO procurement framework; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: No. My right hon. Friend already has frequent discussions with the United States Secretary of Defence on a wide range of issues including procurement.

Nuclear Weapons

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is planned that a nuclear warhead will be developed for the multiple launch rocket system.

Mr. Sainsbury: I understand that this is an option being considered by the United States Government.

Bullying

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what response he has received following his announcement of measures to counter bullying in the Army.

Mr. Freeman: The measures I announced on 26 January to combat bullying in the Army have been well received in the Army and have been welcomed by Members of this House. The media and public response has also recognised the value of these measures.

Irish Republic (Rescues)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what charges are made to the Government of the Irish Republic for rescues effected *(a)* of Irish citizens and *(b)* in Irish waters by British military search and rescue units; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Charges for civil search and rescue incidents are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. The Ministry of Defence recovers costs from the Department of Transport for the search and rescue services which it provides, but does not make charges to other Governments or individuals.

Armilla Patrol

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to reply to the letter of the hon. Member for Hamilton dated 29 December 1987, regarding policy on the Armilla patrol, addressed to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and passed on to him on 11 January.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I have written to the hon. Member.

Clyde Nuclear Emergency Monitoring Team

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what purpose the Clyde nuclear emergency monitoring team was called out on 26 January; and for what period of time personnel from the team were deployed at the scene of the incident.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to my replies to the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) on 18 February at columns *739-40*.

HMS Resolution

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cause of the emergency on board HMS Resolution on 26 January; and what steps have been taken to prevent a repetition of this type of incident.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a statement about the incident affecting the cooling system of the nuclear reactor of the submarine HMS Resolution on 26 January.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer the hon. Members to my reply to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 18 February at column *738*.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* military personnel and *(b)* civilian employees were exposed to levels of radioactivity greater than the permitted dose as a result of the emergency on board HMS Resolution on 26 January; and how many of these were suspended from duty as a result.

Mr. Ian Stewart: None.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any release of radioactivity occurred *(a)* within the vessel, *(b)* into the atmosphere, and *(c)* into the sea as a result of the incident on board HMS Resolution on 26 January.

Mr. Ian Stewart: No.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what notification was given to *(a)* the local liaison committee, *(b)* the civil police and *(c)* the civil fire service concerning the incident on board HMS Resolution on 26 January.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The electrical malfunction which occurred on board HMS Resolution on 26 January posed no danger to the submarine's reactor, its crew or the public. There was therefore no occasion to notify the local liaison committee or emergency services under the terms of the Clyde area public safety scheme.

Soldiers and Horses (Molestation)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cases have been reported of the

molestation of soldiers and horses on duty outside palaces and other public buildings; what steps he is taking to prevent this; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: There have been no complaints recorded of cases of molestation of soldiers or horses whilst on duty outside palaces or public buildings. If such an occurrence were to take place, adequate arrangements exist to enable the sentry to summon assistance.

Nuclear Tests

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he takes to monitor the research activities and findings of individuals looking into the consequence of the nuclear tests conducted on Christmas island in the 1950s; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 28 January to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) at column *309* concerning the study carried out by the National Radiological Protection Board into the mortality and cancer incidence in UK participants in the British nuclear test programme. The study was carried out by the National Radiological Protection Board under contract from the Ministry of Defence. The conduct and form of the study was, however, entirely a matter for the NRPB, with the advice of its medical and epidemiological consultants.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in how many cases claims for compensation or additional pension rights have been made in connection with the 1950s, nuclear tests; and in how many cases payments have been made.

Mr. Sainsbury: Full records are not available but any such claims from members of the armed forces would be barred by section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947. A small number of claims have been received from civilians who participated in the tests, but no payments have been made. Claims for war pensions are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what diseases the National Radiological Protection Board considered in the course of preparation of its report on nuclear test veterans; what criteria it used in deciding which diseases or conditions to exclude; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The responsibility for deciding which diseases would be considered in the course of the National Radiological Protection Board study was entirely a matter for the National Radiological Protection Board, with the advice of its medical and epidemiological consultants.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many questionnaires on the medical effects of nuclear tests were sent in 1956 to ex-service men; how those ex-service men to whom it was sent were selected; how many returned a completed questionnaire; what representations he had received from ex-service men present at nuclear tests who did not receive a questionnaire; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Questionnaires on the medical effects of nuclear tests were not sent to service men or ex-service men, in 1956 or at any other time.

Mine Countermeasure Vessels

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's mine countermeasure vessels capability in the Gulf area.

Mr. Ian Stewart: We have been reviewing the size of our MCMV force in the Gulf. In the light of our experience to date in operations to clear mine danger areas both in the Gulf of Oman and off Qatar, we have concluded that in the present circumstances the mine clearance task can be met satisfactorily by retaining three MCMVs and associated afloat support in the Gulf area to operate in support of the Armilla patrol. To this end Her Majesty's ships Dulverton, Middleton and Atherstone are in the course of taking over the mine counter-measures task in the Gulf hitherto fulfilled by Her Majesty's ships Hurworth, Bicester, Brocklesby and Brecon. The support vessel HMS Abdiel is also returning to the United Kingdom, and is due to be paid off in about six months' time. HMS Abdiel's support role in the Gulf is now being carried out by HMS Herald.

Equipment

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what degree of lateral stability was called for in the DROPS statement of requirement for the medium mobility vehicle; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what lateral stability was achieved by the validation model DROPS medium mobility trucks on their tilt test at the Royal Armaments Research and Development Establishment; and if he will make a statement;

(3) to what tests DROPS vehicles were submitted subsequent to tilt tests, with the test weights turned upside down; what effect this had on the centre of gravity; what stability was achieved; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what stability is expected once the DROPS vehicle has been fitted with small tyres; and if he will make a statement;

(5) whether the DROPS vehicle, once fitted with small tyres, will comply with the statement requirements in respect of the maximum ground pressure; and if he will make a statement;

(6) what was the stated minimum stability requirement for low mobility, road-use only, vehicles; and if he will make a statement;

(7) why, after the first round of trialling, it was considered desirable to subject DROPS RTE to a second round of full open competition to determine best value for money; why this course of action was considered undesirable in respect of DROPS itself; whether it was considered desirable to submit simplified RTE equipment to a second round of full open competition; and if he will make a statement;

(8) what was the difference between RTE/CLOTS equipment and Simple RTE/Simple CLOTS equipment; and if he will make a statement;

(9) which company was selected in 1983 to provide Simple RTE; which other companies were selected in 1985; and if he will make a statement;

(10) whether RTE (rail transfer equipment) supplied by EKA Ltd., was selected for trials in 1983; and if he will make a statement;

(11) whether *(a)* the 1982 or *(b)* the 1986 specification required the rail transfer equipment to operate at different step heights; to what extent this requirement was deemed essential in stating the 1986 requirement; whether any of the equipments tendered in 1986 met this essential requirement; and if he will make a statement;

(12) what have been the changes in operational circumstances that have made rail transfer equipment operation under power cables and at different step heights essential at the time of stating the requirements and dispensable at the time of selecting equipment against those requirements; and if he will make a statement;

(13) which of the requirements of the 1986 rail transfer equipment specification are not met by the ordered equipment; and if he will make a statement;

(14) whether the equipment ordered for rail transfer equipment is an existing commercially available design; and if he will make a statement;

(15) what are the factors that led to the attempt to enhance the mobility of a DROPS vehicle by fitting large wheels; and if he will make a statement;

(16) whether the original DROPS trials equipment achieved medium mobility; whether cross-country mobility is still required; and if he will make a statement;

(17) whether the DROPS medium mobility vehicle is required to be used off-road; whether it was ever intended to have suitable mobility for off-road use; and if he will make a statement;

(18) in precisely what respects the performance requirements called for in respect of the current procurement of 209 DROPS trailers differ from the performance requirements called for in respect of the 295 trailers ordered pursuant to the original DROPS 1982 statement of requirement; where in the 1982 statement of requirement these performance requirements were stated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* I will write to my right hon. Friend shortly.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Devon and Cornwall Investment Bureau

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many industrial companies new to Devon and Cornwall have commenced investment projects as a result of the work of the Devon and Cornwall Investment Bureau in the years 1985-86 and 1986-87; and what is the estimated figure for 1987-88.

Mr. Atkins: My Department provides grant-aid to the Devon and Cornwall Development Bureau (DCDB) to promote the region as a location for investment by overseas companies. I am advised that in the years specified, the number of start-ups by overseas companies new to Devon and Cornwall with which the DCDB has been actively involved is as follows:

	Number
1985-86	1
1986-87	4
1987-88	[1]6

[1] Estimate.

These projects are expected to create around 1,000 new jobs.

In addition, the DCDB assists overseas companies with their plans to expand in Devon and Cornwall, and can claim to have been actively involved with 11 such successful projects over the period in question. These projects are expected to create a further 600 new jobs.

My Department's contribution to the DCDB does not cover work to encourage United Kingdom companies to relocate within Devon and Cornwall, and I have no information on the level of this activity.

Structural Funds

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the United Kingdom share of the structural funds in the past three years, the forecast for this year and the forecast under the new arrangements; and if he will give the figures in percentages at European currency unit and sterling;

(2) pursuant to the statement on the meeting of the European Council, *Official Report*, 15 February, columns 705-17, whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the United Kingdom's share of the structural funds in the past three years, the forecast outturn for 1987-88 and the forecast under the new arrangements; and if he will give the figures both as percentages and in European currency unit and £ sterling.

Mr. Alan Clark: The figures for the United Kingdom share of the structural funds for the past three years are given in the table. The drop in our percentage shares between 1985 and 1986 followed the accession of Spain and Portugal to the European Community.

It is not possible to forecast our share of the funds for this or future years. However, as the Prime Minister said in her statement on the outcome of the European Council at Brussels, we hope to increase our payment receipts from the funds to about £1,000 million in 1992.

United Kingdom share of the commitments of the structural funds

	1985	*1986*	[1]*1987*
Mecu	1,223	1,014	1,244
£ Million	722	714	[2]896
per cent.	22·7	15·6	16·7

[1] Estimate.
[2] Equivalent to about £750 million in payments.

Securities Association

Mr. Richard Page: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if a decision has been reached on whether to give leave for the recognition under the Financial Services Act of the Securities Association.

Mr. Maude: In accordance with the procedures laid down in the Financial Services Act, the Director General of Fair Trading has submitted to my right hon. and noble Friend a report on the rules and guidance submitted by TSA to the SIB. Having considered the Director General's report, my right hon. and noble Friend has concluded that on the basis of the information presently available to him he does not consider TSA's rules and guidance have, or are intended or are likely to have, to any significant extent, the effect of restricting, distorting or preventing competition. He has, therefore, today given his leave to the SIB for the recognition of TSA.

Patent Office

Mr. Page: I ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether his plans have advanced for the relocation of the Patent Office.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: As I told the House on 10 December 1987 *Official Report*, column *239*, I have been examining the possibility of relocating the Patent Office to Cardiff or Newport. In consultation with my colleagues, the Secretaries of State for Wales and for the Environment I have decided that Newport should be the preferred location, on a site already occupied there by the business statistics office, which is a division of my Department. The trade marks branch of the Patent Office opened an examining group on the Newport site on 3 February, as the first phase of the relocation. The move of the rest of the office, except for a modest public office which will remain in London, will take about three years and I estimate that at least 500 jobs will be created locally.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Page: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he intends that any staff in the insolvency service of his Department who are currently based in London will be relocated elsewhere; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have decided that 148 London-based insolvency service staff will be relocated in Birmingham in 1989. The decision to relocate these staff follows a thorough review of my Department's scope for moving staff to locations other than London, where the cost of accommodation is very high. The type of work carried out by the staff concerned does not require their location in any particular area. The proposed move will improve the cost-effectiveness of my Department in our use of public funds for staff accommodation.

I also believe that moving these important Civil Service posts to Birmingham will make a worthwhile contribution to the strong revival of the local economy in the west midlands that is now under way. The insolvency service already has a considerable presence in Birmingham in terms of staff numbers, including one of its major official receiver's offices.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Horniman Museum

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has for the continued operation of the Horniman museum after the abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Dunn: The Government wish to ensure a secure future for the museum, and are considering what arrangements would best achieve that objective.

University Places

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish the number of places offered by each United Kingdom university for each of the past 10 years *(a)* in total, *(b)* by degree course subject and *(c)* by country of origin of student, Scotland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland and others.

Mr. Jackson: The available information for full-time undergraduate new entrants to universities in 1986 is shown in the table. It is taken from "University statistics, 1986-87, volume one (students and staff)", published by the Universities Statistical Record. Information for earlier years is published in previous editions. Figures by subject for 1986 relate to the new subject classification, which is not directly comparable with the classification used prior to 1985. Readily available unpublished information for country of domicile for 1986 entrants is also shown.

Full-time undergraduate new entrants to universities: United Kingdom 1986

	Number
Aston	1,001
Bath	946
Birmingham	2,615
Bradford	1,106
Bristol	2,012
Brunel	671
Cambridge	3,317
City	817
Durham	1,460
East Anglia	1,190
Essex	932
Exeter	1,430
Hull	1,423
Keele	817
Kent	1,37
Lancaster	1,547
Leeds	2,724
Leicester	1,255
Liverpool	2,060
London Business School	—
London	9,583
Loughborough	1,428
Manchester Business School	—
Manchester	2,883
Manchester Institute of Science and Technology	1,108
Newcastle	2,130
Nottingham	1,983
Oxford	3,080
Reading	1,531
Salford	1,083
Sheffield	2,208
Southampton	1,832
Surrey	911
Sussex	1,334
Warwick	1,774
York	1,051
Total England	62,629
Aberystwyth University College	915
Bangor University College	818
Cardiff University College	1,695
St. David's, Lampeter	242
Swansea University College	1,404
University of Wales College of Medicine	76
University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology	672
Total Wales	5,822
Total England and Wales	68,451
Aberdeen	1,491
Dundee	835
Edinburgh	2,505
Glasgow	2,694
Heriot-Watt	1,060
St. Andrews	989
Stirling	899
Strathclyde	1,838
Total Scotland	12,311

	Number
Total Great Britain	80,762
Queen's University Belfast	1,887
University of Ulster	2,760
Total Northern Ireland	4,647
Total United Kingdom	85,409

Full-time undergraduates new entrants to universities in Great Britain, 1986—by subject

	Number
1. Medicine and dentistry	
Medicine	4,054
Dentistry	861
Total medicine and dentistry	4,915
2. Studies allied to medicine	
Anatomy and physiology	267
Pharmacology	187
Pharmacy	688
Ophthalmics	237
Nursing	369
Other and combined studies allied to medicine	317
Total studies allied to medicine	2,065
3. Biological sciences	
Biology	1,688
Botany	129
Zoology	346
Genetics	102
Microbiology	323
Biochemistry	1,129
Psychology	954
Other and combined biological sciences	484
Total biological sciences	5,155
4. Veterinary science, agriculture and related studies	
Veterinary science	337
Agriculture	510
Forestry	81
Food science	191
Other and combined agricultural sciences	187
Total veterinary science, agriculture and related studies	1,306
5. Physical sciences	
Chemistry	2,289
Physics	2,320
Astronomy	64
Geology	792
Geography	469
Other and combined environmental and physical sciences	579
Total physical sciences	6,513
6. Mathematical sciences	
Mathematics	2,463
Statistics	165
Computer studies	1,652
Other and combined mathematical sciences	524
Total mathematical sciences	4,804
7. Engineering and technology	
General engineering	922
Civil engineering	1,520
Mechanical engineering	1,988
Aeronautical engineering	461
Electrical engineering	397
Electronic engineering	1,748
Production engineering	263
Chemical engineering	825
Minerals technology	173
Metallurgy	106
Other materials technology	170
Maritime technology	109
Biotechnology	62
Other and combined studies in engineering and technology	2,068
Total engineering and technology	10,812
8. Architecture and related studies	
Architecture	552
Building	227
Town and country planning	151
Other related studies including combinations	43
Total architecture and related studies	1,023
9. Social sciences	
Economics	2,499
Sociology	707
Social policy and administration	282
Applied social work	116
Anthropology	147
Psychology	583
Geography	1,516
Politics	910
Law	3,869
Other and combined social services	1,429
Total social sciences	12,068
10. Business and financial studies	
Business and management studies	1,450
Financial management	234
Accountancy	700
Institutional management	224
Land and property management	216
Other and combined business and financial studies	525
Total business and financial studies	3,349
11. Librarianship and information science	
Librarianship	33
Other related studies including combinations	48
Total librarianship and information science	81
12. Languages and related studies	
Linguistics	151
English	2,812
American studies	182
Classical studies	401
French	1,037
German	362
Hispanic studies	156
Russian	144
Other European languages	321
Chinese	76
Other Oriental/Asian/African languages	94
Other and combined languages and related studies	2,804
Total languages and related studies	8,540
13. Humanities	
History	2,813
History of art	337
Archaeology	263
Philosophy	430

	Number
Theology and religious studies	696
Other and combined humanities	278
Total humanities	4,817
14. Creative arts	
Fine art	151
Design studies	135
Music	588
Drama	252
Other and combined creative arts	151
Total creative arts	1,277
15. Education	
Teacher training	490
Academic studies in education	302
Other and combined education studies	282
Total education	1,074
16. Multi-disciplinary studies	
Combinations of groups 2, 3 and 4	132
Combinations of groups 2-4 with 5 and 6	323
Combinations of groups 5 and 6	351
Combinations of groups 2-6 with 7 and 8 and 7 with 8	608
Combined or general science	1,515
Combinations of groups 9, 10 and 11	764
Combined or general social science	1,479
Combinations of group 12 with 13-15	1,297
Combinations of groups 13, 14 and 15	45
Combined or general arts	662
Combinations of groups 5 and 6 with 9-11	838
Combinations of groups 2-4, 7 and 8 with 9-11	394
Combinations of groups 5 and 6 with 12-15	250
Combinations of groups 2-4, 7 and 8 with 12-15	127
Combinations of groups 9-11 with 12	968
Combinations of groups 9-11 with 13-15	1,238
Other general and combinations	1,982
Total multi-disciplinary studies	12,973
All subjects	80,762

Full-time undergraduate new entrants by domicile, 1986

	Number
Universities in Great Britain	80,762
of which domiciled in	
Scotland	8,588
England	57,385
Wales	3,645
Northern Ireland	1,109
Others	10,035

Universities (Wales and Northern Ireland)

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will republish a table, in the manner of his answer of 12 February, *Official Report*, columns *375-6*, showing the numbers and percentages of *(a)* Welsh and *(b)* Northern Irish students and relating to (i) Welsh and (ii) Northern Irish universities.

Mr. Jackson: The complete cross classification of country of location by country of domicile is shown in the following table:

Full-time students in 1986

	Universities in				
	England	*Wales*	*Scotland*	*Northern Ireland*	*United Kingdom*
Total	233,538	20,556	47,230	14,966	316,290
Numbers domiciled in					
England	188,316	11,789	9,073	675	209,853
Wales	7,019	5,624	243	28	12,914
Scotland	2,938	129	30,449	125	33,641
Northern Ireland	2,356	199	1,177	12,110	15,842
Other[1]	32,909	2,815	6,288	2,028	44,040
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Percentages domiciled in					
England	81	57	19	5	66
Wales	3	27	1	0	4
Scotland	1	1	64	1	11
Northern Ireland	1	1	2	81	5
Other[1]	14	14	13	14	14

Percentages may not sum due to rounding

[1] Includes those domiciled in other United Kingdom and overseas.

Independent Schools

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has for each of the past five years as to what percentage of those school pupils whose principal address is in an inner London borough attended an independent school; and as to what is the percentage of the pupil population of *(a)* outer London, *(b)* south-east England and *(c)* England who attend independent schools.

Mr. Dunn: Information on pupils' home addresses is not held centrally. The number of pupils in independent schools as a percentage of all pupils in school in each of the last five years in the following areas was:

Pupils in independent schools as a percentage of all pupils in the Inner London Education Authority, Outer London, Other South East and England in January of each year

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
ILEA	10·7	11·2	11·6	12·0	12·4
Outer London	7·3	7·4	7·6	7·7	8·1
Other South East	9·5	9·7	9·9	10·1	10·4
England	6·2	6·4	6·5	6·6	6·9

University Funding

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give details of any revised cash limits for his Department's votes in respect of university funding in 1987-88.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit on class XII, vote 3 is being increased by a total of £7·583 million to facilitate the creation of a new university institution in Cardiff. The effect of this change is as follows:

Class, Vote and Description of Expenditure

	£'000
XII 3 Universities, etc	
Current cash limit	1,706,618
Revision	+7,583
Revised cash limit	1,714,201

The Supplementary Estimate will include provision for a repayable grant of £4·402 million (of which £4·279 million will be charged to the Reserve, after taking account of offsetting savings), with repayments benefiting the Reserve in future years. The remainder, £3·304 million, will be funded by a transfer of £1·652 million from Welsh Office provision (class XVII, vote 5) and £1·652 million from the Reserve. The increase will not add to the public expenditure planning total.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Taxi Drivers (Assaults)

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deaths have resulted for each of the last five years as a consequence of attacks on licensed taxi drivers.

Mr. John Patten: In the period 1982-86, in England and Wales, five licensed taxi drivers are known to have been victims of homicide.

Written Question (Cost)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the cost in time and money of the preparation of the answer to the written question from the hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles) answered on 29 January, *Official Report*, column *395*.

Mr. Hurd: About one hour at a cost of about £30.

Dog Fighting

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the extent of foreign involvement in the promotion of and betting upon dog fighting; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None, although we are, of course, aware of the recent allegations of such involvement. The police work closely with officials of the RSPCA in the investigation of alleged offences relating to dog fighting.

European Parliamentary Constituencies

Sir Anthony Meyer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Boundary Commission for Wales intends to conduct any supplementary review of European parliamentary constituencies.

Mr. Hurd: The commission has informed me of its intention to consider the making of a supplementary report on three European parliamentary constituencies in Wales. These are Mid and West Wales, South East Wales and South Wales.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Boundary Commission intends to conduct any supplementary reviews of European Parliamentary constituencies in England.

Mr. Hurd: The commission has informed me that it intends to consider the making of a supplementary report on the following 34 European parliamentary constituencies in England:

Durham
Cleveland and Yorkshire North
York
Humberside
Lancashire Central
Lancashire East
Yorkshire West
Cheshire West
Cheshire East
Derbyshire
Cambridge and Bedfordshire North
Suffolk
Oxford and Buckinghamshire
Bedfordshire South
Hertfordshire
Essex South West
Essex North East
Bristol
Wiltshire
Cornwall and Plymouth
Sheffield
Nottingham
Lincolnshire
Shropshire and Stafford
Staffordshire East
Midlands Central
Leicester
Devon
Somerset and Dorset West
Dorset East and Hampshire West
Hampshire Central
Wight and Hampshire East
Kent West
Kent East

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Christmas Island (Nuclear Tests)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Attorney-General for what reasons certain records relating to the nuclear tests conducted on Christmas Island during the 1950s have been held back from release under the Public Records Act for 75 years.

The Solicitor-General: It has not been possible, from the information given, to identify the records referred to in the hon. Member's question. In so far as any such records have been withheld from release, they have been so withheld under section 3(4) of section 5(1) of the Public Records Act 1958.

Bona Vacantia Department

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Attorney-General if he will introduce new regulations for the distribution of intestacy proceeds from the Bona Vacantia Department to pass to charities in untraceable cases.

Mr. Brooke: I have been asked to reply.

No. The Treasury Solicitor is already authorised by the Treasury to make payments from Bona Vacantia to those for whom a person dying intestate might reasonablly have been expected to provide. A charity will therefore benefit from an estate where it has helped the deceased, or where it is clear that the deceased intended it to benefit. There is no intention to extend these principles to benefit charities in any other circumstances.

Intestacy

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Attorney-General if he will introduce legislation to provide new ways to enable companies and organisations to allocate or distribute long-standing funds where intestacy has resulted in an inability to trace claimants.

Mr. Brooke: I have been asked to reply.

No. The distribution of the property of persons dying intestate is a matter for their personal representatives. Where there is no one entitled following an intestacy, the matter should be referred to the Treasury Solicitor as Bona Vacantia.

THE ARTS

Asian Artists

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister for the Arts how many Asian artists and companies received financial support from the Arts Council in each of the past five years.

Mr Luce: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) on Mouday 15 February, at columns 698-99.

NATIONAL FINANCE

VAT (United States Forces)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what administrative arrangements are in place for the offsetting of value added tax payments for United Kingdom traders by United States forces not having to pay value added tax under special agreement.

Mr. Lilley: There are no offsetting arrangements. Traders do not charge VAT when supplying United States forces authorities under the special agreements.

Outturn Expenditure

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of outturn expenditure for 1987-88; and what are the figures for each Department.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Member to table 1·8 of volume I of the 1988 public expenditure White Paper (Cm. 288).

Value Added Tax

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what invitations to respond to the proposals of the Commissioner of the European Community for harmonisation of value added tax and excise duties was contained in the global communications from the Commission to Her Majesty's Government; and if he will publish in the *Official Report* its text, together with any response.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 18 February 1988]:* The global communication contained no specific invitations to respond; member states were invited only to evaluate the Commission's tax approximation proposals. The Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) has referred the proposals to the Economic Policy Committee (EPC) for economic analysis and will discuss them in the light of EPC's report, which is expected in the spring. The Commission should be in little doubt about the Government's view on United Kingdom zero rating. A copy of the global communication, together with a copy of each of the Commission's proposals, has been placed in the Library.

EMPLOYMENT

Dock Workers (Dismissals)

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many permanent registered dock workers in the Liverpool local dock board area in each year from 1980 to 1986 have been dismissed by their employer for an offence justifying summary dismissal under the disciplinary provisions of the dock labour scheme; and how many of these men have been reinstated by order of the local dock labour board and appeal tribunals.

Mr. Nicholls: The figures requested are as follows:

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Brought forward from previous year	—	6	—	—	—	—	—
Permanent workers dismissed for offence justifying summary dismissal	12	5	5	6	2	2	2
Reinstated by order of Liverpool Dock Labour Board and appeal tribunals	6	5	5	6	2	2	2
Dismissal upheld by Liverpool Dock Labour Board and appeal tribunals	—	6	—	—	—	—	—
Carried forward to following year	6	—	—	—	—	—	—

Radiation Exposure

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on his policy towards acceptable levels of radiation exposure, following the most recent report of the National Radiological Protection Board.

Mr. Nicholls: I am awaiting the advice of the Health and Safety Commission. The commission has set up a working group on ionising radiations which met for the first time on 9 December 1987. The working group is considering the recent guidance from the National Radiological Protection Board as part of its remit and will advise the commission on an appropriate course of action. I am content to await any subsequent recommendations.

Workers and the public are currently protected by the Ionising Radiations 1985, which require doses to be kept not only below specified dose limits but beyond that to be kept as low as reasonably practicable.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Green Pound

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the average discrepancy between the value of the green pound and the real pound sterling for the years 1985, 1986 and 1987.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the average percentage difference between the value of the pound sterling and the green rate for the £ sterling for each six month period since January 1979.

Mr. MacGregor: The information is not available in the form requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Monetary compensatory amounts reflect the difference between sterling's market rate and green rates. The table shows the MCA percentages for beef and cereals during the first week in each six-month period since 1979 as well as the latest figures available:

Date (week commencing)	MCA (percentage) Beef	Cereals
1 January 1979	−27·0	−27·0
2 July 1979	− 6·0	−17·6
7 January 1980	− 3·5	− 9·0
7 July 1980	+ 1·7	− 1·0
5 January 1981	+12·1	+12·1
6 July 1981	+12·3	+12·3
4 January 1982	+ 8·0	+ 8·0
3 July 1982	+ 9·6	+ 9·6
3 January 1983	+ 1·4	+ 1·4
4 July 1983	+ 5·2	+ 5·2
2 January 1984	+ 7·6	+ 7·6
2 July 1984	+ 1·0	+ 3·9
6 January 1985	− 1·9	− 1·9
1 July 1985	+ 3·6	+ 3·6
6 January 1986	− 3·5	− 3·5
7 July 1986	− 7·7	− 8·9
5 January 1987	−18·4	−26·3
1 July 1987	−10·6	−19·9
4 January 1988	− 8·4	−17·5
15 February 1988	− 8·4	−17·5

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Health and Safety

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will introduce legislation to extend to the House of Commons the requirements of the health and safety Acts.

Mr. Wakeham: No. I have no such proposals. The authorities of the House seek to ensure that the provisions of these Acts are met wherever possible. It has been the practice of inspectors of the Health and Safety Executive to visit the House at the request of the House authorities.

SCOTLAND

Drug Abusers

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many intravenous drug abusers he estimates there are in *(a)* Glasgow and *(b)* Edinburgh.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Because of the nature of the activity it is very difficult to make precise estimates of the numbers of intravenous drug misusers. The current estimate is as follows:

	Estimate
West Scotland (mainly Glasgow)	5,000-7,500
South East Scotland (mainly Edinburgh)	2,000-3,000

Cervical Smear Tests

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many laboratories in Scotland are equipped to deal with cervical smear tests; and what are their locations.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 27 October 1987.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average period of time which each laboratory in Scotland takes to send the results of cervical smear tests back to patients.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many women were tested for cervical cancer in each year since 1975.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

Year	*Number of women tested*
1975	253,461
1976	235,582
1977	239,572
1978	253,270
1979	252,896
1980	282,510
1981	293,870
1982	285,105
1983	315,044
1984	322,484
1985	356,747
1986	361,626

Figures for 1987 are not yet available.

Invasive Carcinoma

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many women are suffering from invasive carcinoma in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Glasgow.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not available in precisely the form requested. In 1985 (the latest year for which complete cancer registration data are available) 14,264 females with malignant neoplasms were registered for the first time in Scotland. The comparable figure for the West of Scotland cancer registry, which includes Strathclyde, Dumfries and Galloway and Central regions, was 6,741.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which socio-economic group is most affected by invasive carcinoma in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The latest information relating to incidence of cancer by socio-economic grouping is given in the publication, "Atlas of Cancer in Scotland: Incidence and Epidemiological Perspective (ed. I Kemp et al), IARC Scentific Publication No. 72", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Outturn Expenditure

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of outturn expenditure for his Department; and if he will express it as a proportion of expenditure originally allocated for the year.

Mr. Rifkind: The information is:

	Estimated Outturn 1987-88 £ million	*As proportion of planned expenditure 1987-88*
Total expenditure within the Secretary of State for Scotland's responsibility	8,212	1·032

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the latest figures for outturn spending for each of the departmental responsibilities listed in table 3.16 of the public expenditure White Paper.

Mr. Rifkind: The latest figures for outturn spending on each of the programmes within my responsibility are shown on page 13 of "Public Expenditure to 1990-91: A Commentary on the Scotland Programme", a copy of which has been supplied to the hon. Member and other hon. Members representing Scottish constituencies. Copies were also placed in the Library.

Leukaemia (Fife)

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will fund a study examining an potential link between leukaemia and radiation in the Fife area.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No. I see no merit in funding ad hoc studies before the Government have received the advice of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment on the further investigation of leukaemia in the vicinity of nuclear establishments.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the capital allocation in cash and real terms to the Housing Corporation in Scotland, including the provisional estimates for 1988-89, for each year since 1974.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Gross Allocation £ million*	*Gross Allocation in real terms £ million*
1974-75	[1]4·50	16·408
1975-76	[1]10·60	30·761
1976-77	[1]16·30	41·791
1977-78	[1]27·10	61·004
1978-79	[1]31·40	63·852
1979-80	[1]48·60	84·558
1980-81	[1]65·70	96·414
1981-82	85·00	113·583
1982-83	108·50	135·197
1983-84	109·60	130·473
1984-85	101·30	115·442
1985-86	104·20	112·062
1986-87	113·80	118·636
1987-88	123·20	[2]123·200
1988-89	131·74	126·068

[1] Actual expenditure. In these years expenditure was controlled on basis of housing units to be provided rather than budget allocation.
[2] Base Year.

Electoral Register

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will list, for each Scottish constituency for each year since 1983 *(a)* the total number of people on the electoral register, *(b)* the number of young people on the register due to reach the age of 18 years during the currency of the register and the annual percentage increase or decrease for *(a)* and *(b)*.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to table 1·5 in the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys series EL Nos 10-13 for the years 1983-1986, respectively, and to table 2 in the monitor EL 87/1 for 1987, from which the annual percentage increase or decrease for *(a)* and *(b)* may be derived. Copies of these publications are in the Library. Similar information for 1988 is not yet available.

Coniferous Afforestation

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the Government's policy with regard to coniferous afforestation in areas of outstanding national beauty.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government's policy is that applications for grant aid towards planting conifers in such areas should each be considered on their merits with any views expressed under the Forestry Commission's consultation arrangements being taken into account.

Forest Damage

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the research studies currently being undertaken by the Forestry Commission into forest damage in the United Kingdom.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The commission's research division undertakes a wide range of studies on damage to forest, landscape and amenity trees throughout Great Britain. On the assumption that the hon. Member is interested in the possible effects of air pollution in particular, the following studies are in hand at present:

- survey of the crown condition of Scots pine, Norway spruce, Sitka spruce, oak and beech
- grid survey (in accordance with EEC Regulation 3528/86) of crown condition of species located at grid intersection points
- study of extension growth of beech over several decades across Southern England
- study of the occurrence of crown dieback of hedgerow ash in England in relation to adjacent agricultural land use
- study of reduced growth Sitka spruce in the South Wales Coalfield
- survey jointly commissioned with the Nature Conservancy Council of beech crown condition and Scots pine growth in Southern England
- studies of the growth and physiology of seedling and clonal stock of major tree species in large open-top chamber experiments at two sites in England and one in Scotland
- study of responses of 6 biomonitors (4 trees, 2 herbaceous species) to ambient pollutants at 62 sites in Southern England

Student Grants

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland why students are not to be compensated for their loss of housing benefit.

Mr. Portillo: I have been asked to reply.

The new housing benefit scheme and the other social security changes which will come into operation in April 1988 will affect a large number of claimants including students. Transitional protection is being provided only for those on supplementary benefit consistent with the Government's approach to direct help to those most in need. Furthermore, many claimants will see some reduction in their housing benefit as a result of increased entitlement to other benefits.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mozambique (Security Advisers)

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to the number of Cuban, Soviet and East German security advisers stationed in Mozambique.

Mr. Mellor: Precise information is not available. However, it is believed that there is still some East German involvement in security matters in Mozambique.

Irish Air Space

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to proposals by the Irish Government to charge the British Government for military aircraft overflying Irish air space; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am not aware of any such proposals.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Mental Nurses (Northumberland)

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many registered mental nurses are employed in Northumberland health authority; what was the number in 1979; and what has been the percentage change.

Mrs. Currie: Such information as is available is shown in the table. Staff with the registered mental nurse qualification cannot be separately identified. The staff-in-post figures are for all state registered nurses employed in the mental illness area of work.

Because of the 1982 NHS reorganisation, figures on a consistent basis are not centrally available for the years prior to 1982.

Nursing staff in mental illness area of work[1] Northumberland district health authority at 30 September

Whole-time equivalent[2]		*Percentage change[3]*
1982	*1986*	*1982-86*
490	520	+6·2

Source: DHSS Annual Census of NHS Non-Medical Manpower.

[1] Includes learners.

[2] Figures are independently rounded to nearest whole time equivalent.

[3] Percentage change calculated on unrounded figures.

AIDS

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has regarding the proportion of hospital beds in New York city occupied by AIDS patients; and if he will make a statement regarding the implications for hospital bed use policy in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Newton: The Department is aware of reported studies in the American scientific press of the percentage of beds used in the treatment of AIDS in New York city. However because of the considerable difference between the numbers with AIDS or infected with HIV in the United Kingdom and the USA, and because of the wide differences in systems for delivering health care in the two countries, it is difficult to make direct comparisions between the current situation in New York and the future situation in the United Kingdom. The Department will continue to monitor developments in this new disease carefully, and to take any appropriate action which is indicated.

Child Benefit

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will indicate the loss of weekly income in 1988-89 for a two-child family as a result of the failure to maintain child benefit in line with the retail price index in the recent uprating and in the 1985 uprating; and if he will show for the same family, assuming they pay £30 rent and £13 rates per week, that both children are at primary school and that there is one fulk-time wage earner on £100 gross wages, the effect on their weekly income of *(a)* the changes in housing benefit, *(b)* the switch from family income supplement to family credit and *(c)* the abolition of free schools meals.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) on 17 December 1987 at column *707*. The relevant figures for this question are as follows:

	£ per week Gain (+)/ Loss (−)
Child benefit—full uprating November 1984 to September 1987	0
Replacing Family Income Supplement (cash and kind) by Family Credit	+5·95
Rent rebate changes	−8·90
Rate rebate changes	−4·19

Private Health Organisations

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people have joined private health organisations over the past 22 years.

Mrs. Currie: The table sets out the number of subscribers in the United Kingdom to private medical insurance and the number of people insured for each year from 1966 to 1986.

Private Medical Insurance United Kingdom

Year	*Total subscribers (millions)*	*Total number of people insured (millions)*
1966	0·73	1·57
1967	0·78	1·67
1968	0·83	1·77
1969	0·89	1·89
1970	0·93	1·98
1971	0·98	2·10
1972	1·02	2·18
1973	1·06	2·27
1974	1·09	2·33
1975	1·09	2·32
1976	1·06	2·25
1977	1·06	2·23
1978	1·12	2·37
1979	1·30	2·75
1980	1·64	3·60
1981	1·86	4·12
1982	1·92	4·23
1983	1·95	4·25
1984	2·28	4·37
1985	2·33	5.04
1986	[1]2·45	5·25

[1] latest available.

Note:—1966 to 1983 data are available only for the major private medical insurers. Data from 1984 covers private medical insurance from all sources.

NHS (Finance)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the national insurance contribution percentage apportioned to the National Health Service, the total money so apportioned each year, and the income per annum from chemists, dentists and opticians from National Health Service charges, from 1979 to the latest year the figures are available.

Mr. Portillo: The information requested is as follows:

National insurance contributions allocations to NHS

Year	*Class 1*		*Class 2*	*Class 3*	*Class 4*
	Employer	*Employee*			
1979-80	0·6	0·40	8·0	8·0	0·60
1980-81	0·6	0·40	8·0	8·0	0·60
1981-82	0·6	0·65	11·5	11·5	0·85
1982-83	0·6	0·75	11·5	11·5	0·95
1983-84	0·6	0·75	11·5	11·5	0·95
1984-85	0·6	0·75	11·5	11·5	0·95
1985-86	0·6	0·75	11·5	11·5	0·95
1986-87	0·6	0·75	11·5	11·5	0·95
1987-88	0·7	0·85	15·5	15·5	1·15

1. The figures for Class 1 and 4 represent the percentage of NI reckonable earnings allocated to the NHS.
2. The figures for Class 2 and 3 represents the percentage of contributions allocated to the NHS.

Total money raised from national insurance contributions allocated to NHS

	£ million
1979-80	881·5
1980-81	1,023·0
1981-82	1,337·3
1982-83	1,629·0
1983-84	1,706·0
1984-85	1,817·7
1985-86	2,024·0
1986-87	2,233·0
1987-88	2,726·0

All figures are net of refunds of national insurance contributions. Figures for 1984-85, 1985-86 and 1986-87 are provisional: the figure for 1987-88 is an estimate provided by the Government Actuary.

NHS (Costs)

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average cost of an operation performed within the National Heath Service; what is the cost of a day's stay in hospital; and what is the average cost of a kidney dialysis treatment.

Mrs. Currie: The nearest available figure for the average cost of an operation is the average cost per in-patient case in acute hospitals in England. In 1985-86 (the latest year available) the figure was £718. This includes the cost of treatment and the cost of a stay in hospital. The cost of the hospital stay only cannot be quantified, but the average cost of a day's hospital treatment in 1985-86 was £101.

The cost of kidney dialysis will depend on a number of factors. On the basis of a study carried out by the Department in 1981, approximate average costs for the first year's treatment (revalued to 1986-87 prices) were as follows: routine hospital dialysis £16,500; home dialysis £13,200; continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis £14,000. The costs for treatment in subsequent years are likely to be less than those in the first year. These revalued figures do not take account of the changes in methods of treatment and case mix since the completion of the study. They therefore provide only a broad indication of present costs.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what steps are taken by his Department to ensure that a recipient of housing benefit resides at the address for which benefit is claimed;

(2) what steps are taken by his Department to ensure that the declarations regarding the rent payable by applicants for housing benefit are correct;

(3) what communication takes place with landlords of tenants applying for or in receipt of housing benefit.

Mr. Portillo: Although the Department has responsibility for the overall structure of the housing benefit scheme, local authorities have full statutory responsibility for its day-to-day administration. It is for authorities to ensure that as far as possible claims for housing benefit are proper and correct, although detailed guidance on fraud and abuse is issued to authorities by the Department. If there is any doubt about the accuracy of the details of a claim authorities should take action as necessary to satisfy themselves that the claim is correct. Information is not collected centrally on the methods of verification used by individual local authorities. Direct contact with a landlord is established where housing benefit is being paid directly to that landlord for example because the claimant is in arrears with his rent. In these cases the authority should notify the landlord of how much housing benefit will be payable, when payments will commence and how they will be made. When direct payments cease the authority should also advise the landlord of the date of and reason for cessation.

Retail Prices Index (Error)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people he estimates are suffering under compensation for the loss of benefit incurred due to the retail prices index error and the fact that their benefits are embodied in only one order book; if he will reconsider his decision not to compensate fully all those people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Of those receiving special payments, it is estimated that about 175,000 are not fully compensated for the error in the retail prices index because they have two or more benefits combined in one order book. About 99 per cent. of those with combined order books are fully compensated or overcompensated. We do not propose to make any extensions to this aspect of the special payments exercise, which has combined as far as was possible fairness with speed of payment.

Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to restore public access to the library of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Mr. Portillo: The services provided by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys library are being reviewed and an announcement about future public access will be made in due course.

Doctors (Employment Details)

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services on what basis he has come to the conclusion that the wish of some individuals not to have details of their employment made publicly available should be respected in the case of doctors carrying out abortions in the private sector.

Mr. Newton: It seems to me to be entirely reasonable not to publicise details of an individual's employment in this or any other field without that individual's consent. My hon. Friend is of course free to approach individual approved places direct to inquire about the doctors who operate at those places.

Medical Equipment (Maintenance)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for St. Helens, South of 10 November 1987 about the report on the in-house maintenance of medical equipment which was completed almost a year ago, but never published.

Mrs. Currie: I replied to the hon. Member on 17 February.

Rating Reform

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table listing the approximate income levels at which people will become eligible for community charge rebates for each local authority in Scotland.

Mr. Scott: The community charge rebate scheme will be based as far as is practicable on the arrangements for rebating rates set out in the Housing Benefit (General) Regulations 1987. However it is not yet possible to provide the information required by the hon. Member since certain essential elements of the rebate scheme have yet to be finalised, and since neither the benefit rates on which calculations of rebate entitlement will be based nor the local authority community charge levels that will apply in April 1989 have yet been set.

I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) on 16 December 1987 at column *584* in which illustrative rebate entitlements based on a number of specified assumptions are set out. The levels of personal community charge that are quoted are exclusive of liability for community water charges. These will not be within the scope of the rebate scheme, but help with water charges will be reflected in the income support rates and in the amounts which will be used to determine rebate entitlements.

Westminster Children's Hospital (Break-in)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has concerning the break-in at Westminster children's hospital paedriatic research laboratory on the night of 6 and 7 February and removal from the computer of the names and addresses of members of the Campaign for the Defence of Riverside Hospitals.

Mrs. Currie: The paediatric research laboratory referred to in the question is not the responsibility of the Westminster children's hospital or of Riverside health authority, but of the Westminster and Charing Cross medical school. The hon. Member may wish to approach the dean of the medical school if he seeks information about the laboratory.

Deaf Persons (Telephone Exchange)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is yet in a position to make a statement on the future of the Royal National Institute for the Deaf's telephone exchange for the deaf.

Mr. Scott: I am pleased to announce the award of a grant of £28,500 for 1987-88 and £30,500 for 1988-89 to the Royal National Institute for the Deaf to assist with the running costs of its telephone exchange for the deaf (TED).

This grant is being given in response to the RNID's request for assistance under the Government's concerned technology programme. Assistance has also been made available by the Department of Trade and Industry, the Manpower Services Commission and British Telecom.

We recognise that a vital need of all deaf and hearing impaired people is to be able to communicate with hearing people. TED is a worldwide leader in solving this problem for many deaf people. We have decided to make a contribution to its running costs for this limited period so that long-term arrangements for providing this service can be worked out.

Radiotherapy Services

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list those hospitals in each health region which provide radiotherapy services, showing how many patients were treated by each of those units; which units have been closed; and which new units have been opened, in each of the last three years.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 11 January 1988]:* The available information is given in the table for those hospitals which in 1983 reported having radiotherapy equipment. No such treatment centres are known to have opened or closed since that date. The numbers of patients are taken from the "NHS Hospital Activity Returns SH3 return part EDP6G".

NHS Hospitals having radiotherapy equipment

Health Authority and Hospital	*New patients attending the radiotheray department*					
	In patients			*Out-patients*		
	1984	*1985*	*1986*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Northern Regional Health Authority						
East Cumbria, Cumberland Infirmary	56	151	241	131	241	295
Newcastle, Royal Victoria Infirmary	8	10	8	512	359	367
Newcastle, Newcastle General Hospital	845	653	628	2,032	2,093	2,206
South Tees, South Cleveland Hospital	1,080	1,026	1,198	1,697	1,849	1,670
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority						
Hull, Princess Royal Hospital	370	355	307	821	910	971
Leeds West, Cookridge Hospital	2,088	1,820	1,754	2,877	3,380	3,043
Trent Regional Health Authority						
Leicestershire, The Leicester Royal Infirmary	271	362	377	584	898	1,083
North Lincolnshire, St. Georges Hospital	646	690	663	689	775	758
Nottingham, Nottingham General Hospital	1,331	713	606	1,780	1,149	1,433
Sheffield, Weston Park Hospital	1,184	1,164	1,226	1,579	1,775	1,824
Southern Derbyshire, Derbyshire Royal Infirmary	245	233	223	708	693	524
East Anglian Regional Health Authority						
Cambridge, Addenbrookes Hospital	632	656	549	2,324	2,280	2,213
East Suffolk, Ipswich Hospital, Anglesea Road Wing	205	167	169	854	829	966
Norwich, Norfolk an Norwich Hospital	367	317	463	1,246	1,290	1,339
Peterborough, Peterborough District Hospital	56	64	79	226	253	229
North West Thames Regional Health Authority						
Hillingdon, Mount Vernon Hospital	903	821	743	2,852	2,971	2,877
Paddington and North Kensington, St. Marys Hospital	133	94	102	196	189	230
Riverside, Charing Cross Hospital	470	401	494	1,609	1,592	1,477
Riverside, Westminster Hospital	481	411	458	1,196	1,170	1,055
North East Thames Regional Health Authority						
Barking, Havering and Brentwood, Old Church Hospital	321	405	389	1,353	1,491	1,708

Health Authority and Hospital	New patients attending the radiotherapy department					
	In patients			Out-patients		
	1984	1985	1986	1984	1985	1986
Bloomsbury, University College Hospital	365	323	80	805	750	180
Bloomsbury, Middlesex Hospital	536	497	355	1,355	1,437	985
City and Hackney, St. Bartholomews Hospital	490	546	414	947	1,117	861
Hampstead, Royal Free Hospital	703	847	634	646	613	608
Haringey, North Middlesx Hospital	309	255	182	1,378	1,252	899
North East Essex, Essex County Hospital	302	398	367	3,176	2,820	3,041
Southend, Southend General Hospital	500	470	405	1,610	1,829	1,859
Tower Hamlets, London Hospital Whitechapel	332	367	336	1,919	1,953	1,519
South East Thames Regional Health Authority						
Brighton, Royal Sussex County Hospital	109	92	74	1,718	1,716	1,988
Camberwell, King's College Hospital	190	177	213	837	618‡	509
Canterbury and Thanet, Kent and Canterbury Hospital	241	216	284	1,380	1,740	1,838
Lewisham and North Southwark, Guy's Hospital	435	404	331	1,373	1,262	1,080
Medway, St. Williams Hospital	219	262	258	1,006	858	901
Tunbridge Wells, Penbury Hospital	45	89	104	804	750	830
West Lambeth, St. Thomas Hospital	371	287	340	1,079	1,418	1,876
South West Thames Regional Health Authority						
South West Surrey, St. Lukes Hospital	662	606	621	3,542	3,736	3,561
Wessex Regional Health Authority						
Bath, Royal United Hospitals	81	114	116	244	286	247
East Dorset, Poole General Hospital	205	168	164	1,054	1,136	1,216
Portsmouth, St. Mary's General Hospital	243	248	191	1,185	1,260	1,275
South West Hants and Southampton, Royal South Hampshire Hospital	516	478	512	2,008	1,610	1,685
Oxford Regional Health Authority						
Northampton, Northampton General Hospital	523	631	376	268	202	396
Oxfordshire, Churchill Hospital	424	404	430	1,071	1,059	1,144
West Berkshire, Royal Berkshire Hospital	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
South Western Regional Health Authority						
Bristol and Weston, Radiotherapy Centre, Horsfield Road, Bristol	935	898	988	2,012	1,956	1,867
Cheltenham, Cheltenham General Hospital	1,782	1,708	1,714	10,843	11,201	10,579
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, Royal Cornwall Hospital (Treliske)	34	53	55	256	263	253
Exeter, Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital, Wonford	179	152	125	626	528	602
Plymouth, Plymouth General, Freedom Fields	303	285	276	521	548	575
West Midlands Regional Health Authority						
Central Birmingham, Queen Elizabeth Hospital	1,173	817	869	4,492	5,221	5,359
Coventry, Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital	143	227	199	1,272	1,274	1,270
North Staffordshire, North Staffordshire Royal Infirmary	239	360	324	1,438	1,491	1,925
Shropshire, Royal Shrewsbury Hospital	165	145	146	546	520	520
Wolverhampton, The Royal Hospital	99	94	95	1,150	1,333	1,376
Mersey Regional Health Authority						
Wirral, Clatterbridge Hospital	2,649	2,680	2,409	1,915	2,320	2,779
North Western Regional Health Authority						
South Manchester, Christie Hospital and Holt Radium Institute	3,560	3,381	3,374	3,226	3,352	3,109
Special Health Authorities						
Hammersmith and Queen Charlottes, Hammersmith Hospital	193	375	408	820	1,339	1,163
The Royal Marsden Hospitals, The Royal Marsden Hospital, Fulham Road	689	706	701	1,154	1,218	1,225
The Royal Marsden Hospitals, The Royal Marsden Hospital, Sutton Surrey	659	648	533	2,272	2,275	2,603

n/a = information not available

Departmental Report (Breach of Confidentiality)

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has about the unauthorised use by a commercial manufacturer of information contained in a report of his Department's supplies divisions at the international meeting on thrombosis and haemostasis in Brussels in July 1987; and what action he proposed to deal with this breach of confidentiality.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 8 February 1988]:* Despite extensive inquiries I have been unable to identify the incident to which the hon. Member refers. If he cares to supply more details I will investigate further.

Student Nurses

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what percentage of the annual cohort of 18-year-olds has been recruited as student nurses in each of the past 10 years; and if he is satisfied that sufficient

recruits of suitable calibre will be recruited in future years, in the light of the fall in the birth rate and proposals in Project 2000;

(2) if he will give the total number of student nurses employed in the National Health Service in each year since 1958, together with the annual rate of wastage caused as a result of nurses failing to complete their training; and if he will make a statement on measures taken to reduce this wastage.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 8 February 1988]*: I regret that information in the form requested is not available centrally. The table shows the numbers entering registered and enrolled nurse training in England for each of the last 10 years, expressed as a percentage of the population aged 18. About 40 per cent. of entrants to nurse training are aged 18, and 90 per cent. are female. All but a tiny minority of these will have entered training with the National Health Service.

Numbers entering basic nurse training and estimated population aged 18: 1978 to 1987—England

Year	*Number entering basic nurse training*			*Estimated population aged 18 (thousands)*			*Percentage of population entering training*
	Total	*Registered*	*Enrolled*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	
1978	30,200	18,990	11,210	712·5	362·7	349·8	4·2
1979	35,370	22,600	12,770	741·5	376·8	364·7	4·8
1980	32,580	20,500	12,080	759·7	386·7	373·0	4·3
1981	30,920	19,630	11,290	773·3	395·3	378·0	4·0
1982	31,810	20,200	11,610	796·0	409·6	386·4	4·0
1983	29,840	18,950	10,890	802·8	413·0	389·8	3·7
1984	24,980	17,680	7,300	778·3	398·0	380·3	3·2
1985	25,523	19,206	6,317	768·1	394·3	373·8	3·3
1986	23,705	18,600	5,105	743·8	380·5	363·3	3·2
1987	22,825	18,434	4,391	n/a	n/a	n/a	—

Notes:
1. Figures relate to year ended 31 March. Figures prior to 1985 have been estimated as 95 per cent. of England and Wales total.
2. Office of Population Censuses and Surveys mid-year population estimates.
n/a = Not yet available.

The basic academic entry qualification for registered nurse training is five O-levels or better; the number of female school leavers available for employment with this level of academic attainment will, it is estimated, decline from 36,500 in 1987 to 29,800 in 1994. This is one of the factors to be taken into account in the Government's response to the Project 2000 proposals for the reform of nurse education. We hope to be in a position to make a statement on Project 2000 by Easter.

On wastage, there has been a reduction in the number of nurse learners discontinuing training as a proportion of the average number in training from nearly 9 per cent. in the year ended 31 March 1980 to 6·3 per cent. in the year ended 31 March 1987. The effect on wastage is another factor we will need to consider in our response to Project 2000.

HIV Infection (Pregnant Women)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the cost, in a full year, of screening all pregnant women for HIV infection.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 9 Februarry 1988]*: Using the latest estimated number of conceptions, the cost of providing a test to all pregnant women in England to screen for HIV infection would probably be about £4 million a year. Actual costs will depend on a number of factors including the additional costs for counselling and whether the blood taken was used for other tests.

Social Security Reform

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the simple scaling used to uprate supplementary benefit as outlined in paragraph 2(ii) on page one of the document "Impact of the Reformed Structure of Income Related Benefits".

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 17 February 1988]*: Supplementary benefit rates were updated to April 1988 by the movement in the retail prices index, excluding housing costs, from September 1986 to September 1987. Payments for additional requirements were uprated by the rise in the general retail prices index over the same period.

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the reason for the change in layout, structure and composition of the tables in the technical annex to the White Paper, entitled "The Reform of Social Security", as compared with the document entitled "Impact of the Reformed Structure of Income Related Benefits"; and what are the differences in the methodology used in each case.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 17 February 1988]*: There are no major changes in layout, structure and composition apart from the omission of tables 1 to 9. These tables are no longer relevant because a decision was taken that all ratepayers receiving income support or housing benefit should pay a minimum of 20 per cent. of their domestic rates bill. The tables are simply updated and revised versions of tables 10 to 17 published in the technical annex to the White Paper "Reform of Social Security" (Cmnd. 9691).

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc., under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

Column numbers followed by the letter W refer to Written Questions. These appear at the end of each daily part or volume with their own sequence of column numbers printed in italics.

A6 748w

A27
Road construction 742-3w

A74
Road works 477w, 540w

Abbott, Ms Diane
Debates etc.
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 910-3
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1039-41
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1177, 1187, 1202-4
Questions
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices, Civil service manpower 351w
Immigration rules 709w
NHS finance, Regional health authorities 181w
Social security reform, Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 351-2w

Aberdeen University
Official engagements 577w

Abernant Colliery
Coal mine closures 9, (18:02:88) 1253-8

Abolition of Domestic Rates etc (Scotland) Act 1987
Debates etc.
(10:02:88) 477
Questions
478w

Abortion
Clinics 191-2w
Costs 269-70w
Disclosure of information 111w, 351w
Employment 780w
Hospitals 191-2w
NHS 173, 269-70w
Private health services 780w
Rape 111w

Abortion (Treatment of Non Resident Women) Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (12:02:88) 675

ABRC see Advisory Board for the Research Councils

Abseiling
Women 131w

Academic freedom 580-1w
Universities 159-60w

Access to Medical Reports Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R (12:02:88) 657-67

Access to Parliament 449-50w

Accident & emergency departments 115-6w
Costs 408w
Wales 123w

Accountability
Council for Licensed Conveyancers 366w

Accountants
Civil service manpower 647-8w
Enterprise counsellors 148w
Professional qualifications 647-8w

Accounting
Public bodies 420w
Public corporations 420w

ACOST see Advisory Council on Science & Technology

ACPO see Association of Chief Police Officers

ACPO(S) see Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland)

Acute beds 502w, 539-40w, 565w
Health services 270w

Adams, Mr Allen
Questions
"Family Fortunes" 175w

ADAS see Agricultural Development & Advisory Service

Adjournment debates
Speaker's rulings & statements (09:02:88) 330

Adley, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 364
Questions
British Rail, Capital investment 241-2w
Channel tunnel, Investment 502
Channel tunnel, Railway network 246w
France, Official engagements 615w
Manchester Airport, Speed limits 615w
Wales Railway Centre 12
Winter Warmth Line, Advisory services 170

Administration of estates
Intestacy 612w

Administration of justice
Northern Ireland 149w, 591w

Administration of Justice Act 1985
Questions
365-6w

Administrative costs
Northern Regional Health Authority 172w
Private patients 623w

Administrative delays
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board 707w
House of Commons publications 388w
Immigration & Nationality Division 136w
Medical treatments 199-200w
Passports 707w
Planning appeals 288w, 719w
Planning permission 669w
Prosthetics 200w
Social security appeals tribunals 178w
Social security claims 186w

Adoption (17:02:88) 997-9

Adult training centres
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority 105-7w

Advertising
Electricity supply industry 508w
Expenditure 295w

Advice & Assistance (Scotland) Regulations 1987
Questions
477w

Advisory Board for the Research Councils 47w

Advisory Council on Science & Technology
Official engagements 519w

Advisory services
Elderly 170
Gaming machines 304w
Prisoners 542w
Social security 566w
Winter Warmth Line 170

Aerospace industry 252w

Afghanistan
Arms exports 391w

Age
Breathalysers 215w
Examinations 816-8
House renovation grants 457w

Age addition
Retirement pensions 98-9w

Age allowances
Pensioners 266w
War widows' pensions 494-5w

Age Concern 170

Age Concern Scotland 65w

Agency nurses
Expenditure 405-6w
Merseyside 205w

Agricultural chemicals
Essington 328w
Set-aside schemes 725w
Testing 237-8w

Agricultural Development & Advisory Service 328w

Agricultural land
Cereals 465-6w
Land use 156w

Agricultural production
Cereals 690w
EC countries 587w
Organic farming 329w

Agricultural research
Agriculture 464w
Radioactivity 62w, 465w

Agricultural stabilisers (15:02:88) 755-98

Agricultural subsidies
Expenditure 156w, 464-5w

Agriculture
Agricultural research 464w
EC budget 726-7w
Employment 76w
GATT 155w
Tax allowances 723w

AIDS
Armed forces recruitment 135-6w
Blood donors 367w
Blood tests 199w
Contraceptives 557-8w
Edinburgh 367w
Expenditure 499-500w
Government assistance 168w
Hospital beds 776w
Immigration 546w
Laboratories 64-5w, 79-80w, 110-1w, 327w
New York 776w
Northern Ireland 327w
Personal social services 168w
Pregnancy 785w
Prisoners 620w
Scotland 64-5w
Technicians 489w, 626-7w
Wales 79-80w

Aids for handicapped
Handicapped workers 227-8w

AIDS Monitoring & Surveillance Committee 167w

Air accidents
Nuclear power stations 590w
Standing Order No 20 applications (08:02:88) 38

Air force (11:02:88) 524-98
Rescue services 238-9w, (11:02:88) 524-98

Air force bases
F16 aircraft 538w
Spain 538w

Air pollution control
Power stations 689

Air routes
Air safety 22
Stansted Airport 410w

Air safety 23
Air routes 22
Air traffic control 21-4, 244w
Inquiries 357-8w

National Air Traffic Services 22
Near misses 21-2, 244w, 357w
Transport of radioactive materials 23

Air traffic
Heathrow Airport 453w

Air traffic control
Air safety 21-4, 244w
English language 244w
Isle of Wight 551w

Air travel
Smoking 2w, 351w

Airbus Industrie
Subsidies 444w

Airbuses
Government assistance to industry 444w

Aircraft
Exports 305w
Oil pollution control 739-40w

Aircraft noise
Jet aircraft 746-8w
Night flying 245-6w

Akhtar, Naseem
Immigration applications 149-50w

Al-Fayed Investment Holdings 262w

Alcoholic drinks
Football 965
Young people 37w, 710-1w

Alcoholic drinks duties
Non-alcoholic drinks 648w

Alcoholism 705w

Alexander, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1154
Malicious Communications Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 621
Questions
EC internal trade, Trade barriers 256w
NHS finance, Bassetlaw Health Authority 213w

Alison, Rt Hon Michael, Second Church Estates Commissioner
Questions
Redundant churches 15
Redundant churches, Church Commissioners 14-5
Teachers, Mathematics education 160w

Allen, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 44-135 passim
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 380-4, 394, 402
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 267, 268, 272
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 929, 935
Questions
Access to Parliament 449-50w
Civil servants, Social security reform 703
Crime prevention, Nottingham 702w
Medical profession, Nottingham Health Authority 486w
Written questions, Knowles, Michael 767w

Alternative Land Use in the Rural Environment 586w

Alternatives to prison
Youth custody 709w

Alton, Mr David
Debates etc.
Passenger transport executives, Rate precepts (09:02:88) 314-7, 325
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1223-7
Questions
Abortion, Rape 111w
Fair Employment Commission, Northern Ireland 749w
Ford Motor Company, Industrial disputes 26
Maghaberry Prison, Prison population 591w
Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive, Rate precepts 739w

Altonjet
Defence procurement 82w

Alyn & Deeside
Housing 462-3w

Ambulance services 348w
Basingstoke Hospital 109-10w
Coatbridge 141w
Greater London 111-2w
NHS finance 502w
Northumberland 692w
Safety standards 409w
Voluntary organisations 413w

Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 241-3
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 985

Ames, Mr David
Debates etc.
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1232-5
Taxis, Crimes of violence (15:02:88) 799-801, 804
Questions
Crimes of violence, Taxis 619-20w
Employment schemes, Basildon 547-8w
Ministers' domestic visits, Basildon 708-9w
Prisoners, Road traffic offences 439-40w
Rate limitation, Basildon District Council 665w
Special education 579-80w
Taxis, Basildon 552w
Taxis, Homicide 767w
Taxis, Licensing 551-2w
VAT zero rated goods, Hospital radio 342w

Amos, Mr Alan
Questions
Abortion, Disclosure of information 111w, 351w
Abortion, Private health services 780w
Air travel, Smoking 2w
Rural areas, Development Commission 753w
Rural areas, Government assistance 461w
Smoking, Air travel 351w

Amphibious vehicles
Exercise Teamwork 88 239w

Analgesics
Heart diseases 631-2w
Medical research 631-2w

Anderson, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1155
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1289-93, 1303-6
Questions
Multiple occupation, Housing policy 8-9
NHS charges, Foreign patients 745-6w

Anderton, James 216w

Anglo-Irish Agreement 149w, 499-500
Standing Order No 20 applications (15:02:88) 718

Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference
Expenditure 328w
Republic of Ireland 149w, 328w, 604w

Angus
EC grants & loans 476w
Housing construction 649w
Tourism 476w

Animal breeding
Pigs 58-62w

Animal experiments
Chemical weapons 538w

Animal feed
Health warnings 675w
Import duties 155w

Animal housing 726w

Animal husbandry
Dairy farming 237w

Animal welfare
Battery hens 726w

Annual reports
Residuary bodies 658w

Anonymous letters (12:02:88) 607-25, 31-56

Appeals
Army Board 449w
Employment discrimination 440-2w

APS
Drugs 271w

Archaeology 302w

Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 993

Ardglass
Fisheries 749-50w

Areas of outstanding natural beauty
Forestry 775w

Armed conflict
Manufacturing industries 135w
Marine insurance 742w
Nuclear power stations 604w

Armed forces
Electoral register 84w, 136w
Horses 757w
VAT 770w
Youth training scheme 735w

Armed forces cadets
Inner cities initiative 735w

Armed forces deployment
Diego Garcia 445-6w
Frigates 735w
USA 418w

Armed forces officers
Ethnic groups 82w

Armed forces pensions
Nuclear weapons tests 758w

Armed forces recruitment
AIDS 135-6w

Armed forces storage depots 741w
Navy 735w

Armed forces training
Health 738w
Isle of Wight 386w

Armed services youth training scheme
Take-up 735w

Armilla patrol
Members' correspondence 756w
Merchant ships 446w, 448-9w

Armoured fighting vehicles
Exports 236w
Turkey 236w, 317w

Arms control
British Nuclear Fuels 240w
Civil service manpower 240w
Defence industries 292w

Arms Control & Disarmament (Privileges & Immunities) Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
Royal assent (09:02:88) 169

Arms embargoes 714w

Arms exports
Afghanistan 391w
Turkey 317-8w

Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1021
Training (16:02:88) 835
Questions
First Division Association, Official engagements 812
Income tax 493-4
Public sector borrowing requirement 335w
Regional aid 346

Army
Clergy 85w
Clinical depression 445w
Intimidation 755w
Resignations 83w

Army Board
Appeals 449w

Army in Northern Ireland
Holroyd, Fred 41w
Television programmes 712w

Arnold, Mr Jacques
Debates etc.
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 903
Self-employed (15:02:88) 753-4
Training (16:02:88) 834
Questions
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 172

Arnold, Mr Tom
Questions
Disley bypass, Road construction 748w
Higher civil servants, Treasury 91w
Local government staff, Greater Manchester 6-20w

Arrests
Football 434w

Art education 468w

Art works
Obscenity 468w

Artificial Limb & Appliance Centres Review 203w

Artificial sweeteners
House of Commons catering 727w

Arts 698
Curriculum 466w, 697
Homosexuality 698
Inner city areas 281w
Pensioners 467w
UNESCO 697-8
Wales 11

Arts Council 568-70w, 697-9, 769w
Arts finance 152w, 698

Arts Council grants 568-70w
Ethnic minorities 698-9, 769w
National Theatre 699-700
Regional arts associations 570w

Arts finance 468w, 699
Arts Council 152w, 698
Museums & galleries 467w

"Arts in Inner Cities" 281w

Arts sponsorship
Business sponsorship incentive scheme 151w

Asbestos
Housing estates 755w

Ashbourne bypass
Road construction 452w

Ashby, Mr David
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 937-8
Questions
Furniture, Fire regulations 343
South Africa, Refugees 236w

Ashdown, Mr Paddy
Debates etc.
Education Reform Bill, Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1088
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 468, (17:02:88) 1001, 1022, 1055-8, 1063, 1072
Questions
Academic freedom 580-1w
Community charge, Overseas students 456w
Education allowances, Costs 601-2w
Examinations 817
Homelessness, Bed & breakfast accommodation 661w
Social security benefits, Students 695w
Tax yields, Deeds of covenant 721w
Universities 810

Ashford 312w

Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 359
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 203, 239-41
Questions
Drugs, Eli Lilley 628w
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 171
Handicapped pupils, Special education 572w
North Staffordshire Health Authority, Construction 189w
Prisons, Crown immunity 704w
Pupil records, Disclosure of information 309-10w

Ashton, Mr Joseph
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 199-204, 219, 264-5
Questions
NHS finance, Capital investment 97w
Smoking, Public houses 190w

Aspinwall, Mr Jack
Questions
VAT, Confectionery 568w

Assisted areas 256w

Assisted places scheme 599-601w

Associated British Ports (No 2) Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (11:02:88) 485, (18:02:88) 1131

Associations of British Chambers of Commerce
Official engagements 251w
Uniform business rate 664-5w

Association of Chief Police Officers 305w
Official engagements 1133

Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland) 305w

Aston University 82w

Atkins, Mr Robert, Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 540, 541
Questions
Airbus Industrie, Subsidies 444w
Airbuses, Government assistance to industry 444w
Assisted areas 256w
Austin Rover, Cars 251w
Austin Rover, Privatisation 251-2w
British Steel Corporation 341
British Steel Corporation, House of Commons questions 444w
British Steel Corporation, Privatisation 147-8w, 341-2
Cars, Retail trade 255-6w
Devon & Cornwall Development Bureau, Industrial investment 759-60w
EC internal trade, Trade barriers 256w
English Industrial Estates Corporation, Expenditure 257w
Enterprise & Deregulation Unit, Business 532w
Enterprise counsellors, Accountants 148w
European Regional Development Fund, EC grants & loans 146-7w
Factory closures, Canning Town Glass 259-60w
Foreign investment in UK, Japan 255w
Government assistance to industry, Lancashire 148-9w
Industrial development, Castleford 532-3w
Innovation, Government assistance to industry 260w
Iron & steel, Production 258-9w
Iron & steel industry, Redundancy 533w
Leyland Trucks, Profitability 255w
London city action team 441-2w
Manufacturing industries, Productivity 262-4w
Metal industries, Industrial production 341
Mining, Equipment 261w
Motor industry 250w
Motor industry, Exhaust emission controls 605-6w
Official engagements, European Regional Development Fund 254w
Paper industry, Industrial energy prices 345
Paper industry, Industrial production 344-5
Paper industry, Patent Office 345
Printing industry, Production 248w
Publishing 350
Publishing, Industrial production 350
Regional aid, Bridgend 352
Regional aid, European Regional Development Fund 253w
Regional aid, Regional selective assistance 533-6w
Regional aid, York 534w
Regional selective assistance 252w
Rover Group, Positive vetting 305w, 444w
Textile industry 251w

Atkinson, Mr David
Debates etc.
Self-employed (15:02:88) 751-2
Questions
Badgers, Nature conservation 379w
Firearms, Import controls 1137
Hong Kong, Civil service pensions 391w
HOTOL 257w
NHS finance, Inquiries 176w
Skiing, Death 458w

Atomic Weapons Research Establishment
Defence research 82-3w
Manpower 444-5w
Trident 537w

Attorney-General 223w, 325w
Cash limits 613w
Sexual harassment 291w

Audio equipment
Production 531w

Audio recordings 344

Austin Rover
Cars 251w
Privatisation 251-2w

Australia
Intelligence services 46w
Parliamentary gifts (09:02:88) 169

Availability for work
Invalid care allowances 627-8w
Social security benefits disqualification 696-7w

Average earnings 716w
Income tax 87-8w, 722w
Managers 316-8w
Manual workers 316-8w
Manufacturing industries 232-4w
Women 716-8w

Avgas 566w

Aviation fuels
Excise duties 566w

AWRE see Atomic Weapons Research Establishment

Axle weights
Road damage 245w

Bacteria
Food hygiene 198-9w

Badgers
Nature conservation 379w

Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth, Secretary of State for Education & Science
Debates etc.
Education Reform Bill, Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1083-4
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 453-7, (17:02:88) 1000-8, 1012-3, 1015
Questions
Curriculum, Teachers 815
Edinburgh University, Higher education admission 815-6
Education Reform Bill 1987/88, Bradford 814-5
Education Reform Bill 1987/88, Educational finance 814
Educational finance 50-4w, 815
Examinations 816-7
Examinations, Age 816-8
Examinations, Curriculum 817
Extracurricular activities, Fees & charges 683-4w
Ideal Homes Exhibition, Dept of Education & Science 219-20w
Inner London Education Authority, Educational standards 219w
School administration, Educational finance 815
Schools, Fees & charges 808-9
Schools, Parental contributions 808-9
University finance, Cash limits 767w

Baker, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1265, 1275, 1280, 1297-300
Questions
Barnsley, Official engagements 519w
Community charge, Parish councils 664w
EC Agriculture Council 154-5w
Lychett Minster, Official engagements 134w
Maintenance 291w
Official engagements, East Stow 294w
Personal equity plans 340w
Planning permission, Illuminated signs 21w
Play groups 581w
Rights of way, Land ownership & tenure 19w
Social services finance, Voluntary organisations 180w
Television programmes, Army in Northern Ireland 712w
West Dorset Health Authority, NHS administration 1147

Balance of payments 335w, 348, 373-6w

Balance of trade 606w
Electronic equipment 33-4w
Japan 256-7w
Manufactured goods 34w, 249-50w, 495
Unemployment 349
USA 260w

Baldry, Mr Tony
Questions
Local government services, Direct labour departments 461w
Management, Education 248w
Oxfordshire Health Authority, Hospital patients 169w
Privatisation 337w
Rate limitation 382w
School administration, Educational finance 815
Youth custody, Alternatives to prison 709w

Bank notes 649w

Bank services
Codes of practice 262w

Bankruptcy 492-3

Banks
Developing countries 152w
Tax allowances 338w

Banks, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (11:02:88) 513
Business statements (18:02:88) 1162
Education Reform Bill, Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1084, 1087, 1093, 1096, 1098-103, 1106-8
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 202-3, 206, 219, 236, 258, 259-60, 276, 281
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1001, 1004-5, 1022, 1043, 1073
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1222, 1225, 1228-9, 1241, 1245
Questions
Arts, Homosexuality 698
Bombings, Birmingham 706w
Bus stops, Parking 451w
Business statements 510-1
Civil servants, Ministers 700
Curriculum, Inner London boroughs 682w
Economic League, Dept of the Environment 297w
Economic League, Dept of Transport 358w
Economic League, Ministry of Defence 318w
Education, Immigrants 711-2w
Educational administration, Inner London boroughs 681-2w
Ford Motor Company, Industrial disputes 27
Hong Kong, Nature conservation 292-3w
Inner London Education Authority 47w, 575w
Inner London Education Authority, Research 682w
London Ambulance Service, Manpower 185-6w
London Docklands Development Corporation 968
National insurance contributions, Tax evasion 353-4w
National insurance credits, Expenditure 354w
Official cars, Costs 131w
PAYE, Tax evasion 422w
Percentage for Arts schemes 467w
Police, London City Airport 41w
Redundant churches 15
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Prosecutions 685w
White fronted geese, Islay 72-3w

Barnes, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 445-7
Questions
School leaving, Further education 582w

Barnes, Mrs Rosie
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1033-6
Questions
Education, Inner London boroughs 433w
Hospices, District health authorities 274-6w
Hospital closures, Brook Hospital 273w
Inner London Education Authority, Educational standards 575w
Student grants, Medical students 217-8w

Barnet Health Authority 629-30w
Nurses 190w

Barnsley
Community care 381-2w
Crime 361w
Official engagements 519w
Police 362w
Schools 373w

Barron, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 149

Barrow in Furness
Unemployment 473w

Basildon
Employment schemes 547-8w
Ministers' domestic visits 708-9w
Taxis 552w

Basildon District Council
Rate limitation 665w

Basingstoke
Official engagements 293w

Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority
Adult training centres 105-7w
Capital investment 105-6w
Expenditure 99-102w
Geriatric patients 102-4w
Health service staff 108-10w
Health visitors 105-6w
Hospital beds 102-4w
Hospital patients 101-4w
Hospital waiting lists 278-80w
Mental health services 107w
Mental patients 107-8w
NHS finance 99-100w, 279w
Pay 100w
Supplementary benefits 108w
Surgery 101-4w

Basingstoke Hospital
Ambulance services 109-10w

Bassetlaw Health Authority
NHS finance 213w

BASW see British Association of Social Workers

Batiste, Mr Spencer
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 447
Questions
Health insurance 269w
Health insurance, Northern Ireland 284w
Health insurance, Scotland 143w
Health insurance, Wales 318-9w

Battered wives
Community charge 478w

Battery hens
Animal welfare 726w
Orders & regulations 726w

Battle, Mr John
Debates etc.
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 153-4
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1193-5
Questions
Family doctors, Leeds 264w
Homelessness, Departmental leaflets 661w
School leaving, Further education 582w

BBC 144-5w, 233w, 702-3w
"Secret Society" 728w

BBC external services
Government grants 233w

Beaumont-Dark, Mr Anthony
Questions
Electricity tariffs, Price increases 692
Ford Motor Company, Industrial disputes 26
Metal industries, Industrial production 341
Skuse, Frank 1139

Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Debates etc.
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1169-75, 1203
Questions
Social security payments 177

Bed & breakfast accommodation
Homelessness 661w, 663w
Northern Ireland 166w

Beggs, Mr Roy
Debates etc.
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1153
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 992
Questions
Ministers, Immigration controls 529w

Beggs, Roy
Members' imprisonment (15:02:88) 685

Begum, Saleena
Immigration applications 1136-7

Beith, Mr A J
Debates etc.
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1151
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 358
Questions
Concessionary television licences, Pensioners 1141
Diets, Supplementary benefits 182w
House of Commons Refreshment Department, Conditions of employment 449w
House of Commons staff, Conditions of employment 449w
Housing associations, Northumberland 520-1w
Housing associations, Rent increases 669w
NHS finance 489
Prices 340w

Belfast
Gypsies 396w

Belgium
Hooliganism 438w
Legal aid 426w

Bell, Mr Stuart
Debates etc.
European Council (15:02:88) 716
Questions
Middlesbrough Borough Council 974

Bellingham, Mr Henry
Debates etc.
Rate Support Grant (England) Supplementary Reports (17:02:88) 1111-2
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 994
Questions
Litter, Waste disposal 666w
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 703w
Privatisation 337w
Schools, Rural areas 819

Bellringing
Dunkeld Cathedral 650w

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Debates etc.
Bombings, Birmingham (16:02:88) 956-8
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 224-5, 251-4

Bennett, Mr Andrew F
Debates etc.
Education Reform Bill, Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1083-4, 1093-5
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 454, 457-9, 464, 472-3, (17:02:88) 1001
Questions
Degrees, Educational finance 810
Further education, Young people 46w
Local government services, Fees & charges 31w
Public inquiries, Judges 364w
Science & technology research, Research finance 814
Teachers, Degrees 371w
Tree planting, Tax allowances 490-1
Tuition fees, Part-time education 216w

Bennett, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 530
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 208, 211, 232, 266
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1006
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1219-20, 1225-6, 1240-2
Questions
Abseiling, Women 131w
Accident & emergency departments, Costs 408w
Accident & emergency departments, Wales 123w
Armed forces, Electoral register 84w, 136w
Community charge, Caravan sites 13
Craft industries, Wales 517w
D & C operations 213-4w
Dept of the Environment, Cash limits 128-9w
Education, Expenditure 745w
Examinations 816
Export credit guarantees, Contracts 442-3w
Family doctors, Costs 115w
Family doctors, Wales 123w
General Certificate of Secondary Education 576w
Hospital catering, Wales 123-4w
Hospital consultants, Contracts of employment 490w
Hospital patients, Costs 408-9w
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 81w, 123-4w
Housing benefits, Social security benefits rules 779w
Income tax, Average earnings 87-8w
NHS, Expenditure 18
NHS charges, Income 401-2w
Nuclear power stations, Testing 510w
Nurses, Shift work 116w
Nurses' training, Student wastage 785-6w
Oldchurch Hospital 115-6w
Operating theatres, NHS 401w
Private education, Pupils 765-8w
Rates & rating 455-6w
Republic of Ireland, Military aircraft 776w
Rescue services, Republic of Ireland 755-6w
Structure plans, Wales 598w
Stun guns 1138
Surgery, Scotland 656-7w
Teacher training, Wales 224w

Benyon, Mr W
Debates etc.
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 992
Questions
Business statements 508-9

Bergeman, Audrey Ann 620w

Berkshire
Structure plans (11:02:88) 599-606, 668w

Berkshire County Council 1w

Bermingham, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Passenger transport executives, Rate precepts (09:02:88) 311, 316, 320-1
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 936, 941, 943, 945
Prime Minister's questions, NHS (09:02:88) 188
Questions
Business statements 513
Crown Prosecution Service, Manpower 42-4w
Medical equipment, Members' correspondence 780w

Bethell, Lord 1140-1

Bevan, Mr David Gilroy
Debates etc.
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 156-7

Bexley Health Authority
NHS finance 173w

BGC see British Gas Corporation

Bibles
Prisons 619w

Bidwell, Mr Sydney
Debates etc.
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 900-2
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1211, 1220, 1223, 1238-40
Questions
District health authorities, Resignations 168-9w
Student Awards Review Committee 571w

Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Debates etc.
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 982
Questions
Anglo-Irish Agreement 499-500
Defective housing, House renovation grants 667w

Birds
Monofilament gill nets 588w
Poisons 61w

Birmingham (16:02:88) 950-8
Bombings 436-7w, 706w
Industrial development 969

Birmingham Children's Hospital
Heart diseases 497-8w, 626-8, 700-1w
Hospital waiting lists 626
Standing Order No 20 applications (11:02:88) 519-20

Birmingham University 82w

Biscuit Cake Chocolate & Confectionery Alliance 568w

Bishopbriggs
Resettlement units 98w

BL see Rover Group

Blackburn, Dr John G
Debates etc.
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 154
Questions
Compliance cost assessments 263w
EC trade, EC action 147w

Blackburn Hyndburn & Ribble Valley Health Authority
Hospital waiting lists 623-4w
Patients 558-60w

Blair, Mr Tony
Questions
Enterprise initiative 347
Exceptional needs payments, North East region 500-2w
Financial Services Act 1986 338-9
Financial Services Act 1986, Self-regulating organisations 607-8w
Insider trading 536w
Personal tax allowances 333w
Supplementary benefits, Cleveland 114w
Supplementary benefits, Darlington 113-4w

Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 356-7
Questions
Hong Kong, Government 236w

Blin-Stoyle Committee see National Curriculum Mathematics Working Group

Blind
Optical charges exemptions (12:02:88) 668-9

Blood donors
AIDS 367w

Blood tests
AIDS 199w
Costs 199w
Genetics 362w, 1137

Blunkett, Mr David
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 104
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 278
Questions
Community charge, Local authorities 664w
Examinations 573w
NHS finance, District health authorities 177w
Nurses, Lost working days 555w
Regional health authorities, Expenditure 698w

Blyth valley
Handicap benefits 554w
Unemployment 472w

BM see British Museum

BNFL see British Nuclear Fuels

Board & lodging charges
Social security recipients 113w
Wales 113w

Board of Inland Revenue see Inland Revenue

Boateng, Mr Paul
Questions
Arts Council grants, Ethnic minorities 698-9
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 184w

Body searches
Durham Prison 544w
Maghaberry Prison 592w
Risley Remand Centre 544-5w

Bombings
Birmingham 436-7w, 706w
Criminal appeals (16:02:88) 950-8
Criminal investigation 538-9w
La Belle discotheque 538-9w

Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 944

Bophuthatswana 236w
Foreign policy 56w, 424w
Overseas aid 33w, 428-9w

Borders Region
Forests 480w

Borwell, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 770
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1186-8, 1190
Questions
Ambulance services 348w
Ambulance services, NHS finance 502w
Austin Rover, Cars 251w
Cereals, Co-responsibility levy 329w
Examinations, Curriculum 371w
Family credit, Disclosure of information 176w
Food labelling, EC action 727w
Game, Licensing 303w, 708w
Pesticides, Safety standards 329-30w
Public sector assets, Overseas investment 336w
Sheep premiums, Judgments 330w
Tax allowances, Social security benefits 722w

Bottles 713w

Bottomley, Mr Peter, Under-Secretary of State for Transport
Questions
A27, Road construction 742-3w
Air safety, Air traffic control 244w
Air safety, Inquiries 357-8w
Air safety, Near misses 244w, 357w
Air traffic control, English language 244w
Air traffic control, Isle of Wight 551w
Air travel, Smoking 2w
Aircraft noise, Jet aircraft 746-8w
Ashbourne bypass, Road construction 452w
Axle weights, Road damage 245w
Bus stops, Parking 451w
Buses, Road accidents 410-1w
Buses, Safety belts 411w
Buses, Speed limits 411w
Bypasses, Road construction 451w
Car ownership, Road traffic 357w
Cars, Motor vehicle safety 551w
Cycling, Road accidents 412-3w
Dartford Thurrock Crossing Bill 1987/88 616w
Dartford Thurrock Crossing Bill 1987/88, Government responses 551-3w
Disley bypass, Road construction 748w
Drinking & driving, Non-alcoholic drinks 133-4w
Driving tests 411-2w
Economic League, Dept of Transport 358w
Handicapped drivers, Parking 615w
Heathrow Airport, Air traffic 453w
Leisure drives, Cheshire 452w
M3-M27 link, Public inquiries 356w
M6, Elevated sections of motorways 454w
M20, Road construction 742w
M25, Road traffic 614-5w, 742w
M62, Road construction 748w
Manchester Airport, Fees & charges 615-6w
Manchester Airport, Speed limits 615w
Motor vehicle safety 246-7w
Motor vehicles, Head restraints 613w
Motorways 409w
Motorways, Road accidents 616w
Motorways, Road traffic 741-2w
Rear seat belts, Car hire 616w
Rights of way, Local government expenditure 450-1w
Road construction, Contracts 2-4w
Road finance, Capital investment 358-60w
Road finance, Local government expenditure 358w
Road safety 242-3w
Road tax, Tax evasion 452-3w
Road traffic, Greater London 614w
Roads, Privatisation 243w
Severn bridge, Road tolls 450w
Sexual harassment, Dept of Transport 1-2w
Transport of radioactive materials, Road accidents 241w
Tyre tread depths, EC action 410w, 749w
Vehicles, Lighting 410w
Winchester bypass, Road accidents 356w

Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Questions
Advisory Council on Science & Technology, Official engagements 519w
Death rate 169-70w
Offenders, Electronic surveillance 139-40w
Teachers, Industrial disputes 371w

Boundary Commission for England 768-9w

Boundary Commission for Scotland 734w

Boundary Commission for Wales 768w

Bovine somatotropin 156-7w
EC countries 678w
Licensing 678w
Testing 678w

Bowden, Mr Andrew
Questions
Age allowances, Pensioners 266w
Assisted places scheme 599-601w
Retirement pensions, Age addition 98-9w
Social security benefits, Voluntary organisations 266w
Unemployment benefits, Occupational pensions 191w

Bowden, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 470, (17:02:88) 1058-60
Questions
Pensioners, Personal income 171w
Stalker, John, Prosecutions 291w

Bowis, Mr John
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 463-5
Training (16:02:88) 828
Questions
Arts finance 698
Companies 337w
Homicide, Life imprisonment 712-4w

New businesses, Consultants 254w
School admission, Greater London 53-6w
University finance, Cash limits 767w
USSR, Chernobilsky, Boris 149w

Boxing
Safety 287w

Boyes, Mr Roland
Debates etc.
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 159
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 946
Questions
Armoured fighting vehicles, Turkey 317w
Arms exports, Turkey 317-8w
Civil service, Inquiries 294w
Civil service, Prime Minister's Efficiency Unit 294-5w
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices, Resignations 180-2w
Drinking & driving, Non-alcoholic drinks 133-4w
Literacy, Educational finance 807
London Docklands Development Corporation, Resignations 127-8w
National Museum of Photography 467w
NHS finance, Expenditure 488
Official engagements 45w
Police, Northumberland 1133
Prime Minister's Efficiency Unit 295w
Property Services Agency, Civil service manpower 967-8
Property Services Agency, Efficiency scrutinies 299-302w
Special education 580w
Unemployment, Houghton 475w
Water authorities, External financing limits 752-3w
Water authorities, Official engagements 669w
Water charges 128w
Water supply industry, Privatisation 461w

Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1041-4

BP see British Petroleum

BPA see British Paediatric Association

Bradford
Education Reform Bill 1987/88 814-5
Property Services Agency 967
Urban programme 673w
Water supply 127w

Bradley, Mr Keith
Questions
Community charge 455w
Homelessness, Mortgage defaulters 660-1w

Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 213-7
Questions
Business statements 504-5

Brandon-Bravo, Mr Martin M
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 433-4
Passenger transport executives, Rate precepts (09:02:88) 294
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1216-7, 1220, 1226, 1236-8
Questions
Industrial production 333w
Nottingham Development Enterprise 968-9

"Brass Tacks" 346w

Bray, Dr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 362
Trident submarines, Mull of Galloway (10:02:88) 366
Questions
British Steel Corporation 351
Science budget 571w

Bray District Council
Contracts 166w

Brazier, Mr Julian
Questions
Aerospace industry 252w
Business statements 512

Bread
Food prices 725w

Breast cancer
Central Nottinghamshire Health Authority 628-9w
Scotland 483w
Screening 556w, 628-30w

Breathalysers
Age 215w

Brewers' Society 133-4w

Bridgend
Regional aid 352

Bright, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Self-employed (15:02:88) 728-32
Questions
Frigates, Armed forces deployment 735w
Motor industry, Exhaust emission controls 605-6w
Railway travel, South East region 355-6w

Brighton & Preston Cemetery Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R* (18:02:88) 1131

Bristol
Homelessness 972
Urban development corporations 666w

Bristol City Council
Council housing finance 972

British Aerospace 257w, 444w

British Airways 21, 415w

British Association of Social Workers 214w

British Bakeries
Takeovers 354

British Boxing Board of Control 287w

British Broadcasting Corporation see BBC

British citizenship
Departmental correspondence 546-7w

British Coal Corporation 63w, 133w, 224-5w, 415w, (10:02:88) 478-84, 507w, 511-2w, 684w, 687, 695
Capital investment 509w
Coal mining 511w
North East region 509w
Nottinghamshire 512w
Official engagements 20, 508w, 511w, 693
Privatisation 509w, 512w

British Gas Corporation 92w, 415w

British Industry Committee on South Africa 233w

British Land 621w

British Leyland see Rover Group

British merchant fleet 414w

British Museum
Museums & galleries 466w

British Nuclear Fuels 226w, 461-2w, 515-6w, 589w
Arms control 240w
Exhibitions 226w
Sellafield 509w

British Paediatric Association
Upper waiting hall 264w

British Petroleum 34w
Kuwait (08:02:88) 37
Standing Order No 20 applications (08:02:88) 37

British Rail 246w, 355-7w, 415w, 747w
Capital investment 241-2w
External financing limits 454w
Land acquisition 740w

British Railways Board 355-6w

British Railways (No 2) Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (11:02:88) 485, (18:02:88) 1131

British residents abroad
Legal aid 416w

British Shipbuilders 415w

British Steel Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
1R (11:02:88) 523

British Steel Corporation 341, 351, 415w, (11:02:88) 523
House of Commons questions 444w
Privatisation 147-8w, 341-2, 351-2

British strategic nuclear force
Labour Party 1145-6
USSR 822

British Telecom 92w, (09:02:88) 329-36, 415w
Computer privacy 254w
Disclosure of information 443w

British Veterinary Association 221w

Britoil 92w
Government shareholding 486
North Sea oil 690
Takeovers 34w

Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Debates etc.
European Council (15:02:88) 709-10
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 248-51

Brixton Prison
Prison staff 1140

Broadcast journalism
Radio 40w

Broadcasting controls
Radio 362w
Television 703w

Brook Hospital
Hospital closures 273w

Brooke, Rt Hon Peter, Paymaster General
Questions
Accountants, Civil service manpower 647-8w
Bankruptcy 492-3
Cider, Tax yields 490
Civil service, London allowance 92w
Civil service dispersal, Costs 339w
Civil service manpower 416-7w
Companies 336-7w
Debts, Developing countries 332w
EC budget 152-4w
EC budget, UK contributions 152w, 387-8w
EC budget, UK repayments 567w, 648w
Government data network, Computer privacy 247w, 567w

Government data network, Computers in Government departments 567-8w, 721-2w
Government data network, Cost effectiveness 568w
Government data network, Government contracts 247w
Government data network, Police national computer 721w
Higher civil servants, Treasury 91w
House of Commons publications, Administrative delays 388w
House of Commons publications, House of Commons Standing Committees 388w
Imports 495
Inflation 331w
Intestacy, Charities 769w
Intestacy, Companies 769w
Manufactured goods, Balance of trade 495
New businesses 492
New businesses, North East region 493
Paper, Recycling 537w
Productivity 494-5
Profitability 330w
Sexual harassment, Treasury 92w
Tax & price index 331w
VAT zero rated goods, European Court of Justice 332-3w

Brown, Mr Gordon
Questions
Hospital beds, NHS & private practice 407-8w
Income support scheme, Rates & rating 489-90w
Income tax, Average earnings 88w
Income tax, Low incomes 89-90w
Income tax, Tax rates & bands 90w, 417-8w
Ionizing radiation, Radiation protection 771w
Leukaemia, Fife 774w
National insurance contributions, Employees' contributions 205w
NHS, Expenditure 278w
NHS finance 489-90
Pensioners, Social security benefits 203-4w
Personal income 93-4w
Public expenditure, Government departments 770w
Public expenditure, Scotland 773-4w
Retirement pensions, Retail price index 272w
Social Fund, Debts written off 490w
Social Fund, Expenditure 401w
Tax allowances, Enterprise zones 421w
Tax allowances, Tax rates & bands 93-5w
Tax evasion 421w, 425w
Tax evasion, Prosecutions 421w
Unpaid taxes 422w

Brown, Mr Nicholas
Questions
Rolls-Royce Aeroengines, Privatisation 487

Brown, Mr Ron
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1163
Training (16:02:88) 835-6
Questions
Company liquidations 337
Edinburgh University, Higher education admission 815

Bruce, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Training (16:02:88) 827
Questions
British strategic nuclear force, USSR 822
National income 338w
Social security benefits, Young people 189-90w

Bruce, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Education Reform Bill, Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1089
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 127, 131-3
Self-employed (15:02:88) 724-8, 740
Training (16:02:88) 829
Questions
Aberdeen University, Official engagements 577w
Exports, COCOM 305w
Handicapped workers, Aids for handicapped 227-8w
Higher civil servants, Inland Revenue 92w
Intelligence services, National security 500
Paper industry, Industrial energy prices 345
Pension funds, Company investigations 90w
Tax allowances, Pension funds 90w

Brucellosis
Scotland 223w

BSC see British Steel Corporation

BT see British Telecom

BTEC see Business & Technician Education Council

Buchan, Mr Norman
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1159
Questions
Arts Council grants 568-70w
Arts Council grants, Regional arts associations 570w

Buck, Sir Antony
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 532, 552

Budgen, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
European Council (15:02:88) 714-5
Questions
Business statements 509-10
Ford Motor Company, Industrial disputes 492

Budget 90w, 496
EC Finance Council 419w
Tobacco duties 419-20w
Unemployment 342w

Building industry
Extortion 593w
London Docklands 126w
Tax exemption certificates 723w

Building repairs
Woolwich Polytechnic 753w

Building workers
Northern Ireland 593w
Terrorism 593w

Burglary
Westminster Children's Hospital 781w

Burns, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
National Health Service (National Lottery) Bill, Motion to introduce Bill negatived (16:02:88) 841
Questions
Charitable donations 153w
Chelmsford Prison, Prison staff 702w
Consumer credit, Disclosure of information 443w
Hospital patients 169w
Income tax, Tax burden 333w
NHS 174
Ordnance Survey 129w
Planning permission, Administrative delays 669w
Skoal Bandits 197w
Unemployment 1148

Burntwood
Primary education 811-2

Burt, Mr Alistair
Debates etc.
Smoke Detectors in Houses Bill, 1R (09:02:88) 189-91
Questions
Industrial investment, Manufacturing industries 491
Urban development corporations, Manchester 666w

Bury
Official engagements 13

Bus crews
Information 413w
Public service vehicles 740w
Smoking 413w

Bus services
London Regional Transport 452w
Wales 77w

Bus services subsidies
Shropshire County Council 1w

Bus stops
Parking 451w

Buses
Crime 413-4w
Crimes of violence 412w
Greater London 749w
Motor vehicle safety 741w
Road accidents 410-1w
Safety belts 411w
Speed limits 411w

Business
Company law 353
Consultants 346-7
Enterprise & Deregulation Unit 532w
Lancaster 354

Business & Technician Education Council 48w

Business education
Health service staff 556w

Business in the Community
Employment schemes 314-5w

Business motions (19:02:88) 1322

Business sponsorship incentive scheme
Arts sponsorship 151w

Business statements 503-18, (18:02:88) 1157-68

Butane gas
Death 397-8w

Butcher, Mr John, Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry
Debates etc.
Patent Office, Civil service dispersal (17:02:88) 1126-30
Talkabout service (09:02:88) 330, 331-6
Questions
Bank services, Codes of practice 262w
Bottles 713w
British Telecom, Computer privacy 254w
British Telecom, Disclosure of information 443w
Bury, Official engagements 13
Child safety, EC action 261w
Computer aided design, Government assistance 250w
Computers in Government departments, Dept of Trade & Industry 713-4w
Consumer protection, Food 306-7w
Copyright, Reprography 145w
Crown copyright 305-6w
Dept of Trade & Industry, Disclosure of information 35w
Dept of Trade & Industry, Television advertising 256w
EC transport policy, EC Consumer Affairs Council 360w
Empty housing, Duchy of Lancaster 33w
Estate Agents Act 1979 307w
Furniture, Fire regulations 342-3
London Regional Passengers' Committee 454w

London Regional Passengers' Committee, Public appointments 743-4w
Manchester City Council, Redundancy 14
Official engagements, Consumers' Association 251w
Patent Office 145-6w
Peel, Robert 14
Pens, Consumer protection 340-1
Retail trade 442w
Safety standards, EC action 260w
Science & technology research, Education & industry 254-5w
Science & technology research, Expenditure 255w
"Sex", Terrence Higgins Trust 608w
Sexual harassment, Dept of Trade & Industry 33w
Sub post offices, Finance 609w
Superconductivity, Industry 607w
Telecommunications cables, Optical fibres 145w
Telecommunications industry, Competition 349-50
Telecommunications industry, Europe 340
Telecommunications industry, Retail trade 339
Telephone directories, Exports 339-40
Telephones, Equipment 350
Telephones, Pornography 350

Butler, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Malicious Communications Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 615-7, 620, 634
Questions
AIDS, New York 776w
AIDS, Technicians 489w, 626-7w
Animal feed, Health warnings 675w
Armed forces recruitment, AIDS 135-6w
Arts Council, Arts finance 152w
Arts finance 699
Blood donors, AIDS 367w
Civil Service College, Private sector 703
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, Police 544w
Drug abuse, Glasgow 772w
Erskine bridge, Toll bridges 320w
European Security Conference, Romania 233w
Falkland Islands, Fisheries 425w
M6, Elevated sections of motorways 454w
Mersey Regional Health Authority, Expenditure 192-4w
Mersey tunnel, Debts 740w
Mozambique, Security 775-6w
NHS administration, Costs 166w
NHS administration, Manpower 11-2
Prisons, Privatisation 704w
Publishing, Industrial production 350
School leaving, Literacy 807
Severn bridge, Road tolls 450w
South Bank, Shops 468w
Tax allowances, Health insurance 90w
Visual arts, Prisons 568w
Wormwood Scrubs, Prison medical services 302w

Butler-Sloss Committee see Child Abuse in Cleveland Judicial Inquiry

Butter
European Council 612w
Intervention stocks 689-90w
Retail prices 676-7w

Butterfill, Mr John
Debates etc.
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1209, 1219, 1223, 1225, 1228, 1233
Questions
South Africa, Overseas investment 233w

Byford, Lawrence 216w

Bypasses
Road construction 451w
Wales 77w

CA see Consumers' Association

CAA see Civil Aviation Authority

Caerphilly Hospital 5

Caesarian sections
Childbirth 177-8w

Callaghan, Mr Jim
Questions
Dental charges, Dental health 184w

Calling of Members
Speaker's rulings & statements (10:02:88) 358, 363, (11:02:88) 522-3, (15:02:88) 709, 716, (17:02:88) 992, 996, (19:02:88) 1259-60

Camberwell
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 698-700w
Exceptional needs payments 700w

Campaign for the Defence of Riverside Hospitals 781w

Campbell, Mr Menzies
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 548-50
Business statements (18:02:88) 1161-2
Questions
Arts, UNESCO 697-8
Firearms, Imports 1138
Football 965
Radio, Drama 708w

Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Questions
Ambulance services, Northumberland 692w
Cervical cancer, Northern region 493w
Child benefit, Family income 777w
Government shareholding 334w
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 554w
Northumberland Health Authority, Dogs 493w
Nurses, Northumberland Health Authority 776w
Police, Manpower 620w
Pre-school education, Northumberland 578w
Private education, Northumberland 585w
School buildings, Northumberland 579w
Unemployment, Blyth valley 472w

Campbell-Savours, Mr D N
Debates etc.
British Petroleum, Standing Order No 20 applications (08:02:88) 37
Business statements (18:02:88) 1164
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 760-1
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 192, 224, 246-8
Oral question time intervention (09:02:88) 186
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 994
Training (16:02:88) 832
Questions
Defence procurement, Altonjet 82w
Defence procurement, Moores Wallisdown 82w
House of Commons Library, "Spycatcher" 17
Inner city areas, "Faith in the City" 962
Nuclear industry Radioactive Waste Executive, Radioactive waste disposal 666w
Police, West Yorkshire 1134
Police misconduct, Stalker, John 216w
Royal prerogative, Intelligence services 39w
Secondary education, Cumbria 813
"Security & Counter Intelligence" 752w
Sellafield, Testing 7
Telephones, Equipment 350
VAT, Newspaper press 496

Canada
Milk 157w

Canavan, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 935
Questions
Budget 90w
Community charge 975
Electoral register, Scotland 774w
Furniture, Fire regulations 342-3
Health service staff, Pay settlements 115w
HMS Resolution, Nuclear submarines 756w
Metropolitan Police, Demonstrations 1143-4
Student grants 159w

Cancer
Scotland 773w
Screening 75w
Social class 773w
Women 773w

Cancer hazards
Engine oil 97-8w

Canning Town Glass
Factory closures 259-60w

Capenhurst 226w, 240w

Capital
Stock market 249w

Capital gains tax
Investment 87w
Tax yields 87w

Capital investment
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority 105-6w
British Coal Corporation 509w
British Rail 241-2w
Coal mining 392w
Community health services 697-8w
Educational finance 159w
NHS finance 97w
Road finance 358-60w
Scotland 143-4w

Capital movements
EC Finance Council 420w

Capital rules 177

Car hire
Rear seat belts 616w

Car ownership
Road traffic 357w

Car tax
Tax harmonisation 343-4w

Caravan sites
Community charge 13
Local authorities 458-60w

Caravans
Parking offences 539w
Tayside 539w

Cardiff 18-9

Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (11:02:88) 485, (18:02:88) 1131

Care proceedings
Scotland 143w

Carlile, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Anglo-Irish Agreement, Standing Order No 20 applications (15:02:88) 718
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 362
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 936-7

Questions
Charities, Religious sects 704w
Craft industries, Wales 11
Developing countries, Family planning 428w
House of Commons Library, "Spycatcher" 17
Interest rates 331w
Sports facilities, Wales 16
Universities, Wales 580w

Carlisle, Mr John
Debates etc.
Self-employed (15:02:88) 731
Questions
Police, Injuries 136w

Carrington, Mr Matthew
Debates etc.
Access to Medical Reports Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 660-3
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1046-9
Questions
Disposable income 335-6w
EC Finance Council, Capital movements 420w
Telecommunications cables, Optical fibres 145w
Youth training scheme 317w

Cars
Austin Rover 251w
Imports 284w
Motor vehicle safety 551w
Northern Ireland 165w, 284w
Retail trade 255-6w

Cartwright, Mr John
Debates etc.
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 851-2
Questions
City of London Polytechnic, Metalworking 216-7w
Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944, Handicapped workers 150w
Horniman Museum 761-2w
Service Children's Education Authority, Pay 383w
Transport, Inquiries 747w
Woolwich Polytechnic, Building repairs 753w

"Case for Change" 65w

Cash, Mr William
Debates etc.
Access to Medical Reports Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 666-7
Malicious Communications Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 616, 619, 621-2, 624, 632-4, 639, 642-9, 654
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 932, 942-3
Questions
Birmingham Children's Hospital, Heart diseases 628
Crime prevention, Codes of practice 1143
Public sector assets, Overseas investment 336w
Sporting events, Hooliganism 501

Cash limits
Attorney-General 613w
Dept of the Environment 128-9w
Housing Corporation 298-9w
Office of Arts & Libraries 569-70w
Property Services Agency 720w
University finance 767w

Castleford
Industrial development 532-3w

Category A prisoners 544w

CBI see Confederation of British Industry

CEGB see Central Electricity Generating Board

Census
Community charge 263w

Census of population
Community charge 695w
Ethnic groups 559w

Central Electricity Generating Board 62-3w, 461-2w, 507-8w, 512w, 515-6w, 589w, 684-5w, 687
Coal fired power stations 509w
Official engagements 511w

Central Nottinghamshire Health Authority 629-30w
Breast cancer 628-9w

Cereals
Agricultural land 465-6w
Agricultural production 690w
Co-responsibility levy 329w
EC countries 677w
Food aid from EC 687w
Intervention Board 586-8w
Production quotas 612w

Certification Office for Trade Union & Employers' Association see Certification Officer

Certification Officer (08:02:88) 39-139

Cervical cancer
Death 195w
Hospital waiting lists 518w
Northern region 493w
Scotland 772-3w
Screening 772-3w
Wales 12
Women 773w

Chairman of Committee of the Whole House
Debates etc.
Amendments & new clauses (12:02:88) 671

Chalker, Rt Hon Lynda, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Questions
Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, Republic of Ireland 604w
Bophuthatswana, Foreign policy 56w, 424w
EC law, Plain language 57w
Frontiers, EC countries 425w
Republic of Ireland, Royal Ulster Constabulary 391w
South Africa, Economic sanctions 425w
South Africa, Overseas investment 233w
South Africa, Refugees 236w
Turkey, Armoured fighting vehicles 236w
USA, Northern Ireland 426w

Chancellor of the Exchequer see Treasury

Channel ferries
Hazardous wastes 5w

Channel Four 712w

Channel tunnel
Employment services 312w
Investment 502
Railway network 246w
Waste disposal 741w

Channon, Rt Hon Paul, Secretary of State for Transport
Questions
Air safety 23
Air safety, Air routes 22
Air safety, Air traffic control 21-4
Air safety, National Air Traffic Services 22
Air safety, Near misses 21-2
Air safety, Transport of radioactive materials 23
British Rail, External financing limits 454w
France, Official engagements 615w
Marine insurance, Armed conflict 742w
Night flying, Aircraft noise 245-6w
Railway travel, South East region 355-6w
Stansted Airport, Air routes 410w

Chapelcross power station
Tritium 240w

Chapman, Mr Sydney
Questions
Arts finance 468w
Barnet Health Authority, Nurses 190w
Inner city areas, Departmental coordination 258w
Metropolitan Police, Manpower 710w
Overseas investment 498
Schools, Fees & charges 809
Town & country planning 659w
Tree planting, Tax allowances 491

Charitable donations 153w

Charities
Intestacy 769w
Law reform 436w, 704w, 707-8w
Legislation 138-9w
Religious sects 704w
Unification Church 42w, 125-6w, 416w

Charity Commission 704w

Chelmsford Prison
Prison staff 702w

Chelsea Football Club
Planning inquiries 298w
Planning permission 962-3

Chemical weapons
Animal experiments 538w
NATO 448w
USA 448w

Chemicals
Fish farming 464w
Production 610w

Chernobilsky, Boris
USSR 149w

Cheshire
Cost per pupil 584-5w
Enterprise allowance scheme 547-50w
Family doctors 268-9w
Job training scheme 230w
Leisure drives 452w
Restart programme 150w
Self-employed 229w
Tourist industry 229-30w
Unemployment 230-2w
Youth employment 231w

Cheshire County Council
Local government services 521-2w
Local government staff 520w

Chester
Empty housing 297w
Minimum wage 74w

Chester Health Authority 268-9w

Child Abuse in Cleveland Judicial Inquiry 364w

Child benefit
Family income 777w
Social security benefits uprating 346-7w

Child Benefit (Uprating) Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (12:02:88) 670

Child care (17:02:88) 997-9

Child Care Law in Scotland Review Group 143w

Child safety
EC action 261w

Childbirth 697w
Caesarian sections 177-8w

Children
Cycling 412-3w
Homicide 434w
Sexual offences 169w
Social security reform 176-7

Children in care 172w

Chile
Human rights 292w
Referenda 292w

Chlamydia
Diagnosis 626w

Chope, Mr Christopher, Under-Secretary of State for the Environment
Debates etc.
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1246
Rate Support Grant (England) Supplementary Reports (17:02:88) 1119-21
Questions
Cheshire County Council, Local government services 521-2w
Cheshire County Council, Local government staff 520w
Community care, Barnsley 381-2w
Community charge 975-6
Coopers & Lybrand Associates, Disclosure of information 21w
Crown Suppliers, Privatisation 126w
Fire services, Contracts for services 671w
Leicestershire County Council, Employment discrimination 521w
Local authorities, Contract compliance 971
Local authorities, Racial discrimination 971-2
Local authorities, Sex discrimination 972
Local authority powers, Handicapped 290w
Local government expenditure, Lancashire County Council 382-4w
Local government land, Management 671w
Local government services, Fees & charges 31w
Local government services, Tenders 672-3w
Local government staff, Greater Manchester 6-20w
London Residuary Body, Offices 381w
New Parliamentary building, House of Commons accommodation 522-3w
Official cars, Costs 131w
Property Services Agency, Bradford 967
Property Services Agency, Cash limits 720w
Property Services Agency, Civil service manpower 967-8
Property Services Agency, Efficiency scrutinies 299-302w
Property Services Agency, Privatisation 967
Rate limitation 659w
Rate limitation, Basildon District Council 665w
Rates & rating, Farm buildings 462w
Rates & rating, London Boroughs Association 663w
Residuary bodies, Annual reports 658w
Residuary bodies, Public appointments 753-4w

Christianity
Unification Church 42w

Christmas Island 757w
Nuclear weapons tests 769w

Chronically Sick & Disabled Persons Act 1970
Questions
191w

Church Commissioners
Redundant churches 14-5

Church of England
Church schools 216w
Ethics 821

Church of England (Legal Aid & Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure 1988
Debates etc.
Royal assent (09:02:88) 169

Church schools
Church of England 216w

Churchill, Mr Winston
Questions
Exservicemen, Nuclear weapons tests 83-4w
Motorways 409w
NHS, Expenditure 276w

Cider
Tax yields 490

Citizens' Advice Bureaux
Homosexuality 608w
Obscene Publications Act 1959 620-1w

City of London Polytechnic
Metalworking 216-7w

City of London (Spitalfields Market) Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (11:02:88) 485, (18:02:88) 1131

City technology colleges
Wolverhampton 574w

Civil Aviation Authority 2w, 244w, 453w, 615-6w

Civil servants
Codes of practice 465w
Communication skills 700-1
Conditions of employment 416-7w
Ministers 700
Performance reviews 702-3
Positive vetting 86w
Social security reform 703

Civil service 701-2
Inquiries 294w
London allowance 92w
Ministerial statements (18:02:88) 1149-56
Prime Minister's Efficiency Unit 294-5w

Civil service agencies (18:02:88) 1149-56

Civil Service College
Private sector 703

Civil service dispersal 701
Costs 339w
Dept of the Environment 287w
Dept of Trade & Industry 257w
Home Office 303w
Patent Office (17:02:88) 1122-30
Wales 10-1

Civil service manpower 416-7w
Accountants 647-8w
Arms control 240w
Dairy farming 328w
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 180-1, 351w
Fraud 469w
Immigration & Nationality Division 137w
Information technology 174w
Ministry of Defence 446w
Mobility allowance 327w
Opposition Whips' Office 649w
Property Services Agency 967-8

Civil service pensions
Hong Kong 391w

Civil service recruitment 391-2w

Clark, Mr Alan, Minister of State for Trade and Industry
Questions
Aerospace industry 252w
Arms embargoes 714w
Balance of payments 348, 373-6w
Balance of trade 606w
Balance of trade, Japan 256-7w
Balance of trade, Unemployment 349
Balance of trade, USA 260w
Corporation tax 349
Data processing, Production 248w
EC grants & loans 760w
EC internal trade, Conferences 536-7w
EC internal trade, Employment 537w
EC internal trade, Trade barriers 256w, 259w
EC trade, EC action 147w
Electronic equipment, Retail trade 33-4w
Electronics industry, Production 250w
Export credit guarantees, Contracts 442-3w
Export licensing, Communication engineering 306w
Export licensing, Palestine Liberation Organisation 306w
Export prices, Dollar 342
Exports, COCOM 305w
Ford Motor Company, Industrial disputes 348
Generalised system of preferences, South Korea 714-6w
Manufactured goods, Balance of trade 34w, 249-50w
Manufactured goods, Prices 249w
Manufactured imports, Manufactured exports 250w
Overseas trade 34w
Palestine Liberation Organisation, Exports 305w
Production, Audio equipment 531w
Production, Chemicals 610w
Production, Computer software 535-6w
Production, Fertilisers 607w
Production, Microelectronics industry 535w
Production, Office equipment 530-1w
Production, Recording equipment 532w
Production, Synthetic fibres 609-10w
Production, Tape recorders 532w
Production, Video equipment 531w, 610w
Synthetic fibres, Turkey 148-9w, 253w
Textiles 348-9
Textiles, West Bank 377-8w
Trade agreements, EC action 715w
Trade competitiveness 342

Clark, Dr David
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 765-73, 775-6, 794-5
Questions
Agricultural research, Radioactivity 62w
Agricultural subsidies, Expenditure 156w
Agriculture, Agricultural research 464w
Bacteria, Food hygiene 198-9w
Cereals, Co-responsibility levy 329w
Employment, Agriculture 76w
Food contamination, Emergency planning 157w
Forestry Commission, Ministerial duties 751-2w
Forests, Pollution 775w
Land drainage, Drainage rates 158w
Milk, Production 61w
Organic farming, Agricultural production 329w
Radioactivity, Agricultural research 465w
Radioactivity, Land pollution 465w
Rain, Radiation hazards 238w
Sheep, Radioactivity 369w
Sheep, Slaughterhouses 156w

Clark, Dr Michael
Questions
Computer aided design, Government assistance 250w
Curriculum 572w
Electricity tariffs, Industrial energy prices 691
Public expenditure, Per capita costs 339w
Southend Hospital, Radiotherapy 175w

Clark, Sir William
Debates etc.
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1151-2
Questions
NHS finance 488-9

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Debates etc.
British Steel Bill, 1R (11:02:88) 523
Questions
British Steel Corporation 351
British Steel Corporation, Privatisation 351-2
Business, Company law 353
Business, Lancaster 354
Companies, Consultants 257-8w
Consultants, Business 346-7
Consultants, Small businesses 346
Dept of Trade & Industry, Civil service dispersal 257w
"DTI the Department for Enterprise White Paper", West Midlands 253w
Enterprise initiative 345-8
Factories, Management 259w
HOTOL 257w
Inner city areas, Departmental coordination 258w
Inner city areas, Private sector 258w
Insolvency Service, Office dispersal 761w
Management, Education 248w
New businesses, Consultants 254w
North Peckham task force, Government grants 253-4w
Official engagements, Association of British Chambers of Commerce 251w
Patent Office, Office dispersal 761w
Post Office, Monopoly 248w
Rate increases, Cleveland County Council 347
Regional aid 346
Regional aid, "DTI the Department for Enterprise White Paper" 252w
Regional selective assistance 252-3w
Regional selective assistance, Employment opportunities 306w
Satellite communications, Competition 608-10w
Space technology, Science & technology research 248-9w
Sub post offices 306w
Trade unions 353-4

Clarke, Sarah 437-8w

Clarke, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 273-5
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 944
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1180, 1197-201
Questions
Ambulance services, Coatbridge 141w
Government shareholding 334w
Social Fund, Social workers 214w
Standard of living 497-8

Clay, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 40, 61-6, 68, 71
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 385-6, 425, 430
Training (16:02:88) 834
Questions
Manufactured goods, Balance of trade 249w
Skuse, Frank, Evidence 439w, 547w

Clelland, Mr David
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 48-51, 60, 98, 101-3, 130
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 210

Clergy
Army 85w

Cleveland
Supplementary benefits 114w

Cleveland County Council
Rate increases 347

Clift, Alan
Forensic science 439w

Climbing
Rescue services 238w

Clinical depression
Army 445w

Clinical psychologists 266-8w

Clinics
Abortion 191-2w

Clwyd
Education 463w
Health services 518w
Opencast mining (10:02:88) 478-84

Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Questions
Arts, Curriculum 697
Educational finance 812
Examinations, Age 817-8
NHS, Abortion 173
Nurses' training, Expenditure 176w

Clyde Submarine Base 756w
Diesel fuel (08:02:88) 162-8
HMS Resolution 736w
Ionizing radiation 737w
Naval bases 737w
Nuclear accidents 737w
Nuclear submarines 736w

Clydebank
Scottish Development Agency 480w

Clydesdale
Population 142w, 656w
Schools 63-4w

Coal
Imports 63w, 687, 694-5
International trade 225w
South of Scotland Electricity Board 694

Coal fired power stations 225w
Central Electricity Generating Board 509w

Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946
Questions
684w

Coal mine closures 346w, 507w
Abernant Colliery 9, (18:02:88) 1253-8
South Wales 5-6

Coal mining 688
British Coal Corporation 511w
Capital investment 392w
Coal reserves 392w
Costs 511-2w
Dismissal 695
Employment 76w
Equipment 512w
Government assistance to nationalised industries 696
Government grants 344w
Industrial disputes 695-6
Industrial relations 693
Pay 695-6
Productivity 693-4
Subsidence 393w
Wales 4

Coal Mining Subsidence (Damage & Arbitration) Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (12:02:88) 670

Coal Mining Subsidence (Prevention & Public Awareness) Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
1R (09:02.88) 186
2R order read (12:02:88) 676

Coal prices 687-8
Dollar 696
Electricity tariffs 688
Productivity 687

Coal reserves
Coal mining 392w

Coastal areas
Electricity generation 688

Coatbridge
Ambulance services 141w

COCOM
Exports 305w

Codes of practice
Bank services 262w
Civil servants 465w
Crime prevention 1143
Listed buildings 521w

Cohen, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 531, 561, 585-7
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1244-6
Questions
Armed forces deployment, USA 418w
Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, Manpower 444-5w
Bombings, Birmingham 706w
Cancer hazards, Engine oil 97-8w
Census, Community charge 263w
Census of population, Community charge 695w
Census of population, Ethnic groups 559w
Chemical weapons, NATO 448w
Chemical weapons, USA 448w
Community charges register, Disclosure of information 63w
Community charges register, Scotland 63w
Computer privacy, National security 619w
Defence, USA 383-4w
Defence research, London University 537-8w
F16 aircraft, Air force bases 538w
Frontiers, EC countries 425w
House of Commons Refreshment Department, Conditions of employment 449w
House of Commons staff, Conditions of employment 449w
Mental health services, NHS finance 822-3
Ministry of Defence, Thames house Millbank 446w
National Health Service Royal Commission, NHS charges 172-3
NATO 538w
NATO, Defence equipment 613w
Nuclear power stations, Fire services 436w, 512w
Nuclear weapons deployment, Western Europe 538w
Parental leave, EC countries 469-70w
Police, Computers 728w
Police national computer 35w, 617-8w
Police national computer, Scotland 728w
Prisoners, AIDS 620w
Social security benefits, Computer privacy 693-4w
Social security benefits, Personal records 694-5w
VAT, Tax allowances 770w

Cohen, Harry
Members' suspension (18:02:88) 1246

Coleman, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Coal mine closures, Abernant Colliery (18:02:88) 1253-5
Questions
Abernant Colliery, Coal mine closures 9
AIDS, Laboratories 64-5w, 79-80w, 110-1w, 327w
Hospital beds, Wales 18
Industrial accidents, West Glamorgan 74w

Collard, Paul 281w

Collections
Museums & galleries 151-2w

Collins, Gerry 391w

Colston School Springburn 728-9w

Colville of Culross, Viscount (16:02:88) 925-49

Colvin, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 526, 551-7
Training (16:02:88) 831
Questions
Alcoholism 705w
Aviation fuels, Excise duties 566w
Business sponsorship incentive scheme, Arts sponsorship 151w
Coal, Imports 694-5
Dairy farming, Animal husbandry 237w
Dairy farming, Food inspection 328w
Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1987/88, Police 1137-8
Hinkley Point C, Public inquiries 686
Milk, Imports 677-8w
Milk, Production 726w
NHS finance, Inquiries 176w

COMA see Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy

Combined heat & power
Edinburgh 346w

Commission of the European Communities see European Commission

Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members (08:02:88) 39-139, (10:02:88) 371-452

Committee of Vice Chancellors & Principals
Official engagements 809

Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy
Infant foods 276w

Common agricultural policy 498-9, (15:02:88) 755-98
EC budget 689w, (15:02:88) 705-17
European Council 611w
Wales 16

Common farm prices
Wheat 679-80w

Communication engineering
Export licensing 306w

Communication skills
Civil servants 700-1
Higher civil servants 700

Community care 183w, 485w
Barnsley 381-2w
Government grants to local authorities 282-4w
NHS finance 183w, 196w

Community Care Review 183w, 196w

Community charge 455w, 663-4w, 961, 975-6
Battered wives 478w
Caravan sites 13
Census 263w
Census of population 695w
Death 540w
Departmental correspondence 960-1
Government grants to local authorities 456w
Households 528-9w
Local authorities 664w
Mobile homes 81w
Overseas students 456w
Parish councils 664w
Public petitions (10:02:88) 477
Remand in custody 1133
Scotland 478w, 585w
Student grants 369w, 585w
Wales 13

Community charge rebates
Scotland 780-1w
Young people 622w

Community charges register 478w, 540w
Disclosure of information 63w
Electoral register 961
Scotland 63w
Tax evasion 975
Voting rights 823-4

Community education
Scotland 731w

Community health services
Capital investment 697-8w
Expenditure 349-50w
NHS finance 116-8w
Wales 518w

Community hospitals
Gwynedd 19-20

Community programme 383w

Compact discs
Copyright 344
Retail trade 344

Companies 336-7w
Consultants 257-8w
Finance Act 1984 419-20w
Intestacy 769w
Local government services 289-90w

Companies Act 1985
Questions
262w

Companies Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (12:02:88) 670

Company investigations
Guinness 261w
House of Fraser 262w, 713w
Insider trading 621w
Pension funds 90w

Company law
Business 353
Small businesses 353

Company liquidations 337

Competition 254w, 354
EC Consumer Affairs Council 306-7w
Electricity tariffs 506-7w
Satellite communications 608-10w
Telecommunications industry 349-50

Complaints
Mental patients 562w
Scottish Fire Service Training School 652-3w

Complaints against police
Ethnic monitoring 303w

Compliance cost assessments 263w

Comptroller & Auditor General see National Audit Office

Computer aided design
Government assistance 250w

Computer applications
Police 617-8w

Computer privacy
British Telecom 254w
Government data network 247w, 567w
National security 619w
Police 305w
Publicity 618-9w
Social security benefits 693-4w

Computer software
Production 535-6w

Computers
HMSO 388w
Police 728w
Production 530-1w

Computers in Government departments
Dept of Health & Social Security 191w
Dept of Trade & Industry 713-4w
Government data network 567-8w, 721-2w

Computers in National Health Service 175w

Concessionary television licences
Pensioners 1141-2

Conditions of employment
Civil servants 416-7w
House of Commons Refreshment Department 449w
House of Commons staff 449w
Teachers 53w

Confectionery
VAT 231w, 343w, 568w

Confederation of British Industry
Official engagements 337-8w
Uniform business rate 664-5w

Conference on Security & Cooperation in Europe see European Security Conference

Conferences
EC internal trade 536-7w

Congenital abnormalities
Heart diseases 463w
Wales 463w

Construction
Hinkley Point C 509-10w
Hospitals 183w
North Staffordshire Health Authority 189w
Severn bridge 10, 20

Consultants
Business 346-7
Companies 257-8w
New businesses 254w
Small businesses 346

Consumer Arbitration Agreements Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
Com (12:02:88) 671-5

Consumer credit (10:02:88) 368-70
Disclosure of information 443w

Consumer Credit Act 1974
Questions
443w

Consumer protection (12:02:88) 671-5
Food 306-7w
Pens 340-1

Consumers' Association
Official engagements 251w

Consumers in the European Community Group 57w

Contact lenses 167w

Contraceptives
AIDS 557-8w

Contract compliance
Local authorities 971

Contracts
Bray District Council 166w
Export credit guarantees 442-3w
Republic of Ireland 166w
Road construction 2-4w
Road works 65w, 119-20w

Contracts for services
Fire services 671w
Hospital catering 655w

Contracts of employment
Hospital consultants 204w, 490w, 556w

Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984
Questions
74w, 150-1w

Conveyancing Standing Committee 364-5w

Conway, Mr Derek
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 197
Questions
Furniture, Fire regulations 343
Special constables 1133-4

Cook, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 551, 577, 580-3, 589, 592
Clyde Submarine Base, Fraud (08:02:88) 162-4, 166
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 787
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 98
Questions
Business statements 508
Environment protection, Disclosure of information 462w
Firearms, EC action 1137
Mergers, Monopolies & Mergers Commission 257w
Nuclear reactors, Testing 510-1w
Radioactive waste disposal, European Commission 461-2w
Trawsfynydd power station, Testing 416w

Cook, Mr Robin
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 772
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1177
Questions
Childbirth 697w
Exceptional needs payments, Expenditure 116w, 699w
Hospital finance 697-8w
Hospitals, NHS finance 116-8w
NHS 176, 407w
NHS, Per capita costs 632w
NHS finance 349-50w
Private patients 503w
Social Fund, Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 181
Supplementary benefits, Social security recipients 348w

Cook-chill catering
Hospital catering 180w

Coombs, Mr Anthony
Debates etc.
Training (16:02:88) 835
Questions
"DTI the Department for Enterprise White Paper", West Midlands 253w
Homicide, Children 434w
NHS, Abortion 269-70w
NHS finance, District health authorities 180w
Prisoners on remand, Remand in custody 1132
Teachers, Educational standards 582-3w
UK contributions to EC budget 387-8w
Urban development corporations, Inner city areas 968

Coombs, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1218, 1228-30, 1244
Training (16:02:88) 836
Questions
Compact discs, Retail trade 344
Economic growth 336w
Family credit, Poverty trap 176w
Nurses, Employment 487w
Pupils, Swimming 158-9w
Schools, Swimming 159w
Schools, Water safety 158w
Swimming, Handicapped 126-7w
Swimming, Health education 267w
Swimming, Training 20-1w
Swimming pools, Local education authorities 47w

Coopers & Lybrand Associates
Disclosure of information 21w

Cope, Mr John, Minister of State for Employment
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 115-7
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 392-3, 397-8, 435-6, 448
Self-employed (15:02:88) 735-41
Questions
Community programme 383w
Employment schemes, Basildon 547-8w
Employment schemes, Business in the Community 314-5w
Employment schemes, Northwich 468-9w
Enterprise allowance scheme, Cheshire 547-50w
Job training scheme, Cheshire 230w
Job training scheme, Professional qualifications 151w
London Docklands, Manpower Services Commission 73w
Small businesses, Northern region 227w
Youth training scheme, Deaf 717w

Copyright
Compact discs 344
Crown copyright 305-6w
Reprography 145w

Copyright Designs & Patents Bill (HL) 1987/88
Questions
145w

Corbett, Mr Robin
Debates etc.
Access to Medical Reports Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 663-4
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 141, 145-8
Malicious Communications Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 609, 611, 618, 632, 637-9
Private notice question intervention (12:02:88) 628
Questions
Birmingham Children's Hospital, Heart diseases 626
Furs, Farms 297w
Rover Group, Positive vetting 305w

Corbyn, Mr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Education Reform Bill, Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1096-7, 1099, 1101-8
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 898
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 454-5, 464-5, (17:02:88) 1002, 1010, 1023, 1048, 1053-5
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 945
Questions
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 170-1
Hospital waiting lists, District health authorities 503-6w
Medical laboratory scientific officers, Manpower 640-8w
Nurses, Manpower 207-11w
Prisoners, Marriage 437-8w

Co-responsibility levy
Cereals 329w
EC countries 677w

Cormack, Jim
Nuclear submarines (08:02:88) 162-8

Cormack, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 195, 212, 223, 227, 255, 258, 269-71
Questions
Archaeology 302w
Business statements 514

Cornwall
Monofilament gill nets 588w

Coronary Prevention Group
Nutrition labelling 727w

Corporation tax 349
Tax yields 722w

Cost effectiveness
Dept of Health & Social Security special investigators 492w
Government data network 568w

Cost improvement programme 100w

Cost per pupil
Cheshire 584-5w
Primary education 811

Cot deaths 270-1w
Hampshire 270-1w

Couchman, Mr James
Debates etc.
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1155-6
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 358
Questions
Dartford Thurrock Crossing Bill 1987/88 616w
Vehicles, Lighting 410w

Council for Licensed Conveyancers 365-6w
Accountability 366w
Travelling expenses 366w

Council house rents
London boroughs 524w
Middlesbrough Borough Council 974
Oldham 974
Rent arrears 973

Council house sales
Discounts 462w
Lambeth (19:02:88) 1323-30
Right to buy 296w

Council house waiting lists 22-4w
London boroughs 22w

Council housing 974-5
Empty housing 22-4w
Housing improvement 527w
Shared ownership schemes 973

Council housing finance
Bristol City Council 972

County hall 381w

Court of appeal
Miscarriages of justice 705w

Cousins, Mr Jim
Questions
Bovine somatotropin, EC countries 678w
Bovine somatotropin, Licensing 678w
Bovine somatotropin, Testing 678w
Community charge, Households 528-9w
Companies, Consultants 257-8w
Electronic equipment, Retail trade 33-4w
Food aid, OECD countries 604-5w
Health service staff, Manpower 624-5w
Household surveys, Family income 529w
Household surveys, Personal income 527-8w
Inheritance tax 340w
Lasers, Radioactivity 695-6w
Nuclear fuels, Nuclear safeguards 393w
Supplementary benefits, Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 493w

Covenants 143-4w

Cox, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1044-6
Questions
House renovation grants, Age 457w
Police custody 703w
Prisoners on remand, Magistrates' courts 36w
Remand in custody, Magistrates' courts 36-7w

Cox Committee see National Curriculum English Working Group

Craft industries
Wales 11, 517w

Craigavon Borough Council
Local government audit 397w

Cran, Mr James
Debates etc.
Training (16:02:88) 837
Questions
Civil service, London allowance 92w
Civil service dispersal, Costs 339w
Civil service dispersal, Home Office 303w
Dept of Health & Social Security, Office dispersal 179w
Dept of the Environment, Civil service dispersal 287w
Dept of Trade & Industry, Civil service dispersal 257w
Economic & Social Research Council, Office dispersal 579w
European fighter aircraft, Official engagements 134w
Office dispersal, Dept of Energy 511w
Official engagements 520w, 690w

Credit agreements
Electricity supply industry 750w

Credit (Control) Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
1R (10:02:88) 368-70

Crewe Health Authority 268-9w
Health service staff 399-401w

Crime
Barnsley 361w
Buses 413-4w
Disclosure of information 650w
Seaham 361w
Tayside 650w

Crime prevention 1143
Codes of practice 1143
Nottingham 702w
Police & Criminal Evidence Act 1984 1142
Private sector 702w
Tayside 732w

Crimes of violence
Buses 412w
Local government social services 197w
Taxis 619-20w, (15:02:88) 799-805

Criminal appeals
Bombings (16:02:88) 950-8
Evidence 1144

Criminal injuries compensation
Punishment attacks 86w

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board 543w, 707w
Administrative delays 707w
Police 544w

Criminal investigation
Bombings 538-9w

Criminal records
Scotland 539w

Crisis loans 697w

Crowd control
Football 663w

Crown copyright 305-6w

Crown immunity
Prisons 704w

Crown Prosecution Service
Manpower 42-4w

Crown Suppliers 21w
Inquiries 299-302w
Privatisation 126w

Crowther, Mr Stan
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 210
Questions
British Steel Corporation 341

Cryer, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1168
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 63, 67-72, 96, 111-5, 128, 135
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 144-5
Passenger transport executives, Rate precepts (09:02:88) 286, 295-8, 302, 303
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1180, 1186
Written questions, Administrative delays (09:02:88) 187
Questions
Arms control, Civil service manpower 240w
British Nuclear Fuels, Arms control 240w
EC countries, Nuclear safeguards 235w
EC Energy Council, Nuclear safeguards 235w
EURATOM, Nuclear safeguards 235w
International Atomic Energy Agency, Nuclear safeguards 226w, 234w
International Atomic Energy Agency, UK contributions 226-7w
Iron & steel industry, Redundancy 533w
Mental health community care, Hospital closures 562-6w
Mental hospitals, Hospital closures 196w
Miscarriages of justice, Home Affairs Select Committee 705w
Nuclear accidents, Greenland 240-1w
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 234w
Nuclear power, Public sector assets 226w
Nuclear power stations 225w
Nuclear test ban, UN disarmament 235w
Official engagements, RAF Lakenheath 688w
Official secrets, Public records 241w
Property Services Agency, Bradford 967
Radiation hazards, Safety standards 225w
Radioactive wastes, European Commission 287w
Radioactive wastes, European Parliament 286-7w
Radioactive wastes, Sellafield 287w
School leaving certificates 583w
Sudan, Nuclear fuels 236w
Telephone tapping, Judicial review 303w
Trade unions 353-4
Transport of radioactive materials 225-6w
Tritium, Chapelcross power station 240w
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, Disclosure of information 240w

CSCE see European Security Conference

Cumbria
Radioactivity 62w
Secondary education 813

Cumbria County Council
Educational finance 813

Cunningham, Mr John
Questions
Agricultural chemicals, Easington 328w
BBC external services, Government grants 233w
British Coal Corporation, Capital investment 509w
British Coal Corporation, Privatisation 509w
Coal mining, Costs 511-2w
Coal mining, Equipment 512w
Crime, Seaham 361w
Dept of Health & Social Security special investigators, Cost effectiveness 492w
Dept of Health & Social Security special investigators, Seaham 402w
EC free food scheme 586w
Farm woodland scheme, Easington 586w
Fire services, Contracts for services 671w
Fraud, Civil service manpower 469w
Government shareholding 334w
Hazardous materials, Durham 150-1w
Hazardous wastes, Seaham 379w, 566-7w
Power stations 589w
Public footpaths 295w
Radioactive waste disposal, Seas & oceans 286w
Retirement pensions, Married women 99w
Rights of way, Local government expenditure 450-1w
Schools, Easington 48w
Social security benefits, Peterlee 186-8w
Social security recipients, Seaham 269w
Tax collection offices, Durham 419w
Waste disposal, Dawdon 133w
Waste disposal, Dawdon Colliery 237w
Waste disposal, Durham 585-6w

Cunningham, Dr John
Debates etc.
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1209, 1214-20
Questions
District health authorities, Storms 565w
Local authorities, Sex discrimination 972
Local government expenditure 525-6w
Nature reserves 959-60
Planning permission, Chelsea Football Club 962-3
Rate limitation 524-5w
Rate limitation, Local government expenditure 526-8w
Reading Borough Council, Training 315-6w

Curriculum 572w
Arts 466w, 697
Examinations 371w, 572w, 817
Inner London boroughs 682w
Teachers 815

Currie, Mrs Edwina, Under-Secretary of State for Health & Social Security
Questions
Accident & emergency departments, Costs 408w
Ambulance services 348w
Ambulance services, Greater London 111-2w
Ambulance services, NHS finance 502w

Ambulance services, Northumberland 692w
Ambulance services, Safety standards 409w
Bacteria, Food hygiene 198-9w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Adult training centres 105-7w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Capital investment 105-6w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Expenditure 99-102w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Geriatric patients 102-4w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Health service staff 108-10w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Health visitors 105-6w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Hospital beds 102-4w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Hospital patients 101-4w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Mental health services 107w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Mental patients 107-8w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, NHS finance 99-100w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Pay 100w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Supplementary benefits 108w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Surgery 101-4w
Basingstoke Hospital, Ambulance services 109-10w
Birmingham Children's Hospital, Heart diseases 497-8w, 700-1w
Blackburn Hyndburn & Ribble Valley Health Authority, Patients 558-60w
Breast cancer, Screening 556w, 628-30w
British Paediatric Association, Upper waiting hall 264w
Butane gas, Death 397-8w
Cancer hazards, Engine oil 97-8w
Census, Community charge 263w
Census of population, Ethnic groups 559w
Cervical cancer, Death 195w
Cervical cancer, Northern region 493w
Childbirth 697w
Childbirth, Caesarian sections 177-8w
Children in care 172w
Chlamydia, Diagnosis 626w
Computers in National Health Service 175w
Cot deaths 270-1w
D & C operations 213-4w
Death, Elderly 697w
Death rate 169-70w
Dental charges, Dental health 181-2, 184w
Dental charges, Dental services 349w
Dental health, Lost working days 566w
District health authorities, Land ownership & tenure 625w
District health authorities, Land values 692w
District health authorities, Public appointments 167w
Family doctors, Mersey Regional Health Authority 268-9w
Food hygiene, Local authorities 622w
Government grants, Lancashire County Council 211w
Grimsby Health Authority, Hospital beds 491w
Grimsby Health Authority, Hospital consultants 490-1w
Grimsby Health Authority, Housing 490w
Grimsby Health Authority, Nurses 491w
Grimsby Health Authority, Public appointments 491w
Grimsby Health Authority, Special duty allowances 492w
Hartley Hospital, Hospital closures 698w
Health insurance 269w, 777-8w
Health service staff, Crewe Health Authority 399-401w
Hospices, District health authorities 274-6w
Hospital beds, Leicestershire Health Authority 196-8w
Hospital beds, NHS 502w
Hospital beds, NHS & private practice 407-8w
Hospital catering, Wakefield Health Authority 180w
Hospital closures, Brook Hospital 273w
Hospital patients 169w
Hospital patients, Costs 408-9w
Hospital patients, Per capita costs 487w
Hospital patients, Regional health authorities 272-4w
Hospitals, Construction 183w
Hospitals, Land values 692w
Infant foods, Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy 276w
Infant mortality 554w
Kidney patients, Surgery 779w
Lasers, Radioactivity 695-6w
London Ambulance Service, Manpower 185-6w
London Ambulance Service, Official engagements 184w
Maudsley Hospital, Nervous system disorders 168w
Medical equipment, Members' correspondence 780w
Meningitis, North West Hertfordshire Health Authority 269w
Mental health community care, Hospital closures 562-6w
Mental health community care, South Tyneside Health Authority 409w
Mental health services, NHS finance 117-8w
Mental health services, North Western Regional Health Authority 639-40w
Mental hospitals, Hospital closures 196w
Mental hospitals, Hostels 97w
Mental patients, Complaints 562w
Mental patients, St James' Hospital Portsmouth 270w
Mental patients, Salford Health Authority 406-7w
Mental patients, Schizophrenia 639w
Mentally ill, Sheltered housing 562w
Mersey Regional Health Authority, Expenditure 192-4w
Neonatal mortality, Intensive care 558w
NHS, Expenditure 496w
NHS, Gynaecology 270w
NHS, Performance indicators 191w
NHS charges, Income 401-2w
NHS finance, Bassetlaw Health Authority 213w
NHS finance, Regional health authorities 179w, 181w
North Staffordshire Health Authority, Construction 189w
Northern Regional Health Authority, Administrative costs 172w
Northumberland Health Authority, Dogs 493w
Norwich Health Authority, Land values 692-4w
Nurses, Leicestershire Health Authority 203w
Nurses, Northumberland Health Authority 776w
Old people's homes, Disciplinary proceedings 98w
Oldchurch Hospital 115-6w
Operating theatres, NHS 401w
Oxfordshire Health Authority, Hospital patients 169w
Pharmacies, Family practitioner committees 200-2w
Pharmacies, Population 201-2w
Plymouth Health Authority 184w
Pontefract Health Authority, Hospital beds 560w
Pontefract Health Authority, Hospital consultants 559-60w
Pontefract Health Authority, Nurses 560-1w
Pontefract Health Authority, Public appointments 561w
Private health services, France 187w
Private patients 503w
Radiotherapy 782-4w
Research, Publishing 350w
Schizophrenia, Expenditure 561-2w
Schizophrenia, Hospital discharges 561w
Sickle cell disease, NHS 172w
Skoal Bandits 197w
Smoking, Air travel 351w
Smoking, Public houses 190w
Social services finance, Voluntary organisations 180w
Southend Hospital, Radiotherapy 174-5w, 496-7w, 699w
Spectacles 167w
Surgery, Costs 182w
Surgery, NHS 400w
Surgery, Per capita costs 626w
Swimming, Health education 267w
Thrombosis, International conferences 783-5w
Vaccination 623w
Westminster Children's Hospital, Burglary 781w
Worth house, Inquiries 494w
York District Hospital, Costs 190w

Curry, Mr David
Debates etc.
European Council (15:02:88) 715
Questions
Industrial production 333w
National insurance contributions 630-1w

Customs & Excise 566-8w, 721-2w
Hazardous wastes 95w

CVCP see Committee of Vice Chancellors & Principals

Cycling
Children 412-3w
Road accidents 412-3w

Cyprus
Educational aid 125w
Overseas aid 125w

D & C operations 213-4w

D notices 384-6w

DAF 255w

Dairy farming
Animal husbandry 237w
Civil service manpower 328w
Food inspection 328w

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1165-6
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 201-2, 220
Trident submarines, Mull of Galloway (10:02:88) 364, 366
Questions
Academic freedom, Universities 159-60w
Afghanistan, Arms exports 391w
Air safety, Air traffic control 22-3
Bombings, Criminal investigation 538-9w
Civil servants, Codes of practice 465w
Coopers & Lybrand Associates, Disclosure of information 21w
Crown copyright 305-6w
D notices 384-6w
Defence contracts, Shipping accidents 446-7w
Dept of Trade & Industry, Disclosure of information 35w
Education Reform Bill 1987/88, Universities 49-50w
Electricity supply industry, Emergency planning 62w
HMS Conqueror, Log books 318w, 387w
House of Commons Library, Procurement 17
National Curriculum Mathematics Working Group, Resignations 682-3w
Publishing 350
Research, Publishing 350w
Trident submarines, Sea transport 448w

Trident submarines, Shipping accidents 447-8w
War crimes, Inquiries 304w

Darling, Mr Alistair
Questions
British Telecom, Computer privacy 254w
Business statements 516-7
Committee of Vice Chancellors & Principals, Official engagements 809
Community charge, Death 540w
Criminal records, Scotland 539w
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 170-1w
Hospital catering, Scotland 655w
NHS 272w
NHS, Scotland 221w
Student grants 585w
Student grants, Community charge 585w
Student grants, Housing benefits 585w
Tax allowances, Personal equity plans 87-9w
Tax allowances, Share option scheme 89w
Tax allowances, Shares 89w
Tax yields 333w
Telephone directories, Exports 339-40
Water supply, Lead 540w

Darlington
Supplementary benefits 113-4w

Dartford Thurrock Crossing Bill 1987/88
Questions
616w
Government responses 551-3w

Dartford tunnel 551-3w

Data processing
Production 248w

Data Protection Act 1984
Questions
618-9w

Data Protection Registrar 619w

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 534-5, 576-7, 594
Questions
Navy, Armed forces storage depots 735w

Davies, Mr Quentin
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 769
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 248
Questions
Companies 336-7w
Dartford Thurrock Crossing Bill 1987/88, Government responses 552-3w
Local government land, Management 671w

Davies, Mr Ron
Questions
Agricultural chemicals, Testing 237-8w
Bovine somatotropin 156-7w
Forestry, Scotland 775w
Public expenditure, NHS 341w
Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Nature Conservancy Council 296w
South Wales, Government assistance 5
Teachers, Retirement 310w

Davis, Mr David
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 272-3

Davis, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1161
Questions
Civil service 701
Overseas aid, Population 430w

Dawdon
Waste disposal 133w

Dawdon Colliery
Waste disposal 237w

Day release 584w

DCDB see Devon & Cornwall Development Bureau

Deaf
Telephone exchanges 214w, 781-2w
Youth training scheme 717w

Death
Butane gas 397-8w
Cervical cancer 195w
Community charge 540w
Elderly 697w
Northern Ireland 500
Scotland 654-6w
Skiing 458w

Death rate 169-70w

Debt collection
Northern Ireland 393-5w

Debts 335w
Developing countries 332w
Mersey tunnel 740w
Northern Ireland 394w
Southern Africa 429-30w

Debts written off
Social Fund 490w

Dec85/199/EURATOM 753w

Decriminalisation
Scotland 64w

Deeds of covenant
Tax yields 721w

Deeside 3-4

Deeside industrial park 3-4

Defective housing
House renovation grants 667w
Local government expenditure 667-8w

Defence
USA 383-4w

Defence contracts
Shipping accidents 446-7w
Trident 239w

Defence equipment
DROPS 758-9w
NATO 613w
Palestine Liberation Organisation 425-6w

Defence industries
Arms control 292w

Defence land
Horse riding 384w

Defence procurement
Altoujet 82w
Moores Walliadown 82w
Trident 239w
USA 755w

Defence research
Atomic Weapons Research Establishment 82-3w
Educational institutions 82w
London University 537-8w

Defence Systems
Mozambique 529-30w

Degrees
Educational finance 810
Teachers 371w

Demolition
Property development 660w

Demonstrations
Metropolitan Police 1143-4
NHS 1143-4

Dental charges 349w
Dental health 181-2, 184w
EC countries 349w
Wales 464w

Dental health
Dental charges 181-2, 184w
Lost working days 566w

Dental services
Dental charges 349w

Dentistry
Wales 464w

Dentists
Disciplinary proceedings 177-8w
Pay 135w

Dept of Education & Science 50-4w, 812
First Division Association 574w
Ideal Homes Exhibition 219-20w
Press releases 373w
Sexual harassment 158w

Dept of Employment 469w
Sexual harassment 73-4w
Youth training scheme 470w

Dept of Energy 515-6w
Office dispersal 511w

Dept of Health & Social Security 188-9w, 350w, 567-8w, 721-2w, 783-5w
Computers in Government departments 191w
Housing benefits 621w
Information technology 174w
Office dispersal 179w
Sexual harassment 554w

Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 184w
Camberwell 698-700w
Civil service manpower 180-1, 351w
Greater London 351w
Greenock 404w
Resignations 180-2w
Social Fund 181
Social security reform 351-2w
Strathclyde 404w
Supplementary benefits 493w

Dept of Health & Social Security special investigators
Cost effectiveness 492w
Seaham 402w

Dept of the Environment 521w
Cash limits 128-9w
Civil service dispersal 287w
Economic League 297w
Sexual harassment 20w

Dept of Trade & Industry 761w
Civil service dispersal 257w
Computers in Government departments 713-4w
Disclosure of information 35w
Sexual harassment 33w
Teesside 345-6
Television advertising 256w

Dept of Transport
Economic League 358w
Sexual harassment 1-2w

Departmental circulars
Greenbelt 285w

Departmental coordination
Inner city areas 258w

Departmental correspondence 37-8w, 49-50w
British citizenship 546-7w
Community charge 960-1
Intelligence services 85w
National Union of Mineworkers 344w
Tower Hamlets 437w

Departmental forms
Income tax 342-3w

Departmental leaflets
Homelessness 22w, 661w
Profit sharing 387w

Departmental publications
Housing action trusts 670w
Right to buy 670w

Departmental responsibility 45w, 621w, 775-6w

Deportation
Liverpool 706w

Derbyshire
Educational finance 430-1w
Unemployment 229w
Vacancies 229w

Derelict land grants 129-31w
Public expenditure 671w

DES see Dept of Education & Science

Developing countries
Banks 152w
Debts 332w
Family planning 428w

Development Commission 461w
Rural areas 288w, 753w

Development Commission for Rural England see Development Commission

"Development of Representative Government" (10:02:88) 355-64

Devlin, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Training (16:02:88) 837
Questions
Art education 468w
Companies 337w
Enterprise initiative 345-6
Information technology, Dept of Health & Social Security 174w
New businesses, North East region 493
Offshore suppliers 510w

Devon
School administration 573w

Devon & Cornwall Development Bureau
Industrial investment 759-60w

Dewar, Mr Donald
Questions
A74, Road works 477w, 540w

Dewi Jones 21w

DHSS see Dept of Health & Social Security

Diabetes
Diets 182w

Diagnosis
Chlamydia 626w

Dickens, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 422-3
Skinner, Dennis, Members' conduct (09:02:88) 187-8
Talkabout service (09:02:88) 329-30
Questions
Derelict land grants, Public expenditure 671w
Social security reform 181

Dicks, Mr Terry
Questions
Air safety, Near misses 21
Night flying, Aircraft noise 245-6w

Diego Garcia
Armed forces deployment 445-6w

Diesel fuel
Clyde Submarine Base (08:02:88) 162-8

Diets
Diabetes 182w
Supplementary benefits 182w

DIG see Disablement Income Group

Diplomatic service
Kensington & Chelsea 55w

Dir/90/51/EEC 746-8w

Dir/83/286/EEC 746-8w

Dir/85/337/EEC 344-5w

Dir/86/113/EEC 726w

Dir/87/216/EEC 74w

Direct labour departments
Local government services 461w

Direct taxation
NHS finance 556-8w

Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland 223w

Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944
Questions
Handicapped workers 150w

Disablement Income Group 170-1

Disablement Services Authority 199-200w, 203w

Disadvantaged
Food surpluses 157-8w

Disciplinary Procedures Joint Working Party 177-8w

Disciplinary proceedings
Dentists 177-8w
Dock workers 770-2w
Hospital doctors 177-8w
Old people's homes 98w

Disclosure of information
Abortion 111w, 351w
British Telecom 443w
Community charges register 63w
Consumer credit 443w
Coopers & Lybrand Associates 21w
Crime 650w
Dept of Trade & Industry 35w
Environment protection 462w
Family credit 176w
Foreign policy 291w
Government data network 247w
Medical records (12:02:88) 657-67
Ministers' correspondence 45w
Nuclear weapons tests 769w
Pupil records 309-10w
Scottish Fire Service Training School 653w
Trade unions 305w
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority 240w

Discounts
Council house sales 462w

Discrimination
Handicapped 188-9w
Higher education admission 576w

Disease control 620w

Disley bypass
Road construction 748w

Dismissal
Coal mining 695
Forensic science 1138

Disposable income 335-6w, 497

District councils 143-4w

District health authorities
Hospices 274-6w
Hospital waiting lists 503-6w
Land ownership & tenure 625w
Land values 692w

NHS finance 177w, 180w
Public appointments 167w
Resignations 168-9w
Storms 565w

Dixon, Mr Don
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 55-6
Questions
Mental health community care, South Tyneside Health Authority 409w

Dobson, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Birmingham Children's Hospital, Standing Order No 20 applications (11:02:88) 520-1
Business statements (18:02:88) 1158
Education Reform Bill, Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1084-7, 1088
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 208-13
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 457, 468, (17:02:88) 1002, 1010, 1025, 1031
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1211-2
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988, Calling of Members (19:02:88) 1259-60
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1310-5
Questions
Business statements 503-4
Education, Inner London boroughs 162w
Inner London Education Authority, Sports 162w

Dock labour scheme 454-5w, 770-2w

Dock workers
Disciplinary proceedings 770-2w
Liverpool Dock Labour Board 770-2w
Manpower 455w

Doctors
Negligence 187w
Pay 135w
Telephones 70-1w

Doctors' & Dentists' Remuneration Review Body 135w

DOE see Dept of the Environment

Dog fighting 768w

Dogs
Northumberland Health Authority 493w

Dollar
Coal prices 696
Export prices 342

Domestic rates 960
Rates & rating 70w

Domestic rents
Housing associations 966

Domestic violence
Police 65w
Scotland 65w

Doran, Mr Frank
Questions
Chronically Sick & Disabled Persons Act 1970 191w
Tax yields 333w

Douglas, Mr Dick
Questions
Balance of payments 373-6w

Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James, Under-Secretary of State for Scotland
Questions
BBC, "Secret Society" 728w
Capital investment, Scotland 143-4w
Caravans, Parking offences 539w
Crime, Tayside 650w
Crime prevention, Tayside 732w

Criminal records, Scotland 539w
Decriminalisation, Scotland 64w
Domestic violence, Police 65w
Dunkeld Cathedral, Bellringing 650w
Electoral register, Scotland 774w
Erskine bridge, Toll bridges 320w
Fine defaulters, Prisons 71w
Forestry, Scotland 775w
Forests 480w
Forests, Northumberland 480w
Forests, Pollution 775w
Gaming machines, Scotland 476w
Homelessness, Housing capital allocations 66w
Homelessness, Mortgage defaulters 65-6w
Homelessness, Scotland 68-70w
Housing, Shetland 732w
Housing construction, Angus 649w
Housing construction, Perth 649w
Housing Corporation, Scotland 774w
Housing finance, Scotland 144w
Legal aid, Scotland 477w
Planning appeals, Scotland 320w
Police, Computers 728w
Police national computer, Scotland 728w
Prison population, Scotland 71w
Prison population, Young offenders 71w
Road works, Contracts 65w
School violence, Prosecutions 66w
Scottish Fire Service Training School, Complaints 652-3w
Scottish Fire Service Training School, Inquiries 652-3w
Scottish Fire Service Training School, Interviews 652-3w
Scottish Special Housing Association 321w
Structure plans, Strathclyde 64w
Television programmes, National security 144-5w
White fronted geese, Islay 72w
Young offenders, Tayside 479w

Drainage rates
Land drainage 158w

Drama
Radio 708w

Drinking & driving
Non-alcholic drinks 133-4w

Driving licences
Public service vehicles 613-4w, 740w

Driving tests 411-2w

DROPS
Defence equipment 758-9w

Drug abuse
Edinburgh 772w
Glasgow 772w

Drug crimes
Proceeds of crime 541w, 701w

Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986
Questions
541w

Drug Trafficking Offences (Enforcement in England & Wales) Order 1988
Debates etc.
(10:02:88) 367

Drugs
APS 271w
Costs 109w
Eli Lilley 628w
Expenditure 557w
Hospitals 198w
Licensing 271w

DTI see Dept of Trade & Industry

"DTI the Department for Enterprise White Paper"
Financial institutions 259w
Regional aid 252w
West Midlands 253w

DTp see Dept of Transport

Duchy of Lancaster
Empty housing 33w

Duffy, Mr A E P
Debates etc.
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 994

Dundee 75w, 479w
Rate rebates 70w
Regional aid 483-4w
School violence 66w
Supplementary benefits 495-6w
Unemployment 65-6w, 75w
Vacancies 540-2w
Welfare milk 65w
Youth training scheme 478-9w

Dungeness A power station 590w

Dungeness B power station 590w

Dunkeld Cathedral
Bellringing 650w

Dunn, Mr Bob, Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science
Questions
Assisted places scheme 599-601w
Church schools, Church of England 216w
Cost per pupil, Cheshire 584-5w
Curriculum, Inner London boroughs 682w
Education, Inner London boroughs 160-2w, 433w
Education Reform Bill 1987/88, Special education 573-4w
Educational administration, Inner London boroughs 681-2w
Educational finance 812
Educational finance, Capital investment 159w
Educational finance, Derbyshire 430-1w
Educational finance, Inner London boroughs 161w
Free school meals, Inner London Education Authority 162w
Further education, Inner London boroughs 161w
Further education, Young people 46w
Grant maintained schools 573w
Handicapped pupils, Special education 572w
Horniman Museum 761-2w
Inner London Education Authority 47w
Inner London Education Authority, Educational standards 161-2w
Inner London Education Authority, Expenditure 812
Inner London Education Authority, Research 682w
Middle schools 603-4w
Play groups 581w
Pre-school education, Northumberland 578w
Pre-school education, Special education 578w
Primary education, Burntwood 811-2
Primary education, Cost per pupil 811
Private education, Northumberland 585w
Private education, Pupils 765-8w
Pupils, Inner London boroughs 162w
Pupil-teacher ratios 580w
School administration, Devon 573w
School admission, Greater London 53-6w
School buildings, Northumberland 579w
School closures, Pilgrim School Bedford 310w
School governors 579w
School leaving certificates 583w
School meals, Fees & charges 583w
School uniforms 583w
Schools, Barnsley 373w
Schools, Easington 48w
Schools, Official engagements 584w
Schools, Official visits 219w
Schools, Pedestrian crossings 46-7w
Schools, Sports facilities 577w
Secondary education, Cumbria 813
Secondary education, School admission 47-8w
Special education 572w, 579-80w
Special education, EC action 584w
Special education, Grant maintained schools 819-20
Special educational needs, Local education authorities 603-3w
Special educational needs, Northern Ireland 818
Special educational needs, Teachers 818
Staffordshire County Council 811
Swimming pools, Local education authorities 47w

Dunnachie, Mr Jimmy
Questions
Community charge 664w
Electricity supply industry, Advertising 508w
Gaming machines, Scotland 476w
Immigration, Members 1135
Income support scheme, Housing benefits 630w
Income support scheme, Social security reform 630w
Mental health services, NHS finance 117-8w
Social security reform 786-7w
Supplementary benefits, Social security benefits uprating 786w

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 360
Nazi war crimes (08:02:88) 31
Questions
Bus services subsidies, Shropshire County Council 1w

Durham
Hazardous materials 150-1w
Tax collection offices 419w
Waste disposal 585-6w

Durham Prison
Body searches 544w

Dykes, Mr Hugh
Debates etc.
European Council (15:02:88) 716
Questions
Community charge 976
Defence procurement, USA 755w
Electricity supply industry, Privatisation 508w
Employment schemes, Business in the Community 314-5w
Official secrets, Law reform 1140-1
Planning permission, Property development 660w

Dyslexia
Scotland 732w

Eadie, Mr Alexander
Questions
Coal, South of Scotland Electricity Board 694
Coal mining, British Coal Corporation 511w
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 171w
National Union of Mineworkers, Departmental correspondence 344w
Official engagements, Trade unions 46w, 294w
Power stations, Public inquiries 686
Union of Democratic Mineworkers, Official engagements 344w

EAEC see EURATOM

EAGGF see European Agricultural Guidance & Guarantee Fund

Easington
Agricultural chemicals 328w
Farm woodland scheme 586w
Schools 48w

East London river crossing 551-3w

East Stow
Official engagements 294w

Eastham, Mr Ken
Questions
Hypermarkets 970
Junior hospital doctors, Overtime 172w
Prison education services, Local education authorities 40-1w
Regional selective assistance, Employment opportunities 306w
Thrombosis, International conferences 783-5w

EC action
Child safety 261w
EC trade 147w
Firearms 1137
Food labelling 727w
Radioactive wastes 753w
Safety standards 260w
Special education 584w
Trade agreements 715w
Tyres 410w

EC Agriculture Council 154-5w

EC budget 152-4w
Agriculture 726-7w
Common agricultural policy 689w, (15:02:88) 705-17
European Council 294w, 611-2w, 726-7w
National income 611w
UK repayments from EC budget 567w

EC Commission see European Commission

EC Consumer Affairs Council
Competition 306-7w
EC transport policy 360w

EC countries
Agricultural production 587w
Bovine somatotropin 678w
Cereals 677w
Co-responsibility levy 677w
Dental charges 349w
Frontiers 425w
Health services finance 174w, 177-8, 204-6w, 402-4w
Labour costs 312-4w
Light dues 241-2w
Nuclear safeguards 235w
Optical charges 349w
Parental leave 469-70w
Shipping 414w

EC Economic & Finance Council see EC Finance Council

EC Energy Council
Nuclear safeguards 235w

EC Finance Council 612w
Budget 419w
Capital movements 420w

EC free food scheme 586w

EC grants & loans 760w
Angus 476w
European Regional Development Fund 146-7w

EC Internal Market Council 147w

EC internal trade
Conferences 536-7w
Employment 537w
Insurance 259w
Trade barriers 256w, 259w

EC law
Plain language 57w
Water pollution 380-1w

EC nationals (16:02:88) 847-924

EC trade
EC action 147w

EC Transport Council 615w

EC transport policy
EC Consumer Affairs Council 360w

ECGD see Export Credits Guarantee Department

ECOFIN see EC Finance Council

Economic agreements
European Council 688-9w

Economic & Social Research Council
Office dispersal 579w

Economic growth 336w, 388w
Unemployment 336w

Economic League 444w
Dept of the Environment 297w
Dept of Transport 358w
Employment schemes 415w
Ministry of Defence 318w
Nationalised industries 415w

Economic sanctions
South Africa 425w

Economic situation
Shares 647w
Wales 4-5

ECOTEC Research & Consulting 288w

ECSC see European Coal & Steel Community

Eddisbury
Greenbelt 672w

EDF see Electricite de France

Edinburgh
AIDS 367w
Combined heat & power 346w
Drug abuse 772w
Water supply 540w

Edinburgh University 49-50w
Higher education admission 815-6

EDU see Enterprise & Deregulation Unit

Education
Clwyd 463w
Expenditure 745w
Gypsies 324-5w
Immigrants 711-2w
Inner London boroughs 160-2w, 433w
Management 248w
Public expenditure 342w
Schools & parents 820-1
Wales 745w

Education Act 1944
Questions
682w

Education allowances
Costs 601-2w

Education & industry
Science & technology research 254-5w

Education Reform Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1083-108
Questions
186, 217w, 371-2w, 572-3w, 582w, 683-4w
Bradford 814-5
Educational finance 814
Leicestershire 573w
Special education 573-4w
Universities 49-50w

Education (School Records) Regulations 1988
Questions
309-10w

Educational administration
Inner London boroughs 371-2w, 681-2w, 711-2w
Local education authorities 572-3w

Educational aid
Cyprus 125w

Educational finance 50-4w, 812, 815
Capital investment 159w
Cumbria County Council 813
Degrees 810
Derbyshire 430-1w
Education Reform Bill 1987/88 814
Expenditure 481w
Higher education colleges 370w
Inner London boroughs 161w
Literacy 807
School administration 815

Educational institutions
Defence research 82w

Educational maintenance allowance
Northern Ireland 396-7w

Educational standards
Inner London Education Authority 161-2w, 219w, 575w
Teachers 582-3w

EEC see European Economic Community

Efficiency scrutinies (18:02:88) 1149-56
Property Services Agency 299-302w

EFTA see European Free Trade Association

EIB see European Investment Bank

Ejoh, Orkocharkwu Emmanuel
Immigrant detainees 138w

El Salvador
Mercenaries 529w

Elderly
Advisory services 170
Death 697w
Heating 187-8w
Residential care 65w

Election offences
Prosecutions 361w

Electoral register
Armed forces 84w, 136w
Community charges register 961
Scotland 774w

Electorate
Rates & rating 369w

Electricite de France
Profitability 513w

Electricity Council
Public appointments 509w

Electricity generation
Coastal areas 688
Fawley A 512w
Nuclear power 510w

Electricity supply industry 688-9
Advertising 508w
Credit agreements 750w
Emergency planning 62w
France 62w
Northern Ireland 592-3w, 750w
Privatisation 507-8w
Security 684-5w

Electricity tariffs
Coal prices 688
Competition 506-7w
Employment 470w
Industrial energy prices 691
Industry 507w
Inflation 338w
Pensioners 691-2
Price increases 690-3
South Western Electricity Board 691

Electronic equipment
Balance of trade 33-4w
Retail trade 33-4w

Electronic surveillance
Offenders 139-40w

Electronics industry
Exports 250w
Production 250w

Elevated sections of motorways
M6 454w

Eli Lilley
Drugs 628w
NHS 628w

Elmvale School Springburn 728-9w

Emergency planning
Electricity supply industry 62w
Food contamination 157w
NHS finance 197w

Emergency powers
Northern Ireland 165-6w, (16:02:88) 925-49

Emery, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1158-9
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 222

Employees' contributions
National insurance contributions 205w

Employers' contributions
Members' pensions 658w

Employment 228-9w
Abortion 780w
Agriculture 76w
Coal mining 76w
EC internal trade 537w
Electricity tariffs 470w
Northern region 231w
Nurses 487w
Wales 81w

Employment Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
Rep (08:02:88) 39-139
Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 371-452

Employment by sector
Scotland 733-4w
Women 733w

Employment discrimination
Appeals 440-2w
Leicestershire County Council 521w
Northern Ireland 440-2w, 594-6w, 674w

Employment opportunities 334w
North Angus 728w
Regional selective assistance 306w
Wales 597w

Employment schemes
Basildon 547-8w
Business in the Community 314-5w
Economic League 415w
Northwich 468-9w

Employment Service (16:02:88) 825-38

Employment services
Channel tunnel 312w
Sizewell B 312w

Employment training 383w

Empty housing
Chester 297w
Council housing 22-4w
Duchy of Lancaster 33w
Vale Royal 297w

Energy conservation
Palace of Westminster 58w

Energy consumption
Industry 513-4w

Energy research
Nuclear power 684w

Energy Select Committee 684w

Engine oil
Cancer hazards 97-8w

Engineering industries
Graduates 814

English education 581-2w

English Estates see English Industrial Estates Corporation

English Industrial Estates Corporation
Expenditure 257w

English language
Air traffic control 244w

English National Opera 568-70w

English Working Group see National Curriculum English Working Group

ENO see English National Opera

Enterprise allowance scheme
Cheshire 547-50w

Enterprise & Deregulation Unit
Business 532w

Enterprise counsellors
Accountants 148w

Enterprise initiative 345-8

Enterprise zones
Tax allowances 421w

Entry clearances
Immigrants' fiancees 690-1w
Immigration controls 40w

Environment protection
Disclosure of information 462w
European Year of the Environment 523-4w
Nuclear power stations 344-5w
Opencast mining 661w

Environmental health
Gypsies 396w

Environmental impact assessment 344-5w

Epilepsy
Scotland 70w

Equal opportunities
Handicapped 283w

Equipment
Coal mining 512w
Mining 261w
Telephones 350

Erskine bridge
Toll bridges 320w

ESRC see Economic & Social Research Council

Estate Action 662w
Housing improvement 662w

Estate Agents Act 1979
Questions
307w

Ethics 185
Church of England 821

Ethnic groups
Armed forces officers 82w
Census of population 559w
Immigrant detainees 39w

Ethnic minorities
Arts Council grants 698-9, 769w
Industrial tribunals 383w
Job centres 469-70w
Police 704w

Ethnic monitoring
Complaints against police 303w
Haringey 559w

EURATOM 57w, 235w, 416w, 461-2w, 519w, 530w, 753w
Nuclear safeguards 235w

Europe
Motor vehicle safety 551w
NATO 424w
Telecommunications industry 340

European Agricultural Guidance & Guarantee Fund 760w

European Assembly see European Parliament

European Assembly constituencies 768-9w
Wales 768w

European Atomic Energy Community see EURATOM

European Coal & Steel Community 716w

European Commission 57w, 254w, 294w, 770w
Official engagements 689w
Radioactive waste disposal 461-2w
Radioactive wastes 287w

European Council 340w, 612w, 688-90w, (15:02:88) 755-98
Butter 612w
Common agricultural policy 611w
EC budget 294w, 611-2w, 726-7w
Economic agreements 688-9w
Foreign relations 612w
Ministerial statements (15:02:88) 705-17

European Court of Justice 330w
VAT zero rated goods 332-3w

European Economic Community 34w, 152-4w, 373-6w

European fighter aircraft 84w, (11:02:88) 524-98
F18 aircraft 84w
Official engagements 134w
West Germany 84w

European Free Trade Association 147w

European Investment Bank 760w

European Parliament 235w, 346w, 768-9w
Radioactive wastes 286-7w

European Patent Office (17:02:88) 1122-30

European Regional Development Fund 760w
EC grants & loans 146-7w
Official engagements 254w
Regional aid 253w
Wales 75-6w

European Research into Consumer Affairs 57w

European Security Conference
Romania 233w

European Social Fund 760w

European Space Agency 248-9w

European Year of the Environment
Environment protection 523-4w

Evans, Mr David
Questions
Confederation of British Industry, Official engagements 337-8w
Football, Arrests 434w
Football, Hooliganism 965

Housing construction, Housing finance 456-7w
Local government land, Property transfer 659w
Planning appeals, Administrative delays 288w
Rate support grants 754-5w

Evennett, Mr David
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1011, 1062-4
Questions
Bexley Health Authority, NHS finance 173w
Electricity supply industry, Privatisation 507w
London Regional Passengers' Committee 454w
London Regional Passengers' Committee, Public appointments 743-4w
London Regional Transport, Bus services 452w
London Regional Transport Act 1984, Law reform 451-2w
Passports, Administrative delays 707w
Teachers, Greater London 183
Teachers, Trade unions 581w

Evidence
Criminal appeals 1144
Skuse, Frank 438-9w, 547w, 1138-9

Ewing, Mr Harry
Questions
Public service pensions, Retail price index 688w

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Debates etc.
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1154
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 755, 790-1
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 205
Questions
Air force, Sea rescue 238-9w
Brucellosis, Scotland 223w
Death, Scotland 654-6w
Decriminalisation, Scotland 64w
Domestic violence, Police 65w
Fisheries, Scotland 729w
Handicap benefits, Social security payments 348w
Languages education, Scotland 654w
North Sea oil, Offshore suppliers 690
Rescue services, Climbing 238w
Rescue services, Costs 739w
Scotland, Universities 576-8w
Social security benefits, Retail price index 247-8w, 349w
Syrian Arab Republic, Torture 691w
Test tube babies, Scotland 654w
Veterinary services, Scotland 221-2w

Examinations 573-4w, 816-7
Age 816-8
Curriculum 371w, 572w, 817
General Certificate of Secondary Education 163w
Licensed conveyancers 366w

Exceptional needs payments
Camberwell 700w
Expenditure 116w, 699w
Leicester 694w
North East region 500-2w
Rotherham 175w
Social security recipients 205-6w

Excise duties
Aviation fuels 566w

Exercise Fire Focus 736w

Exercise Teamwork 88
Amphibious vehicles 239w

Exhaust emission controls
Motor industry 605-6w

Exhaust emissions 381w

Exhibitions
British Nuclear Fuels 226w

Expert evidence
Forensic science (16:02:88) 950-8

Export credit guarantees
Contracts 442-3w

Export Credits Guarantee Department 442-3w

Export licensing
Communication engineering 306w
Palestine Liberation Organisation 306w

Export prices
Dollar 342

Exports
Aircraft 305w
Armoured fighting vehicles 236w
COCOM 305w
Electronics industry 250w
Milk 675-6w
Nuclear fuels 225-6w
Palestine Liberation Organisation 305w
Pigmeat 675-6w
Telecommunications industry 339
Telephone directories 339-40

Exservicemen
Nuclear weapons tests 83-4w, 757-8w

External financing limits
British Rail 454w
Water authorities 752-3w

Extortion
Building industry 593w
IRA 545w, 593w
Northern Ireland 519w, 594w
Tax yields 723-4w
Terrorism 519w, 594w

Extracurricular activities
Fees & charges 683-4w
University finance 372w

Extradition
Republic of Ireland 164-5w, 685-6w

Eye disorders
Hospital waiting lists 632-8w

Eye tests 349w, 463w
NHS 112w
NHS charges 732w
Optical charges 195w, 349w
Scotland 732w

F16 aircraft
Air force bases 538w

F18 aircraft
European fighter aircraft 84w

Factories
Management 259w

Factory closures
Canning Town Glass 259-60w

Fair Employment Agency for Northern Ireland 594-6w

Fair Employment Commission
Northern Ireland 749w

Fairbairn, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1159

"Faith in the City"
Inner city areas 962

Falkland Islands
Fisheries 56-7w, 425w
Military exercises 736-7w

Fallon, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Training (16:02:88) 833
Questions
Educational administration, Local education authorities 572-3w
European Commission, Official engagements 689w
New Zealand, Official engagements 338w
Northern Regional Health Authority, Administrative costs 172w
Prisons, Privatisation 361w
Small businesses, Northern region 227w
Teesside Development Corporation, Official engagements 518w

Falmouth Container Terminal Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (11:02:88) 485, (18:02:88) 1131

Family credit
Disclosure of information 176w
Poverty trap 176w

Family doctors
Cheshire 268-9w
Costs 115w
Generic prescribing 352w
Leeds 264w
Medical education 353w
Mersey Regional Health Authority 268-9w
Northern Ireland 284-6w
Prescriptions 555w
South Wales 8
Training 284-6w
Wales 123w

"Family Fortunes" 175w

Family income 175w, 399w
Child benefit 777w
Household surveys 529w
Social security reform 777w

Family planning
Developing countries 428w

Family practitioner committees
Pharmacies 200-2w

FAO see Food & Agriculture Organisation

Farm buildings
Planning permission 662w
Rates & rating 462w

Farm incomes
Green pound 674-5w

Farm rents 677w

Farm woodland scheme
Easington 586w

Farmers
Manpower 464w

Farms
Furs 297w

Farr, Sir John
Debates etc.
Protection of Animals (Amendment) Bill, House of Commons Standing Committees (17:02:88) 996
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 993-4
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1276-9
Questions
Bombings, Birmingham 706w
Evidence, Criminal appeals 1144
Leicestershire County Council, Employment discrimination 521w
Nature reserves 959
School uniforms 583w
Shipping 340w

Fashoda
Nuclear submarines 735-6w

Fast reactors
Science & technology research 507w

Fatchett, Mr Derek
Debates etc.
Education Reform Bill, Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1095
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1064-8, 1069, 1070-1
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 141
Questions
Arts, Curriculum 466w
Educational finance 815
Hospital waiting lists, Leeds Eastern Health Authority 280w
Public expenditure, Education 342w
Schools, Parental contributions 808-9

Faulds, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 363
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 209, 234, 257-61, 265
Questions
Business statements 518
Cyprus, Educational aid 125w
Cyprus, Overseas aid 125w
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 171w
Objects in lieu of tax, Office of Arts & Libraries 569-70w

Favell, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 57-8
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 144, 148-9
Questions
Bypasses, Road construction 451w
Drug crimes, Proceeds of crime 541w
Drugs, Hospitals 198w
Hospital patients, Regional health authorities 272-4w
Immigration, Members 1136
Manchester City Council, Redundancy 14
NHS, Performance indicators 191w
Nuclear power, Republic of Ireland 512w
Social security reform 181

Fawley A
Electricity generation 512w

FCO see Foreign & Commonwealth Office

FDA see First Division Association

Fearn, Mr Ronnie
Debates etc.
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1183-6
Questions
Agency nurses, Expenditure 405-6w
Child benefit, Social security benefits uprating 346-7w
Family doctors, Medical education 353w
Health service staff, Pay settlements 497w
Multiple occupation 665w
NHS finance, Direct taxation 556-8w
NHS finance, National insurance contributions 778w
Nurses, Recruitment 167w
Official engagements, Association of British Chambers of Commerce 251w
Pharmacies, Family practitioner committees 200-2w
Pharmacies, Population 201-2w
Pharmacies, Wales 598w
Schools, Fees & charges 808
Severe weather payments 170

Fees & charges
Extracurricular activities 683-4w
Local government services 31w
Manchester Airport 615-6w
Police custody 138w
School meals 583w
Schools 808-9

Fermanagh
Homicide 441-2w

Fertilisers
Production 607w

Field, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 529
Rate Support Grant (England) Supplementary Reports (17:02:88) 1119
Questions
Air traffic control, Isle of Wight 551w
Oil pollution control, Aircraft 739-40w
Parkhurst Prison, Prison accommodation 1140
Police community liaison committees 434w
Police community liaison committees, Isle of Wight 434w
Rural areas, Development Commission 288w
Storms, Government grants to local authorities 522w
Tax & price index 331w

Field, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1175, 1180-3, 1202-3
Questions
AIDS, Pregnancy 785w
AIDS Monitoring & Surveillance Committee 167w
Blood tests, AIDS 199w
Blood tests, Costs 199w
Means tested benefits, Social security recipients 185-6w

Fields, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Passenger transport executives, Rate precepts (09:02:88) 313-4
Questions
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 170-1w

Fife
Leukaemia 774w

Film
Voluntary organisations 500

Finance Act 1984
Questions
Companies 419-20w

Financial institutions
"DTI the Department for Enterprise White Paper" 259w

Financial services
Securities Association 760-1w

Financial Services Act 1986
Questions
255w, 337-9
Self-regulating organisations 607-8w

Fine defaulters
Prisons 71w
Scotland 71w

Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Education Reform Bill, Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1087-9
Malicious Communications Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 620, 622, 633, 636, 638-42
Questions
Bank notes 649w
Hospital waiting lists 629-30

Fire certificates
Heathrow central station 412w
London Underground 412w

Fire engines 671w

Fire escapes
Multiple occupation 321-2w

Fire prevention
Houses (09:02:88) 189-91

Fire regulations
Furniture 342-3

Fire services
Contracts for services 671w
Nuclear power stations 436w, 512w
Rate precepts (08:02:88) 140-61

Firearms 38w
EC action 1137
Import controls 1137
Imports 1138
Ryan, Michael 304w

Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1987/88
Questions
302w
Police 1137-8

First Division Association 465w
Dept of Education & Science 574w
Official engagements 812

Fish farming
Chemicals 464w
Salmon 730-1w
Seals 731w

Fisher, Mr Mark
Questions
Arts, Inner city areas 281w
National Theatre, Arts Council grants 699-700
Office of Population Censuses & Surveys, Libraries 780w
Radio, Broadcast journalism 40w
Radio, Broadcasting controls 362w
Radio, Radio frequencies 40w
Radio, Rural areas 39w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries 165w
Special educational needs, Teachers 818
Staffordshire County Council 811

Fisheries
Ardglass 749-50w
Falkland Islands 56-7w, 425w
Licensing 729w
Scotland 729w

Fishery protection
Salmon 325-6w

Flannery, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1011, 1066
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 941-2
Self-employed (15:02:88) 731
Questions
Examinations 816-7
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries 502
Shops, Urban areas 970
Teachers, Trade unions 578w

Flats
House renovation grants 673-4w

Fleming, Gerald 750w

Flynn, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Malicious Communications Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 654
Patent Office, Civil service dispersal (17:02:88) 1123-4
Water, Wales (12:02:88) 677-80
Questions
Agricultural chemicals, Set-aside schemes 725w
Alcoholic drinks duties, Non-alcoholic drinks 648w
Ambulance services, Voluntary organisations 413w
Breast cancer, Screening 556w
Budget, Tobacco duties 419-20w
Civil service dispersal, Wales 10-1

Dept of Trade & Industry, Television advertising 256w
Gastropods, Pest control 724-5w
Inheritance tax 340w
Patent Office 145w
Ports, Hazardous materials 739w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries 165w
Social security benefits, Retail price index 1146
Sports facilities, Local government services 15-6
Sulphur dioxide, Pollution control 666-7w
Summertime 619w
Television licences, Students 38w
Transnuklear 519w
Wales, Official engagements 134w

Food
Consumer protection 306-7w

Food aid
OECD countries 604-5w

Food aid from EC
Cereals 687w

Food & Agriculture Organisation
USA 293w

Food contamination
Emergency planning 157w

Food hygiene
Bacteria 198-9w
Local authorities 622w

Food inspection
Dairy farming 328w

Food labelling
EC action 727w

Food prices
Bread 725w
Milk 725w

Food surpluses
Disadvantaged 157-8w
Expenditure 587-8w, 612w
Intervention stocks 689w
Local authorities 158w

Fookes, Miss Janet
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 233-5

Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1159-60
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1152
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 51-3, 60, 81-5, 130-1
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 398-401, 414-5
Questions
Coal mining, Wales 4
Peel, Robert 14

Football 965
Alcoholic drinks 965
Arrests 434w
Crowd control 663w
Hooliganism 416w, 426w, 438w, 964-5

Football League 964-5

Ford Motor Company
Industrial disputes 25-7, 184, 348, 492

Foreign & Commonwealth Office 291w
Sexual harassment 55w

Foreign Enlistment Act 1870
Questions
529w

Foreign investment in UK
Japan 255w

Foreign patients
NHS charges 745-6w

Foreign policy
Bophuthatswana 56w, 424w
Disclosure of information 291w

Foreign relations
European Council 612w
USSR 424w

Forensic science
Clift, Alan 439w
Dismissal 1138
Expert evidence (16:02:88) 950-8
Labour Party 1138

Forestry
Areas of outstanding natural beauty 775w
Scotland 775w
Tax allowances 95w, 339w, 490-1
Taxation 339w

Forestry Commission 775w
Ministerial duties 751-2w

Forests 480w
Borders Region 480w
Northumberland 480w
Pollution 775w

Forman, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1153

Forsyth, Mr Michael, Under-Secretary of State for Scotland
Questions
AIDS, Laboratories 64-5w
Ambulance services, Coatbridge 141w
Blood donors, AIDS 367w
Brucellosis, Scotland 223w
Cancer, Scotland 773w
Care proceedings, Scotland 143w
Cervical cancer, Scotland 772-3w
Cervical cancer, Women 773w
Child Care Law in Scotland Review Group 143w
Death, Scotland 654-6w
Doctors, Telephones 70-1w
Drug abuse, Glasgow 772w
Dyslexia, Scotland 732w
Educational finance, Expenditure 481w
Epilepsy, Scotland 70w
Eye tests, NHS charges 732w
Fisheries, Scotland 729w
Free school meals, Tayside 65w
Health insurance, Scotland 143w
Health service staff, NHS administration 141-2w
Higher education colleges, Educational finance 370w
Hospital beds, Scotland 320w, 482-4w
Hospital catering, Scotland 655w
Hospital closures, Scottish health boards 730w
Hospital staff, Lanarkshire Health Board 220-2w
Hospital waiting lists, Hip replacements 482w
Hospital waiting lists, Scotland 482w
Hospitals, Scotland 482w
Languages education, Scotland 367-8w, 477w, 654w
Leukaemia, Fife 774w
Neonatal mortality, Scottish health boards 650-1w
NHS, Scotland 139-40w, 221w
NHS finance, Scotland 322-4w, 479w, 539-40w
Nurses, Scotland 480w
Parkhead Stadium, Public order policing 653w
Population, Clydesdale 142w, 656w
Pre-school education, Scotland 71w
Primary education, Scotland 481w
Residential care, Scotland 729-30w
Salmon, Fish farming 730-1w
School closures, St Bede's School Balornock 729w
School closures, Scotland 728-9w
School nurses, Scotland 142-3w
School population, Scotland 481w
School violence, Scotland 66w
Schools, Clydesdale 63-4w
Schools, Government grants to local authorities 69-70w
Seals, Fish farming 731w
Seals, Scotland 731w
Sheep, Radioactivity 369w
Student grants 476-7w
Student grants, Community charge 369w
Student grants, Housing benefits 369w
Student grants, Index linking 475-6w
Student grants, Scotland 369w
Surgery, Scotland 656-7w
Tayside Health Board, Health service staff 370-1w
Test tube babies, Scotland 654w
Veterinary services, Scotland 221-2w
Water supply, Lead 540w
White fronted geese, Islay 72-3w

Forth, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 194, 215, 223, 286
Questions
Birmingham Children's Hospital, Heart diseases 627
Community charge 975-6
Electricity generation, Nuclear power 510w
Electricity tariffs, Price increases 693
Electronics industry, Production 250w
Employment opportunities 334w
Generalised system of preferences, South Korea 714-5w
Marine insurance, Armed conflict 742w
Satellite communications, Competition 608-10w

Foulkes, Mr George
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1071
Questions
Arms control, Defence industries 292w
Business statements 517-8
Chile, Human rights 292w
Chile, Referenda 292w
EC law, Plain language 57w
El Salvador, Mercenaries 529w
Falkland Islands, Fisheries 56-7w
Falkland Islands, Military exercises 736-7w
Hong Kong, Official visits 427-8w
Military vehicles, Lighting 81w
Mozambique, Defence Systems 529-30w
Nuclear submarines, Faslane 735-6w
Nuclear submarines, HMS Resolution 736w
Nuclear submarines, River Clyde 736w
Official engagements, Consumers' Association 251w
Sudbury-Colchester railway 453w
Trident submarines, Shipping accidents 539w
Westminster pier, Planning permission 670w

Fowler, Rt Hon Norman, Secretary of State for Employment
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 85-9
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 412-8, 433, 440-1
Training, Ministerial statements (16:02:88) 825-38
Questions
Ford Motor Company, Industrial disputes 25-7
Youth training scheme 317w

France
Electricity supply industry 62w
Official engagements 615w
Private health services 187w
Research finance 582w

Frandsen, Aksel 616w

Fraser, Mr John
Debates etc.
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 852-5
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 469-70
Questions
Community charge 664w
Housing benefits, Lambeth 559w
Maudsley Hospital, Nervous system disorders 168w

Fraud
Civil service manpower 469w
Prescriptions 622-3w
Seaham 469w

Free school meals
Inner London Education Authority 162w
Tayside 65w

Freeman, Mr Roger, Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 590-8
Questions
Air force, Rescue services 238-9w
Armed forces, Electoral register 84w, 136w
Armed forces, Horses 757w
Armed forces cadets, Inner cities initiative 735w
Armed forces officers, Ethnic groups 82w
Armed forces recruitment, AIDS 135-6w
Armed forces training, Health 738w
Armed forces training, Isle of Wight 386w
Armed services youth training scheme, Take-up 735w
Army, Clergy 85w
Army, Clinical depression 445w
Army, Intimidation 755w
Army, Resignations 83w
Army Board, Appeals 449w
Bombings, Criminal investigation 538-9w
Defence land, Horse riding 384w
Departmental correspondence, Intelligence services 85w
Intelligence services, Northern Ireland 83w
Military vehicles, Lighting 81w
Ministry of Defence, Thames house Millbank 446w
Navy, Armed forces storage depots 735w
Official secrets, Public records 241w
Rescue services, Climbing 238w
Rescue services, Costs 739w
Rescue services, Helicopters 387w
Rescue services, Republic of Ireland 755-6w
Royal Observer Corps 440w
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, Disclosure of information 240w

Freight transport
Herald of Free Enterprise 4-5w

French, Mr Douglas
Questions
Council house sales, Discounts 462w
Employment opportunities 334w

Frigates
Armed forces deployment 735w

Frontiers
EC countries 425w

Fulmer
Sewers 659w

Furniture
Fire regulations 342-3

Furs
Farms 297w

Further education
Inner London boroughs 161w
School leaving 582w
Students 577w
Young people 46w

Further education colleges 217w
National Association of Teachers in Further & Higher Education 217w
Special education 577w

Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Questions
Business statements 508
Community charge, Battered wives 478w
Community charge, Scotland 478w
Community charges register 478w
Disclosure of information, Trade unions 305w
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 171w
Income tax, Tax burden 334w
Intelligence services, Australia 46w
Pre-school education, Scotland 71w
Student grants, Community charge 369w
Student grants, Housing benefits 369w
Student grants, Scotland 369w

Galbraith, Mr Sam
Questions
BBC, "Secret Society" 728w
Childbirth, Caesarian sections 178w
Health service staff, NHS administration 141-2w
Hospital beds, NHS 502w
Hospital beds, Scotland 320w
Ministry of Defence, Civil service manpower 446w
NHS, Expenditure 496w
NHS finance 175
NHS finance, Scotland 322-4w, 479w
Planning appeals, Scotland 320w
Prescriptions, Family doctors 555w
Public expenditure 341w
Resettlement units, Bishopbriggs 98w
Shaw Medical Centre, Scottish Development Agency 320-1w
Structure plans, Strathclyde 64w
Tax allowances, Luncheon vouchers 90w
Television programmes, National security 144-5w
Universities, Scotland 576w

Gale, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 231-2, 276-9
Questions
European Assembly constituencies 768-9w
Remand in custody 1132
Worth house, Inquiries 494w

Galloway, Mr George
Questions
Tax allowances, Forestry 339w

Game
Licensing 303w, 708w

Game Licences Act 1860
Questions
708w

Gaming machines
Advisory services 304w
Scotland 476w

Garcia, Ronald J 303-4w

Garel-Jones, Mr Tristan, Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household
Debates etc.
Parliamentary gifts, Australia (09:02:88) 169
Parliamentary gifts, St Christopher & Nevis (09:02:88) 169

Garrett, Mr John
Debates etc.
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1155
Questions
Bombings, Birmingham 706w
Britoil, North Sea oil 690
Homelessness, Bed & breakfast accommodation 663w

Garrett, Mr Ted
Questions
Privatisation 486
Public libraries 465-6w

Gastropods
Pest control 724-5w
Pesticides 724-5w

GATT 155w
Agriculture 155w

Gatwick Airport 245-6w, 545-6w

Gaza Strip 691w

General Agreement on Tariffs & Trade see GATT

General Certificate of Secondary Education 575-6w
Examinations 163w

General Medical Council 187w

Generalised system of preferences
South Korea 714-6w

Generic prescribing
Family doctors 352w
Proprietary drugs 555w

Genetics
Blood tests 362w, 1137
Immigration controls 708w

George, Mr Bruce
Debates etc.
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 157-9
Questions
Stock market, Capital 249w

Geriatric patients
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority 102-4w

Geriatrics
Nurses 624w

Germany
Private health services 187w

Gill, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 788
Self-employed (15:02:88) 745-6
Questions
Hospital catering, Privatisation 173w
Pigmeat, Monetary compensatory amounts 820
Privatisation 487

Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Questions
DROPS, Defence equipment 758-9w
Sub post offices, Finance 609w

Glasgow 773w
Drug abuse 772w

GLC see Greater London Council

Glendevon Carpets 337

Global Communication
VAT 770w

Glyn, Dr Alan
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1167
Structure plans, Berkshire (11:02:88) 603

Godman, Dr Norman A
Questions
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices, Greenock 404w
Electorate, Rates & rating 369w
Income support scheme, Scotland 404w
Newbattle Abbey College, Finance 519w
Regional aid, Strathclyde 368w
Salmon, Fish farming 730-1w
School closures, Scotland 688w
Seals, Fish farming 731w
Seals, Scotland 731w
Supplementary benefits, Scotland 502-4w

Golding, Mrs Llin
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 91-2
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 383-4, 426-7
Questions
Junior hospital doctors, Overtime 172w

Goodhart, Sir Philip
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 237-9

Goodlad, Mr Alastair
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 364
Questions
Cheshire County Council, Local government services 521-2w
Cheshire County Council, Local government staff 520w
Cost per pupil, Cheshire 584-5w
Employment schemes, Northwich 468-9w
Empty housing, Vale Royal 297w
Enterprise allowance scheme, Cheshire 547-50w
Factories, Management 259w
Family doctors, Mersey Regional Health Authority 268-9w
Greenbelt, Eddisbury 672w
Health service staff, Crewe Health Authority 399-401w
Job training scheme, Cheshire 230w
Leisure drives, Cheshire 452w
Mental health community care 267-8w
Minimum wage, North West region 470w
Restart programme, Cheshire 150w
Self-employed, Cheshire 229w
Service industries, Northwich 313-4w
Tourist industry, Cheshire 229-30w
Unemployed, Mental illness 231-2w
Unemployment, Cheshire 230-2w
Unemployment, Northwich 471-2w
Vacancies, Northwich 313-4w
Wages Inspectorate, Northunnel 74w
Youth employment, Cheshire 231w

Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Debates etc.
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 854
Questions
"Sex", Terrence Higgins Trust 608w, 620-1w

Gordon, Ms Mildred
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 471-2
Questions
Government data network, Computer privacy 567w
Government data network, Computers in Government departments 567-8w, 721-2w
Government data network, Cost effectiveness 568w
Government data network, Police national computer 721w

Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1160
Questions
Old people's homes, Disciplinary proceedings 98w

Gorst, Mr John
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 198, 204, 254
Questions
Road tax, Tax evasion 452-3w

Gould, Mr Bryan
Questions
British Steel Corporation, Privatisation 341-2
Trade competitiveness 342

Government
Hong Kong 236w, (10:02:88) 355-64

Government assistance
AIDS 168w
Computer aided design 250w
Liverpool 969
Rural areas 461w
South Wales 5
Wind power 689

Government assistance to industry
Airbuses 444w
Innovation 260w
Lancashire 148-9w
Manufacturing industries 18-9
Wales 18-9

Government assistance to nationalised industries
Coal mining 696

Government contracts
Government data network 247w

Government data network
Computer privacy 247w, 567w
Computers in Government departments 567-8w, 721-2w
Cost effectiveness 568w
Government contracts 247w
Police national computer 721w

Government departments
Northern Ireland 821
Paper 537w
Public expenditure 770w

Government grants
BBC external services 233w
Coal mining 344w
Lancashire County Council 211w
London Regional Transport 242w
North Peckham task force 253-4w
Railway freight transport 453w
South West Housing Society 5-6w
Urban development corporations 666w

Government grants to local authorities
Community care 282-4w
Community charge 456w
Schools 69-70w
Storms 522w

Government responses
Dartford Thurrock Crossing Bill 1987/88 551-3w

Government shareholding 334w
Britoil 486

Gow, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 993
Questions
Ford Motor Company, Industrial disputes 27
Property Services Agency, Privatisation 967

Gower, Sir Raymond
Questions
Bus services, Wales 77w
Bypasses, Wales 77w
Common agricultural policy, Wales 16
Community charge, Caravan sites 13
Severn bridge, Construction 10

Graduates
Engineering industries 814

Graham, Mr Thomas
Questions
Housing benefits, Social security reform 775w
Invalid care allowances, Availability for work 627-8w
Invalid care allowances, Social security recipients 628w
Student grants 476-7w

Graham Committee see National Curriculum Mathematics Working Group

Grandparents (17:02:88) 997-9

Grandparents (Adoption of Children) Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
1R (17:02:88) 997-9

Grant, Sir Anthony
Questions
Business statements 505-6
Cycling, Road accidents 412-3w
Doctors, Negligence 187w
Planning appeals, Administrative delays 719w

Grant, Mr Bernie
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 455
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1230, 1234, 1242-3
Questions
Armed forces officers, Ethnic groups 82w
Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1987/88 302w
Immigrant detainees, Ethnic groups 39w
NHS, Gynaecology 270w
NHS finance, Expenditure 488
Official engagements, South Africa 46w
Residuary bodies, Annual reports 658w
Social security claims, Administrative delays 186w

Grant maintained schools 573w
Special education 819-20

Greater London
Ambulance services 111-2w
Buses 749w
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 351w
Homelessness 296-7w
NHS finance 211-3w
Night flying 245-6w
Offensive weapons 38w
Road traffic 614w
Road traffic offences 542w
School admission 53-6w
Social security reform 351-2w
Teachers 183
Traffic wardens 542-3w

Greater London Council 242w

Greater Manchester
Local government staff 6-20w

Greater Manchester (Light Rapid Transit System) Bill (HL) 1984/85
Debates etc.
Royal assent (09:02:88) 169

Greater Manchester (Light Rapid Transit System) (No 2) Bill (HL) 1984/85
Debates etc.
Royal assent (09:02:88) 169

Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive
Rate precepts (09:02:88) 287-307

Green pound
Farm incomes 674-5w
Sterling 771-2w

Greenbelt
Departmental circulars 285w
Eddisbury 672w
Hertfordshire 21w
Hypermarkets 970

Greenland
Nuclear accidents 240-1w

Greenock
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 404w
Regional selective assistance 368w

Greenway, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1161
Education Reform Bill, Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1085-6
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 193
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1034-5, 1043
Questions
Aircraft noise, Jet aircraft 746-8w
Armed forces, Horses 757w
Armed services youth training scheme, Take-up 735w
Art works, Obscenity 468w
Axle weights, Road damage 245w
British Rail, Land acquisition 740w
Business & Technician Education Council 48w
Business statements 512-3
Charities, Law reform 436w
Coal mining, Pay 695-6
Competition 354
Computers in National Health Service 175w
Curriculum, Teachers 815
Dog fighting 768w
Football, Alcoholic drinks 965
Grant maintained schools 573w
Medical treatments, Lost working days 554-5w
National Theatre, Arts Council grants 700
Official engagements 135w, 294w, 520w
Rates & rating, London Boroughs Association 663w
Schools, Fees & charges 808
Tax allowances, Sports administration 423w
Tax & price index 331w

Greenway, Mr John
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 780
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1300-3, 1313-4
Questions
Education Reform Bill 1987/88, Educational finance 814
Opera, Official engagements 467w
Schools, Pedestrian crossings 46-7w

Greenwich
Thamesmead Town 21w

Greenwich Hospital
Hospital closures 273w

Gregory, Mr Conal
Questions
Dock workers, Liverpool Dock Labour Board 770-2w
Motor vehicles, Head restraints 613w
York District Hospital, Costs 190w

Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 934-6
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 989-90
Questions
Police, Personal records 137-8w

Griffiths, Mr Nigel
Questions
Community charge rebates, Scotland 780-1w
Housing benefits, Social security reform 177
Housing Corporation, Scotland 774w
Student numbers, Wales 766w
Students, Universities 373-4w
Universities, Student numbers 762-6w

Griffiths, Mr Win
Questions
Academic freedom 580-1w
Coal fired power stations, Central Electricity Generating Board 509w
Employment, Wales 81w
Income support scheme, Handicap benefits 630w
Privatisation 95w
Regional aid, Bridgend 352
Resettlement units, Homelessness 182w
Student Awards Review Committee 432w
Student grants 432-3w
Water authorities, Water pollution 669w

Griffiths Committee see Community Care Review

Grimsby
Severe weather payments 492w

Grimsby Health Authority
Hospital beds 491w
Hospital consultants 490-1w
Housing 490w
Nurses 491w
Public appointments 491w
Special duty allowances 492w

Grist, Mr Ian, Under-Secretary of State for Wales
Debates etc.
Opencast mining, Clwyd (10:02:88) 482-4
Water, Wales (12:02:88) 680-4
Questions
Accident & emergency departments, Wales 123w
AIDS, Laboratories 79-80w
Cancer, Screening 75w
Cervical cancer, Wales 12
Community charge, Caravan sites 13
Community charge, Mobile homes 81w
Community health services, Wales 518w
Congenital abnormalities, Heart diseases 463w
Dental charges, Wales 464w
Family doctors, Wales 123w
Gwynedd Health Authority, Official engagements 81w
Health insurance, Wales 318-9w
Health services, Clwyd 518w
Homelessness, Wales 120-4w
Hospital beds, Wales 18
Hospital catering, Wales 123-4w
Hospital waiting lists, Cervical cancer 518w
Hospital waiting lists, Hip replacements 15
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 81w, 123-4w
Housing, Alyn & Deeside 462-3w
Multiple occupation, Housing policy 8-9
Multiple occupation, Wales 9
NHS, Expenditure 18, 223-4w
NHS administration, Manpower 11-2
NHS charges, Foreign patients 745-6w
Obstetrics, Wales 79w
Ophthalmic services, Waiting lists 463w
Paediatrics, South Wales 319w
Pharmacies, Wales 598w
Primary health care, Gwent 8
Residential care, Wales 686w
Speech therapy, Wales 518w
Sports facilities, Local government services 15-6
Sports facilities, Wales 16
Structure plans, Wales 598w
Surgery, North Wales 15
Vaccination, Wales 77-80w

Grocott, Mr Bruce
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 224
Questions
Election offences, Prosecutions 361w
Grant maintained schools 573w
Independent Broadcasting Authority, Official engagements 709w
Overtime 548w
Urban development corporations, Telford 666w

Ground, Mr Patrick
Questions
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board 543w
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, Administrative delays 707w

Grylls, Mr Michael
Questions
Consultants, Small businesses 346

Guaranteed prices
Wool 328w

Guillotine (17:02:88) 1083-108

Guinness
Company investigations 261w

Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn, Minister of State for Agriculture, Fisheries & Food
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 775, 778, 794-8
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1274-5, 1293
Questions
Agriculture, GATT 155w
Animal feed, Import duties 155w
EC free food scheme 586w
Farm woodland scheme, Easington 586w
Food surpluses, Disadvantaged 157-8w
Food surpluses, Local authorities 158w
Land drainage, Drainage rates 158w
Monofilament gill nets, Birds 588w
Waste disposal, Dawdon Colliery 133w, 237w
Waste disposal, Durham 585-6w

Gwent
Primary health care 8

Gwynedd
Community hospitals 19-20

Gwynedd Health Authority
Official engagements 81w

Gynaecology
NHS 270w
Surgery 213-4w

Gypsies
Belfast 396w
Education 324-5w
Environmental health 396w
Northern Ireland 324-5w, 395-6w

Hamilton, Mr Neil
Questions
Crown Suppliers, Privatisation 126w
Hospital waiting lists, Macclesfield Health Authority 96w
Opencast mining 697

Hampshire
Cot deaths 270-1w
Police 435-6w

Hampshire (Lyndhurst Bypass) Bill (HL) 1986/87
Debates etc.
2R order read (11:02:88) 485, (18:02:88) 1131

Hampson, Dr Keith
Questions
Examinations, Curriculum 817
Middle schools 603-4w
Urban programme, Leeds 673w

Handicap benefits
Blyth valley 554w
Income support scheme 630w
Social security payments 348w
Social security reform 170, 170w, 171, 171w, 172, 179-80, 554w

Handicapped
Discrimination 188-9w
Equal opportunities 283w
Local authority powers 290w
Ministerial duties 45w, 110w
Northern Ireland 281-3w
Swimming 126-7w
Unemployed 281-2w
Unemployment 281-2w
Wheelchairs 290w

Handicapped drivers
New Zealand 615w
Parking 615w

Handicapped pupils
Special education 572w

Handicapped workers
Aids for handicapped 227-8w
Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 150w

Hanley, Mr Jeremy
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 277
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 849-904 passim
Questions
Immigration, Members 1135
Inner city areas, Private sector 258w
Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts 165-6w
Social security benefits uprating 176-7

Hannam, Mr John
Questions
Electricity tariffs, South Western Electricity Board 691
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 171
Handicapped pupils, Special education 572w
Special education, EC action 584w

Hardy, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 772
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 143-4, 159
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Official engagements 508w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 696
Electricity tariffs, Price increases 691
Factory closures, Canning Town Glass 259-60w
Rotherham, Exceptional needs payments 175w

Hargreaves, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 913-4
Questions
Gaming machines, Advisory services 304w

Hargreaves, Mr Ken
Questions
Blackburn Hyndburn & Ribble Valley Health Authority, Patients 558-60w
Hospital waiting lists, North Western Regional Health Authority 623-4w
Science & technology research, Research finance 163w
Social security, Advisory services 566w
University finance, University Grants Committee 311-2w

Haringey
Ethnic monitoring 559w

Harman, Ms Harriet
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1056-7
Questions
Ambulance services, Safety standards 409w
Asbestos, Housing estates 755w
Childbirth, Caesarian sections 177-8w
Dental charges 349w
Dental charges, Dental services 349w
Dental charges, EC countries 349w
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices, Camberwell 698-700w
Exceptional needs payments, Camberwell 700w
Eye disorders, Hospital waiting lists 632-8w
Generic prescribing, Family doctors 352w
Health services, Management consultants 352-3w
Health services finance, EC countries 402-4w
Hospital consultants, Contracts of employment 204w
Income tax, Average earnings 722w
Indecent Displays (Control) Act 1981, Prosecutions 616w
Infant mortality 554w
National insurance contributions 354w
NHS charges 174
NHS charges, Local authorities 565w
Optical charges, Eye tests 349w
Prisons, Bibles 619w
Proprietary drugs, Hospital doctors 352w
Social workers, Hospitals 565w

Harris, Mr David
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 529, 562
Questions
English Industrial Estates Corporation, Expenditure 257w

Hartley Hospital
Hospital closures 698w

Harvest Chewy bars
VAT 343w

Haselhurst, Mr Alan
Questions
Housing compensation 1146
School admission, Rural areas 819
Stansted Airport, Air routes 410w

Haslam, Robert 684w

Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Debates etc.
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1149-50, 1156
European Council (15:02:88) 707-9
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 874-6, 883
Nazi war crimes (08:02:88) 29
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 931-5, 943-4
Questions
Education, Schools & parents 820-1
NHS finance 1145
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries 499

Hayes, Brian 35w

Hayes, Mr Jerry
Debates etc.
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 991
Questions
Economic growth, Unemployment 336w
Health services, Acute beds 270w
Hospital waiting lists, Regional health authorities 489w
Intestacy, Administration of estates 612w
Intestacy, Charities 769w
Intestacy, Companies 769w
Police & Criminal Evidence Act 1984 1142-3

Haynes, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 41, 57-61, 129
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 386-7
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1209
Self-employed (15:02:88) 750-1
Questions
Business statements 509
Coal mining 688
Electricity supply industry, Privatisation 508w
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 170-1w
Public libraries, Nottinghamshire 151w

Hayward, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 526
Questions
Arts Council grants, Ethnic minorities 699
Urban development corporations, Bristol 666w

Hazardous materials
Durham 150-1w
Ports 739w

Hazardous wastes
Channel ferries 5w
Customs & Excise 95w
Herald of Free Enterprise 42w, 57w
Import licensing 24w
Imports 24w
Seaham 379w, 566-7w
Waste disposal 297w

HC see House of Commons

Head restraints
Motor vehicles 613w

Health 175
Armed forces training 738w
Teachers 310w

Health & Safety Commission see Health & Safety Executive

Health & Safety Executive 232w, 345w, 383w, 468w

Health education
Swimming 267w

Health insurance 269w, 777-8w
Health services finance 263-4w
Northern Ireland 284w
Scotland 143w
Tax allowances 90w
Wales 318-9w

Health service staff
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority 108-10w
Business education 556w
Crewe Health Authority 399-401w
Liverpool Health Authority 354-6w
Manpower 488-9w, 624-5w
NHS administration 141-2w, 265w
NHS finance 195w
Office workers 265w
Pay settlements 115w, 497w
Scotland 141-2w
Tayside Health Board 370-1w
Temporary staff 109w

Health services
Acute beds 270w
Clwyd 518w
Expenditure 264-6w
Management consultants 352-3w

Health services finance
EC countries 174w, 177-8, 204-6w, 402-4w
Health insurance 263-4w

OECD countries 179

Health visitors
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority 105-6w

Health warnings
Animal feed 675w

Heart diseases
Analgesics 631-2w
Birmingham Children's Hospital 497-8w, 626-8, 700-1w
Congenital abnormalities 463w
South Glamorgan Health Authority 319w

Heathcoat-Amory, Mr David
Questions
Business statements 511
Further education, Students 577w
Hinkley Point C, Construction 509-10w
Hinkley Point C, Public inquiries 687
Museums & galleries, Collections 151-2w
NHS 173
Official engagements, European Regional Development Fund 254w
Prescription charges, Income 174w
Property Services Agency, Civil service manpower 967

Heathrow Airport 245-6w
Air traffic 453w
Metropolitan Police 37w

Heathrow central station
Fire certificates 412w

Heating
Elderly 187-8w

Heddle, Mr John
Questions
Computer privacy, Publicity 618-9w
Estate Agents Act 1979 307w
Foreign investment in UK, Japan 255w
Hospital waiting lists, NHS & private practice 485-6w
Listed buildings, Codes of practice 521w
Planning appeals, Planning authorities 660w
Rent arrears 667w
Town & country planning, Planning authorities 660w
Urban regeneration grants 521w
Waste disposal, Hazardous wastes 297w

Heffer, Mr Eric S
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 525, 528
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 99-101
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 372, 378-80, 388
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 194, 203, 212, 228, 235, 271-2
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 856-7, 912
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1226, 1235-6
Self-employed (15:02:88) 720, 732-5, 738
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1178
Standing Order No 20 applications (10:02:88) 367
Training (16:02:88) 830
Questions
Belgium, Legal aid 426w
Football, Hooliganism 438w
Ford Motor Company, Industrial disputes 26
Government assistance, Liverpool 969
Legal aid, British residents abroad 416w
Protest, Ministry of Defence 1144

Helicopters
Rescue services 387w

Help the Aged 170

Henderson, Mr Doug
Questions
Balance of trade, Japan 256-7w
Public investment 332w
Tree planting, Tax allowances 491
Water authorities, Official engagements 669w

Herald of Free Enterprise
Freight transport 4-5w
Hazardous wastes 42w, 57w

Hermon, John 165w, 216w

Hertfordshire
Greenbelt 21w

Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1153
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1009, 1020-6

Hetherington Committee see War Crimes Inquiry

Heunis, Annette 236w

Heveningham hall
Property transfer 720w

Heysel stadium 416w, 426w, 438w

Hicks, Mrs Maureen
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 254-7
Questions
City technology colleges, Wolverhampton 574w
Invalid care allowances, Pensioners 493w
Pay, Married men 332w

Hicks, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
European Council (15:02:88) 713
Questions
Police, Computer privacy 305w
Textiles, West Bank 377-8w

Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L
Debates etc.
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1151
Questions
Air safety, Air routes 22
Armed forces training, Isle of Wight 386w
Planning appeals, Worthing Borough Council 19-20w
VAT 821

High technology
Science & technology research (19:02:88) 1321-2

Higher civil servants
Communication skills 700
Inland Revenue 92w
Performance related pay 812-3
Treasury 91w

Higher education 809-10
Research 47w

Higher education admission
Discrimination 576w
Edinburgh University 815-6

Higher education colleges
Educational finance 370w
Scotland 370w

Hill, Mr James
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 360
Questions
Business statements 507
Land Registry Office 964
NATO, Europe 424w
Persian Gulf, Western European Union 423w
Universities 810-1
USSR, Foreign relations 424w
Western European Union 183

Hill, Paul 437-8w

Hinchliffe, Mr David
Questions
Exservicemen, Nuclear weapons tests 757-8w
Further education colleges, Special education 577w
Hospital catering, Wakefield Health Authority 180w
House of Commons, Industrial health & safety 772w
Housing benefits, Wakefield District Council 347w
Local government social services, Crimes of violence 197w
Nuclear weapons tests, Christmas Island 769w
Railway land, Trespass 357w
Social workers' training 347w
Waste disposal, West Yorkshire 296w

Hind, Mr Kenneth
Debates etc.
Coal mine closures, Abernant Colliery (18:02:88) 1253
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 940-1
Questions
Government assistance to industry, Lancashire 148-9w
Property Services Agency, Cash limits 720w

Hinkley Point B
Public inquiries 345w

Hinkley Point C 686
Construction 509-10w
Public inquiries 686-7

Hip replacements 182w
Hospital waiting lists 15, 482w

Historic buildings
Romania 425w

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons see HM Inspectorate of Prisons

HM Inspectorate of Prisons 435w

HM Inspectorate of Schools 219w

HM Land Registry see Land Registry Office

HMI see HM Inspectorate of Schools

HMS Conqueror
Log books 318w, 387w

HMS Resolution
Clyde Submarine Base 736w
Naval Emergency Monitoring Organisation 756w
Nuclear submarines 736w, 756w
Radiation hazards 756-7w

HMSO
Computers 388w

Hogg, Mr Douglas, Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 944
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 37w, 710-1w
Alcoholism 705w
Body searches, Durham Prison 544w
Body searches, Risley Remand Centre 544-5w
Breathalysers, Age 215w
Chelmsford Prison, Prison staff 702w

Clift, Alan, Forensic science 439w
Complaints against police, Ethnic monitoring 303w
Dog fighting 768w
Drug crimes, Proceeds of crime 541w
Election offences, Prosecutions 361w
Firearms 38w
Firearms, EC action 1137
Firearms, Import controls 1137
Firearms, Imports 1138
Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1987/88 302w
Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1987/88, Police 1137-8
Football, Arrests 434w
Game, Licensing 303w, 708w
Metropolitan Police 1144
Metropolitan Police, Demonstrations 1143-4
Metropolitan Police, Heathrow Airport 37w
Metropolitan Police, Manpower 710w
Metropolitan Police, Privatisation 436w
Metropolitan Police, Sick leave 35-6w
Parole 708w
Police, Barnsley 362w
Police, Ethnic minorities 704w
Police, Hampshire 435-6w
Police, Injuries 136w
Police, Leicestershire 705w
Police, London City Airport 41w
Police, Manpower 620w
Police, Personal records 137-8w
Police community liaison committees 434w
Police community liaison committees, Isle of Wight 434w
Police custody 703w
Police custody, Fees & charges 138w
Police custody, Prisoners on remand 703w
Police national computer 35w, 617-8w
Police right of search, Offensive weapons 617w
Police stations 37-8w
Prison education services, Local education authorities 40-1w
Prison overcrowding 438w
Prison population, Mentally ill 546w
Prisoners, Advisory services 542w
Prisoners, AIDS 620w
Prisoners, Marriage 437-8w
Prisoners, Road traffic offences 439-40w
Prisoners, USA 709-10w
Prisoners, Welsh language 701w
Prisoners on remand, Magistrates' courts 36w
Prisoners on remand, Police custody 435w
Prisoners' release, Mentally ill 546w
Prisons, Bibles 619w
Prisons, Crown immunity 704w
Prisons, Privatisation 361w, 704w, 1134
Prisons, Speech therapy 541-2w
Remand in custody, Magistrates' courts 36-7w
Remand in custody, Prison accommodation 362w
Risley Remand Centre, Medical treatments 620w
Ryan, Michael, Firearms 304w
Stun guns 1138
Summertime 619w
Traffic wardens, Greater London 542-3w
West Mercia Police, Manpower 709w
Wormwood Scrubs, Prison medical services 302w
Young people, Police custody 434-5w

Hogg, Mr Norman
Debates etc.
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1156
Questions
Hospital beds, Scotland 482-4w
Hospital closures, Scottish health boards 730w
Hospital waiting lists, Hip replacements 482w
Hospital waiting lists, Scotland 482w
Hospitals, Scotland 482w

Holland, Mr Stuart
Debates etc.
Council house sales, Lambeth (19:02:88) 1326
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 868, 876-8, 881
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1002-3, 1022, 1035-7, 1046-7, 1060-2, 1072
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1210, 1218, 1237
Questions
Banks, Tax allowances 338w
Industrial investment 492

Holroyd, Fred 83w
Army in Northern Ireland 41w

Holt, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 236-7, 261, 281
Rate Support Grant (England) Supplementary Reports (17:02:88) 1113-4
Training (16:02:88) 832
Questions
Civil service dispersal 701
Council house rents, Middlesbrough Borough Council 974
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board 707w
Economic growth, Unemployment 336w
Rate increases, Cleveland County Council 347
Road traffic offences, Greater London 542w
Social security appeals tribunals, Administrative delays 178w
Traffic wardens, Greater London 542-3w

Holy Loch 735-6w

Home Affairs Select Committee 1134, 1144
Miscarriages of justice 705w

"Home Improvement Policy Consultation Paper" 719w

Home Office 567-8w, 721-2w, 767w
Civil service dispersal 303w
Leicester 437w
Members 37-8w
Sexual harassment 302w

Home Robertson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 766
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1071
Questions
Business statements 517
Doctors, Telephones 70-1w
Housing, Shetland 732w
Nurses, Scotland 480w
Research finance, France 582w
Scottish Fire Service Training School, Complaints 652-3w
Scottish Fire Service Training School, Inquiries 652-3w
Scottish Fire Service Training School, Interviews 652-3w

Homelessness 661w
Bed & breakfast accommodation 661w, 663w
Bristol 972
Departmental leaflets 22w, 661w
Greater London 296-7w
Households 661w
Housing capital allocations 66w
Mortgage defaulters 65-6w, 660-1w
Northern Ireland 325-6w
Resettlement units 182w
Scotland 65-6w, 68-70w
Temporary accommodation 325-6w
Wales 120-4w
Young people 658-9w

Homes Insulation Grants Order 1987
Debates etc.
(10:02:88) 367

Homicide
Children 434w
Fermanagh 441-2w
Life imprisonment 712-4w
Northern Ireland 441w
Taxis 767w

Homosexuality
Arts 698
Citizens' Advice Bureaux 608w

Hong Kong
Civil service pensions 391w
Government 236w, (10:02:88) 355-64
Ministerial statements (10:02:88) 355-64
Nature conservation 292-3w
Official visits 427-8w

"Hong Kong Government White Paper" (10:02:88) 355-64

Hong Kong Legislative Council (10:02:88) 355-64

Hood, Mr Jimmy
Questions
Dyslexia, Scotland 732w
Educational finance, Expenditure 481w
Environment protection, Opencast mining 661w
Fine defaulters, Prisons 71w
Forensic science, Dismissal 1138
Hospital staff, Lanarkshire Health Board 220-2w
Hydroelectric power, North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board 319-20w
LAW Mining Company, Licensing 63w
Ministers' visits abroad, Scottish Office 221w
Nuclear weapons, Transport of radioactive materials 136w
Pay, Scotland 734-6w
Population, Clydesdale 142w, 656w
Primary education, Scotland 481w
Prison population, Scotland 71w
Prison population, Young offenders 71w
School population, Scotland 481w
Schools, Clydesdale 63-4w
Tax allowances, Forestry 339w

Hooliganism 541w
Belgium 438w
Football 416w, 426w, 438w, 964-5
Sporting events 501

Hordern, Sir Peter
Questions
Capital gains tax, Tax yields 87w
Income tax, Tax rates & bands 417w
Metropolitan Police, Heathrow Airport 37w
Mortgage relief 87w
NHS 176
Public Accounts Commission, Expenditure 44w
Surgery, NHS 400w

Hormone growth promoters 156-7w, 678w

Horniman Museum 761-2w

Horse riding
Defence land 384w

Horses
Armed forces 757w

Hospices
District health authorities 274-6w

Hospital beds 173-4
AIDS 776w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority 102-4w
Grimsby Health Authority 491w
Leicestershire Health Authority 196-8w
NHS 502w
NHS & private practice 407-8w

Pontefract Health Authority 560w
Scotland 320w, 482-4w
Wales 18

Hospital catering
Contracts for services 655w
Cook-chill catering 180w
Privatisation 173w
Scotland 655w
Wakefield Health Authority 180w
Wales 123-4w

Hospital closures
Brook Hospital 273w
Greenwich Hospital 273w
Hartley Hospital 698w
Mental health community care 553w, 562-6w
Mental hospitals 196w
St Mary's Hospital Manchester 501
Scottish health boards 730w

Hospital consultants
Contracts of employment 204w, 490w, 556w
Grimsby Health Authority 490-1w
Pontefract Health Authority 559-60w
Regional health authorities 272-4w

Hospital discharges 272-4w, 503w
Schizophrenia 561w

Hospital doctors
Disciplinary proceedings 177-8w
Proprietary drugs 352w

Hospital finance 697-8w

Hospital patients 169w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority 101-4w
Costs 408-9w
Oxfordshire Health Authority 169w
Per capita costs 487w
Regional health authorities 272-4w

Hospital radio
VAT zero rated goods 342w

Hospital staff
Lanarkshire Health Board 220-2w

Hospital waiting lists 277-8w, 629-30
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority 278-80w
Birmingham Children's Hospital 626
Blackburn Hyndburn & Ribble Valley Health Authority 623-4w
Cervical cancer 518w
District health authorities 503-6w
Eye disorders 632-8w
Hip replacements 15, 482w
Leeds Eastern Health Authority 280w
Leeds Western Health Authority 280w
Macclesfield Health Authority 96w
NHS & private practice 485-6w
North Western Regional Health Authority 623-4w
Regional health authorities 489w
Scotland 482w
Sheffield Health Authority 96w
Singleton Hospital 518w
Wales 15, 81w, 123-4w

Hospitals
Abortion 191-2w
Construction 183w
Drugs 198w
Land values 692w
NHS finance 116-8w
Public expenditure 341w
Scotland 482w
Social workers 565w
Standards enforcement 188w
Test tube babies 654w
West Midlands 628-9

Hostels
Mental hospitals 97w

HOTOL 257w

Houghton
Unemployment 475w

House of Commons 517w
Industrial health & safety 772w

House of Commons accommodation
New Parliamentary building 522-3w

House of Commons broadcasting
Television 183, (09:02:88) 192-286

House of Commons catering
Artificial sweeteners 727w
Non-alcoholic drinks 517w

House of Commons chamber
Speaker's rulings & statements (12:02:88) 619

House of Commons debates
Speaker's rulings & statements (08:02:88) 143-4

House of Commons galleries
Speaker's rulings & statements (10:02:88) 344

House of Commons Library
"Spycatcher" 17-8

House of Commons publications
Administrative delays 388w
House of Commons Standing Committees 388w

House of Commons questions
British Steel Corporation 444w
Costs 295w

House of Commons Refreshment Department
Conditions of employment 449w

House of Commons Select Committees
Speaker's rulings & statements (09:02:88) 286

House of Commons staff
Conditions of employment 449w

House of Commons Standing Committees
House of Commons publications 388w
Speaker's rulings & statements (17:02:88) 996

House of Fraser
Company investigations 262w, 713w
Lonrho 262w

House prices
Owner occupied housing 963

House purchase
Housing 973
Housing associations 668w, 672w
Owner occupied housing 963

House renovation grants
Age 457w
Defective housing 667w
Flats 673-4w

Household surveys
Family income 529w
Personal income 527-8w

Households
Community charge 528-9w
Homelessness 661w

Houses
Fire prevention (09:02:88) 189-91

Housing 964
Alyn & Deeside 462-3w
Grimsby Health Authority 490w
House purchase 973
Shetland 732w

Housing action trusts
Departmental publications 670w

Housing associations 966
Domestic rents 966
Finance 379w
House purchase 668w, 672w
Northumberland 520-1w
Rent increases 669w

Housing benefits
Dept of Health & Social Security 621w
Income support scheme 630w
Lambeth 559w
Local government social services 621w
Private rented housing 347w
Social security benefits rules 779w
Social security reform 177, 775w
Student grants 369w, 585w
Thamesmead Town 110w
Wakefield District Council 347w

Housing Bill 1987/88
Questions
379w

Housing capital allocations
Homelessness 66w

Housing compensation 1146

Housing construction
Angus 649w
Housing finance 456-7w
Perth 649w

Housing Corporation 144w, 672w, 966-7
Cash limits 298-9w
Housing improvement 662w
Official engagements 966
Scotland 774w

Housing Defects Act 1984
Questions
667w

Housing estates
Asbestos 755w

Housing finance
Housing construction 456-7w
Scotland 144w

Housing (Houses in Multiple Occupation) Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (12:02:88) 670

Housing improvement
Council housing 527w
Estate Action 662w
Housing Corporation 662w

Housing policy
Multiple occupation 8-9

Housing revenue accounts 66w

Housing subsidies
Rent increases 527w

Housing tenure 963-4

Howard, Mr Michael, Minister of State for Local Government
Debates etc.
Rate Support Grant (England) Supplementary Reports (17:02:88) 1109-12
Questions
Community charge 455w, 663-4w
Community charge, Government grants to local authorities 456w
Community charge, Households 528-9w
Community charge, Local authorities 664w
Community charge, Overseas students 456w
Community charge, Parish councils 664w
Household surveys, Family income 529w
Household surveys, Personal income 527-8w
Rates & rating 455-6w
Uniform business rate, Confederation of British Industry 664-5w

Uniform business rate, Rate increases 457-8w

Howarth, Mr George
Debates etc.
Passenger transport executives, Rate precepts (09:02:88) 317-8, 324, 325
Questions
Housing improvement, Housing Corporation 662w
Manufactured imports, Manufactured exports 250w

Howarth, Mr Gerald
Questions
Dental health, Lost working days 566w
Industrial production 333w
Primary education, Burntwood 811-2
Prisoners, USA 709-10w
VAT, Harvest Chewy bars 343w

Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Debates etc.
Hong Kong, Ministerial statements (10:02:88) 355-64
Questions
Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, Republic of Ireland 149w
Hong Kong, Government 236w
Republic of Ireland, Military aircraft 776w

Howell, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1152
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 357

Howell, Mr Ralph
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 761-2, 768, 773-7
Questions
Agricultural land, Cereals 465-6w
Agricultural production, EC countries 587w
Balance of trade 606w
Butter, Retail prices 676-7w
Cereals, EC countries 677w
District health authorities, Land ownership & tenure 625w
District health authorities, Land values 692w
Farm rents 677w
Food prices, Milk 725w
Green pound, Sterling 771-2w
Health insurance 777-8w
Health service staff, NHS administration 265w
Hospitals, Land values 692w
Norwich Health Authority, Land values 692-4w
Pay, Married men 332w
Price increases, Manufacturing industries 548w
Public corporations 415w
Tax thresholds 497
UK contributions to EC budget, UK repayments from EC budget 648w
Wheat, Common farm prices 679w
Wheat, Intervention prices 680w
Wheat, Prices 726w

Howells, Mr Geraint
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 777-80
Questions
Cancer, Screening 75w
Regional selective assistance 252w
Wind power, Government assistance 689
Wool, Guaranteed prices 328w

Hoyle, Mr Doug
Questions
Business statements 515
Immigrant detainees 215-6w
Risley Remand Centre, Medical treatments 620w
Westminster Children's Hospital, Burglary 781w

HSE see Health & Safety Executive

Hughes, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Passenger transport executives, Rate precepts (09:02:88) 288, 289-91, 302, 322-3
Questions
Air safety, Air traffic control 24

Hughes, Mr Robert G
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 361
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 200
Questions
Bus crews, Information 413w
Bus crews, Smoking 413w
Buses, Crime 413-4w
Council housing, Housing improvement 527w
Deaf, Telephone exchanges 214w
Higher civil servants, Communication skills 700
Housing subsidies, Rent increases 527w
Pay, Married men 332w
Speech therapists, Pay 266-8w
Television, Broadcasting controls 703w

Hughes, Mr Roy
Questions
Economic situation, Wales 4-5
Paediatrics, South Wales 319w
Pay, Juries 350w
Trawsfynydd power station, Testing 7-8
Unemployment, Newport 9

Hughes, Mr Sean
Questions
Army, Clergy 85w
Army, Resignations 83w
Income support scheme, Social security recipients 113w
Planning appeals 662w

Hughes, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 457, 465-7, (17:02:88) 1006, 1036
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1209, 1211-2
Rate Support Grant (England) Supplementary Reports (17:02:88) 1109, 1116-8, 1120
Questions
Birds, Poisons 61w
Buses, Greater London 749w
Chemical weapons, USA 448w
Council house rents, London boroughs 524w
Council house waiting lists, London boroughs 22w
Educational administration, Inner London boroughs 371-2w
Homelessness, Greater London 296-7w
Housing benefits, Local government social services 621w
Housing benefits, Private rented housing 347w
Housing Corporation 966-7
Medical treatments, Administrative delays 199-200w
NHS finance, Greater London 211-3w
NHS finance, Health service staff 195w
NHS finance, Regional health authorities 181w
North Peckham task force, Government grants 253-4w
Police, Ethnic minorities 704w
Prosthetics, Administrative delays 200w
Shared ownership schemes, Council housing 973
Tree conservation 673w
Human rights 681w
Chile 292w

Hume, Mr John
Debates etc.
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 984
Questions
Educational maintenance allowance, Northern Ireland 396-7w
Electricity supply industry, Northern Ireland 392-3w
Family doctors, Northern Ireland 284-6w
Homelessness, Temporary accommodation 325-6w
Local government audit, Craigavon Borough Council 397w
Mobility allowance, Civil service manpower 327w
Mobility allowance, Northern Ireland 326-7w
Mobility allowance, Social security appeals 163-4w, 326-7w
Mobility allowance, Social security claims 327w
Punishment attacks, Criminal injuries compensation 86w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries 1146-7
Rural areas, Northern Ireland 592w
Student grants, Northern Ireland 286w, 396w

Hunter, Mr Andrew
Questions
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Adult training centres 105-7w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Capital investment 105-6w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Expenditure 99-102w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Geriatric patients 102-4w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Health service staff 108-10w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Health visitors 105-6w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Hospital beds 102-4w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Hospital patients 101-4w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Hospital waiting lists 278-80w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Mental health services 107w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Mental patients 107-8w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, NHS finance 99-100w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Pay 100w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Supplementary benefits 108w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority, Surgery 101-4w
Basingstoke Hospital, Ambulance services 109-10w
Bophuthatswana, Foreign policy 56w, 424w
Drugs, Costs 109w
EC internal trade, Trade barriers 259w
General Certificate of Secondary Education 576w
Health service staff, Temporary staff 109w
Income tax 335w
NHS, Industrial relations 173-4w
Official engagements, Basingstoke 293w
Planning permission, Farm buildings 662w
Police, Hampshire 435-6w

Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas, Secretary of State for the Home Department
Debates etc.
Nazi war crimes, Offenders (08:02:88) 28-36
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 925-31

Questions
Association of Chief Police Officers, Official engagements 1133
Bombings, Birmingham 436-7w
Brixton Prison, Prison staff 1140
Civil service dispersal, Home Office 303w
Crime prevention 1143
Crime prevention, Codes of practice 1143
Departmental correspondence, Tower Hamlets 437w
Drug crimes, Proceeds of crime 701w
Education, Immigrants 711-2w
European Assembly constituencies 768-9w
European Assembly constituencies, Wales 768w
Home Office, Members 37-8w
IRA, Extortion 545w
Metropolitan Police, Expenditure 547w
Official secrets, Law reform 1140-1
Parkhurst Prison, Prison accommodation 1140
Police, Computer privacy 305w
Police, Northumberland 1133
Police, West Yorkshire 1134
Police & Criminal Evidence Act 1984 1142-3
Police & Criminal Evidence Act 1984, Crime prevention 1142
Police misconduct, Stalker, John 216w
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 41w, 703w, 705w
Prison riots, Costs 1139-40
Royal prerogative, Intelligence services 39w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries 394w
Sexual harassment, Home Office 302w
Special constables 1133-4
Telephone tapping, Judicial review 303w
War crimes, Inquiries 304w
Written questions, Knowles, Michael 767w

Hydroelectric power
North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board 319-20w

Hypermarkets 970
Greenbelt 970
Planning inquiries 969-70

IAEA see International Atomic Energy Agency

IBA see Independent Broadcasting Authority

Ibbs, Robin 294-5w

Ideal Homes Exhibition
Dept of Education & Science 219-20w
Expenditure 812

ILEA see Inner London Education Authority

Illsley, Mr Eric
Questions
Community programme 383w
Local government services, Tenders 672-3w

Illuminated signs
Planning permission 21w

ILO see International Labour Organisation

Immigrant detainees 215-6w
Ejoh, Orkechurkwu Emmanuel 138w
Ethnic groups 39w

Immigrants
Education 711-2w

Immigrants' fiancees
Entry clearances 690-1w

Immigration
AIDS 546w
Members 710w, 1135-6
Republic of Ireland 711w
Tower Hamlets Borough Council 710w

Immigration & Nationality Division (16:02:88) 847-924
Administrative delays 136w
Civil service manpower 137w
Languages 543w
Overtime 543-4w

Immigration appeals 438w

Immigration applications 215w
Akhtar, Nasreen 149-50w
Begum, Salema 1136-7
Temporary immigrants 137w
Visas 140w

Immigration Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 847-924

Immigration controls
Entry clearances 40w
Genetics 708w
Meyer, Gene 545-6w
Ministers 529w

Immigration officers (16:02:88) 847-924

Immigration rules 709w

Import controls
Firearms 1137

Import duties
Animal feed 155w

Import licensing
Hazardous wastes 24w

Imports 495
Cars 284w
Coal 63w, 687, 694-5
Firearms 1138
Hazardous wastes 24w
Milk 157w, 677-8w
Synthetic fibres 148-9w
Textiles 377-8w

"Improving Management in Government" (18:02:88) 1149-56

Income
NHS charges 401-2w
Prescription charges 174w

Income & Corporation Taxes Bill (HL) 1987/88
Debates etc.
Royal assent (09:02:88) 169

Income support scheme
Handicap benefits 630w
Housing benefits 630w
Rates & rating 489-90w
Scotland 404w
Social security recipients 113w
Social security reform 630w

Income tax 335w, 342w, 493-4
Average earnings 87-8w, 722w
Departmental forms 342-3w
Low incomes 89-90w
Personal tax allowances 493
Tax burden 247w, 333-4w
Tax rates & bands 90w, 417-8w, 423w, 496
Taxpayers 247w

Indecent Displays (Control) Act 1981
Questions
Prosecutions 616w

Independent Broadcasting Authority 39w, 712w
Official engagements 709w

Index linking
Student grants 372w, 475-6w

India
Ministers' visits abroad 215w

Industrial accidents 74w
London Docklands 383w
Small businesses 74w
West Glamorgan 74w

Industrial development
Birmingham 969
Castleford 532-3w

Industrial disputes
Coal mining 695-6
Ford Motor Company 25-7, 184, 348, 492
Teachers 371w

Industrial energy prices
Electricity tariffs 691
Paper industry 345

Industrial health & safety 232w
House of Commons 772w
Technicians 626-7w

Industrial investment 491-2
Devon & Cornwall Development Bureau 759-60w
Manufacturing industries 491

Industrial production 333w
Metal industries 341
Paper industry 344-5
Publishing 350

Industrial relations (08:02:88) 39-139
Coal mining 693
NHS 173-4w

Industrial tribunals
Ethnic minorities 383w

Industries
Profits 388-92w

Industry
Electricity tariffs 507w
Energy consumption 513-4w
Superconductivity 607w

Infant foods
Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy 276w
Nitrates 571-2w
Water 571-2w

Infant mortality 554w

Inflation 331w
Electricity tariffs 338w
NHS finance 331-2w
Public expenditure 331-2w

Information
Bus crews 413w
Insider trading 255w
Wallace, Colin 41w

Information technology
Civil service manpower 174w
Dept of Health & Social Security 174w

Ingram, Mr Adam
Questions
Epilepsy, Scotland 70w
Space technology, Science & technology research 248-9w

Inheritance tax 340w

Injuries
Police 136w

Inland Revenue 567-70w, 593-4w, 701, (15:02:88) 719-54, 721-4w
Higher civil servants 92w

Inner cities initiative
Armed forces cadets 735w

Inner city areas
Arts 281w
Departmental coordination 258w
"Faith in the City" 962
Private sector 258w
Urban development corporations 968

Inner London boroughs
Curriculum 682w
Education 160-2w, 433w

Educational administration 371-2w, 681-2w, 711-2w
Educational finance 161w
Further education 161w
NHS finance 211-3w
Pupils 162w

Inner London Education Authority 47w, 308w, 433w, 488, 525-6w, 575w, 681-2w, 711-2w, 753w, 761-2w, (17:02:88) 1000-82
Educational standards 161-2w, 219w, 575w
Expenditure 218-20w, 812
Free school meals 162w
Public appointments 308-9w
Rate precepts (10:02:88) 453-76
Rate support grants 308w
Research 682w
Sports 162w

Innovation
Government assistance to industry 260w

Inquiries
Air safety 357-8w
Civil service 294w
Crown Suppliers 299-302w
NHS finance 176w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 46w, 165w, 394w, 499, 502, (17:02:88) 977-96, 1146-7
Scottish Fire Service Training School 652-3w
Transport 747w
War crimes 304w
Worth house 494w

Insider trading 536w
Company investigations 621w
Information 255w
Peachey Property 621w

Insolvency Service
Office dispersal 761w

Insurance
EC internal trade 259w
Kidnapping 545w

Intelligence services 45w
Australia 46w
Departmental correspondence 85w
National security 500
Northern Ireland 83w
Royal prerogative 39w

Intensive care
Neonatal mortality 558w

Inter-American Development Bank
USA 293w

Interest rates 331w

International Atomic Energy Agency 345w, 510-1w, 530w
Nuclear safeguards 226w, 234w
UK contributions 226-7w

International conferences
Thrombosis 783-5w

International Labour Office see International Labour Organisation

International Labour Organisation 232w

International trade
Coal 225w

Intervention Board 329w
Cereals 586-8w

Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce see Intervention Board

Intervention prices
Wheat 680w

Intervention stocks 674-5w
Butter 689-90w
Food surpluses 689w

Interviews
Northern Ireland 283w
Restart programme 470w

Scottish Fire Service Training School 652-3w
Travelling expenses 283w

Intestacy
Administration of estates 612w
Charities 769w
Companies 769w

Intimidation
Army 755w

Invalid care allowances
Availability for work 627-8w
Pensioners 493w
Social security recipients 406w, 628w
Supplementary Benefits (Conditions of Entitlement) Regulations 1981 627-8w

Inverclyde
Local government elections 369w

Investment
Capital gains tax 87w
Channel tunnel 502

Investment income
Pensioners 188w

Ionizing radiation
Clyde Submarine Base 737w
Leukaemia 774w
Radiation protection 771w

IRA
Extortion 545w, 593w

Iran-Iraq war 423-4w

Irish Sea 539w

Iron & steel
Production 258-9w

Iron & steel industry
Redundancy 533w

Irvine, Mr Michael
Questions
National income 338w
North Sea oil, Petroleum exploration 689-90

Irving, Mr Charles
Questions
Bottles 713w
Community care 485w
Community care, NHS finance 196w
Mental health community care, Hospital closures 553w
Mental health community care, Planning 97w
Mental hospitals, Hostels 97w
Mental patients, Per capita costs 95-6w
Mentally ill, Mental health services 486w
National insurance contributions, NHS 398-400w
Paper, Recycling 537w
Science & technology research, Education & industry 254-5w

Islay
White fronted geese 72-3w

Isle of Wight
Air traffic control 551w
Armed forces training 386w
Police community liaison committees 434w

Italy
Magnox reactors 589w

Jack, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 539, 541, 583-5
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 69
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 897-900
Questions
British Rail, External financing limits 454w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 696
Elderly, Heating 187-8w

Enterprise initiative 347-8
European fighter aircraft 84w
European fighter aircraft, F18 aircraft 84w
European fighter aircraft, West Germany 84w
Government grants, Lancashire County Council 211w
Leyland Trucks, Profitability 255w
Local government expenditure, Lancashire County Council 382-4w
NHS, Performance indicators 353w

Jackson, Mr Robert, Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science
Questions
Aberdeen University, Official engagements 577w
Academic freedom 580-1w
Academic freedom, Universities 159-60w
Business & Technician Education Council 48w
City of London Polytechnic, Metalworking 216-7w
Committee of Vice Chancellors & Principals, Official engagements 809
Day release 584w
Degrees, Educational finance 810
Economic & Social Research Council, Office dispersal 579w
Education allowances, Costs 601-2w
Education Reform Bill 1987/88, Universities 49-50w
Extracurricular activities, University finance 372w
Further education, Students 577w
Further education colleges 217w
Further education colleges, Special education 577w
Graduates, Engineering industries 814
Higher education 809-10
Higher education, Research 47w
Higher education admission, Discrimination 576w
Inner London Education Authority, Public appointments 308-9w
Medical research, Analgesics 631-2w
Medical students, Parental contributions 372w
Medical students, Student grants 372w
Medical students, Student numbers 431w
National Association of Teachers in Further & Higher Education, Further education colleges 217w
Polytechnics & Colleges Funding Council, Public appointments 309w
Postgraduate students, Student numbers 813
Research finance, France 582w
Science & technology research, Research finance 163w, 814
Science budget 571w
Scotland, Universities 576-8w
"Strategy for the Science Base" 583-4w
Student Awards Review Committee 432w, 571w
Student grants 159w, 432-3w, 585w
Student grants, Community charge 585w
Student grants, Housing benefits 585w
Student grants, Index linking 372w
Student grants, Medical students 217-8w
Student numbers, Wales 766w
Students, Universities 373-4w
Tuition fees, Part-time education 216w
Universities 580w, 810-1
Universities, Research councils 581w
Universities, Scotland 576w
Universities, Student numbers 762-6w
Universities, Wales 580w
Universities Funding Council, Public appointments 217w
Universities Funding Council, Scotland 579w
University finance 431-2w, 582w, 810
University finance, Scotland 576w
University finance, Special educational needs 373w
University finance, University Grants Committee 311-2w

Janman, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 444-5
Malicious Communications Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 645, 647-8
Questions
Dartford Thurrock Crossing Bill 1987/88, Government responses 551-2w
Manufacturing industries 337w
Official engagements, Thurrock 294w

Janner, Mr Greville
Debates etc.
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 859, 861
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Official engagements 508w
Business statements 510
Butane gas, Death 397-8w
Export licensing, Communication engineering 306w
Export licensing, Palestine Liberation Organisation 306w
Official engagements 135w
Palace of Westminster, Energy conservation 58w
Palestine Liberation Organisation, Defence equipment 305w, 425-6w
Palestine Liberation Organisation, Training 437w
Pens, Consumer protection 340-1
Special education 572w

Japan
Balance of trade 256-7w
Foreign investment in UK 255w
Nuclear fuels 530w
Nuclear power 57w

Jenkins of Hillhead, Rt Hon Lord 496-7

Jessel, Mr Toby
Questions
Arts, Curriculum 697
Hospital beds 173-4

Jet aircraft
Aircraft noise 746-8w

Job centres
Ethnic minorities 469-70w

Job training scheme
Cheshire 230w
Professional qualifications 151w

John, Mr Brynmor
Questions
Multiple occupation, Wales 9

John Howard School Bedford 310w

Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 767, 780-3

Johnston, Sir Russell
Questions
Stalker, John, Publishing 824

Jones, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Opencast mining, Clwyd (10:02:88) 478-81
Training (16:02:88) 831
Questions
Balance of payments 335w
Coal prices, Dollar 696
Education, Clwyd 463w
Health services, Clwyd 518w
Housing, Alyn & Deeside 462-3w
Imports 495
Pigmeat, Wales 463w
Schools, Official engagements 584w
Unemployment, Wales 3-4

Jones, Mr Gwilym
Questions
Defective housing, Local government expenditure 667-8w
Private investment, Wales 3
Severn bridge, Construction 20
Unemployment, Wales 4

Jones, Mr Ieuan Wyn
Debates etc.
Training (16:02:88) 832
Questions
Community Care Review 196w
Gwynedd Health Authority, Official engagements 81w
Housing Corporation, Official engagements 966
Interest rates 331w
National Association of Teachers in Further & Higher Education, Further education colleges 217w
Nuclear safety 63w
Official engagements 135w, 520w, 690w
Remand in custody, Prison accommodation 362w
Tyre tread depths, EC action 749w

Jones, Mr Martyn
Questions
Civil service manpower 416-7w
Employment opportunities, Wales 597w
Milk, Canada 157w
Public expenditure, Pay 341w
Regional selective assistance, Wales 517w
Trawsfynydd power station, Testing 510w

Jones, Philip 509w

Jones, Mr Robert B
Debates etc.
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1211
Self-employed (15:02:88) 719-24, 726, 731-3, 754
Questions
Civil servants, Communication skills 700-1
Corporation tax, Tax yields 722w
Electronics industry, Production 250w
Greenbelt, Hertfordshire 21w
Meningitis, North West Hertfordshire Health Authority 269w
Motorways, Road accidents 616w
Power stations, Air pollution control 689
Productivity 335w
Secondary education, School admission 47-8w

Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1270-2

Judges
Public inquiries 364w

Judgments
Sheep premiums 330w

Judicial review
Telephone tapping 303w

Junior hospital doctors
Overtime 172w

Juries
Pay 350w

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Debates etc.
European Council (15:02:88) 709
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 355-6
Questions
House of Commons catering, Artificial sweeteners 727w

Kemi Mansi Services 529w

Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1167
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 759, 765
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 128
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 372-3, 375-6
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 200
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 920
Oral question time intervention (10:02:88) 337
Questions
Business, Lancaster 354
New businesses 337
Textile industry 251w
University finance 810

Kennedy, Mr Charles
Questions
Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive, Official engagements 671w
Offshore suppliers 510w
University finance, Scotland 576w

Kensington & Chelsea
Diplomatic service 55w

Key, Mr Robert
Questions
Housing improvement, Estate Action 662w
Income tax, Tax rates 4 bands 423w
Museums & galleries, Official engagements 468w
New businesses 492
Roads, Privatisation 243w
Social security reform, Means tested benefits 177w

Kidnapping
Insurance 545w

Kidney patients
Surgery 779w

Kilfedder, Mr James
Debates etc.
European Council (15:02:88) 714
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 987

Killingbeck Hospital (10:02:88) 365

King, Mr Roger
Questions
Graduates, Engineering industries 814
Hospitals, Standards enforcement 188w
Profitability 342w

King, Rt Hon Tom, *Secretary of State for Northern Ireland*
Debates etc.
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Ministerial statements (17:02:88) 977-96
Questions
Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, Expenditure 328w
Human rights 681w
Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts 165-6w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries 165w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Ministerial statements 325w

King's College 537-8w

Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Questions
House of Commons broadcasting, Television 183

Kirkhope, Mr Timothy
Questions
House renovation grants, Flats 673-4w
Urban development corporations, Leeds 666w

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Debates etc.
Access to Medical Reports Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 657-60

Questions
Birmingham Children's Hospital, Heart diseases 627-8
Health service staff, Manpower 488-9w
Higher education admission, Discrimination 576w
Housing associations, House purchase 672w
Mental patients, Special hospitals 553-4w
NHS finance, National income 487-8w
Nurses, Northern Ireland 283-4w
Nurses' training 176-7w
Overseas aid, Warships 32w
Regional selective assistance 252-3w
School nurses, Scotland 142-3w
Taxation 495-6

KMS see Keeni Meeni Services

Knapman, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 384-5
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1306-7
Self-employed (15:02:88) 748-50
Questions
Data processing, Production 248w
Disposable income 336w
Veterinary drugs, Licensing 678-9w

Knight, Mr Greg
Debates etc.
Malicious Communications Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 608-55 passim
Questions
Audio recordings 344
Chemical weapons, Animal experiments 538w
Crime prevention, Private sector 702w
Income tax 342w
NHS finance 630
Rolls-Royce Aeroengines, Privatisation 486

Knight, Dame Jill
Questions
NHS 175

Knowles, Michael
Written questions 767w

Knox, Mr David
Questions
Coal mining, Productivity 694
European Council 340w
European Regional Development Fund, Wales 76w
Peak Park Joint Planning Board, Local government elections 970-1
Primary education, Cost per pupil 811

Kuwait
British Petroleum (08:02:88) 37

La Belle discotheque
Bombings 538-9w

Laboratories
AIDS 64-5w, 79-80w, 110-1w, 327w

Labour costs
EC countries 312-4w

Labour Party 184, 973, 976
British strategic nuclear force 1145-6
Forensic science 1138

Lambeth
Council house sales (19:02:88) 1323-30
Housing benefits 559w

Lambie, Mr David
Questions
Science budget 571w

Lamond, Mr James
Debates etc.
European Council (15:02:88) 714
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 356
Optical Appliances (Blind & Partially Sighted Persons) Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 668-9
Questions
Begum, Saleena, Immigration applications 1136-7
Birmingham Children's Hospital, Heart diseases 628
Business statements 509
Council house rents, Oldham 974
Nature reserves, Land ownership & tenure 959
Oldham Hospital, NHS finance 184-5
Spectacles 167w
Synthetic fibres, Turkey 253w
Textiles 348-9

Lamont, Rt Hon Norman, Financial Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Armed forces deployment, USA 418w
Banks, Developing countries 152w
Banks, Tax allowances 338w
Budget 90w
Budget, EC Finance Council 419w
Budget, Unemployment 342w
Capital gains tax, Investment 87w
Capital gains tax, Tax yields 87w
Charitable donations 153w
Corporation tax, Tax yields 722w
Finance Act 1984, Companies 419-20w
Government shareholding 334w
Higher civil servants, Inland Revenue 92w
Income tax 335w, 342w, 493-4
Income tax, Average earnings 87-8w, 722w
Income tax, Departmental forms 342-3w
Income tax, Low incomes 89-90w
Income tax, Personal tax allowances 493
Income tax, Tax burden 333-4w
Income tax, Tax rates & bands 90w, 417-8w, 423w, 496
Inheritance tax 340w
Interest rates 331w
Mortgage relief 87w, 334w
Mortgage relief, Costs 418w
Pay, Married men 332w
PAYE, Tax evasion 422w
Pension funds, Company investigations 90w
Personal equity plans 340w
Personal income 93-4w
Personal tax allowances 333w
Privatisation 95w, 337w, 486
Privatisation, Tenders 92w
Public bodies, Accounting 420w
Rolls-Royce Aeroengines, Privatisation 486-7
Rolls-Royce Aeroengines, Shares 486
Shipping 340w
Tax allowances, Agriculture 723w
Tax allowances, Enterprise zones 421w
Tax allowances, Forestry 95w, 339w
Tax allowances, Health insurance 90w
Tax allowances, Luncheon vouchers 90w
Tax allowances, Pension funds 90w
Tax allowances, Personal equity plans 87-9w
Tax allowances, Share option scheme 89w
Tax allowances, Shares 89w
Tax allowances, Social security benefits 722w
Tax allowances, Sports administration 423w
Tax allowances, Tax rates & bands 93-5w
Tax burden 342w
Tax burden, Low pay 418-9w
Tax collection offices, Durham 419w
Tax evasion 421w, 425w
Tax evasion, Prosecutions 421w
Tax exemption certificates, Building industry 723w
Tax yields 333w, 343w
Tax yields, Deeds of covenant 721w
Tax yields, Extortion 723-4w
Tax yields, Pensions 720-1w
Tax yields, Tax rates & bands 494
Taxation 495-6
Taxation, Forestry 339w
Taxpayers, Income tax 247w
Tree planting, Tax allowances 490-1
Unpaid taxes 422w
VAT, Newspaper press 496

Lanarkshire Health Board
Hospital staff 220-2w

Lancashire
Government assistance to industry 148-9w

Lancashire County Council
Government grants 211w
Local government expenditure 382-4w

Lancashire Enterprises 148-9w

Lancaster
Business 354

Land acquisition
British Rail 740w

Land drainage
Drainage rates 158w

Land ownership & tenure
District health authorities 625w
Nature reserves 24-32w, 959
Rights of way 19w

Land pollution
Polychlorinated biphenyl 741w
Radioactivity 465w

Land Registry see Land Registry Office

Land Registry Office 964

Land use
Agricultural land 156w
Set-aside schemes 586w

Land values
District health authorities 692w
Hospitals 692w
Norwich Health Authority 692-4w

Landlord & tenant
Private rented housing 501-2

Lang, Mr Ian, Minister of State for Scotland
Questions
Community charge, Battered wives 478w
Community charge, Death 540w
Community charge, Scotland 478w
Community charges register 478w
Community charges register, Disclosure of information 63w
Community charges register, Scotland 63w
Domestic rates, Rates & rating 70w
EC grants & loans, Angus 476w
Electorate, Rates & rating 369w
Employment by sector, Scotland 733-4w
Employment opportunities, North Angus 728w
Hydroelectric power, North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board 319-20w
Pay, Scotland 734-6w
Rate support grants, Scotland 731w
Regional aid, Dundee 483-4w
Regional aid, Strathclyde 368w
Regional development grants, Scotland 483w
Scottish Development Agency, Clydebank 480w
Shaw Medical Centre, Scottish Development Agency 320-1w
Tourism, Angus 476w
Unemployment, Dundee 65-6w
Vacancies, Dundee 540-2w
Women's employment, Scotland 733w
Youth training scheme, Dundee 478-9w
Youth training scheme, Scotland 479w

Languages
Immigration & Nationality Division 543w

Languages education
Scotland 367-8w, 477w, 654w

Lasers
Radioactivity 695-6w

Latham, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 210
Questions
Armed forces cadets, Inner cities initiative 735w
Business statements 507-8
Concessionary television licences, Pensioners 1141
Domestic rates 960
Hospitals, Construction 183w
Police, Leicestershire 705w
Urban regeneration grants 719-20w

Laundries
Privatisation 173w

Law Commission 364-5w, (12:02:88) 607-25, 31-56

"Law Commission Report, 147" (12:02:88) 607-25, 31-56

LAW Mining Company
Licensing 63w

Law reform
Charities 436w, 704w, 707-8w
London Regional Transport Act 1984 451-2w
Official secrets 1140-1
Work permits 712w

Lawrence, Mr Ivan
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 363
Malicious Communications Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 648-55
Nazi war crimes (08:02:88) 31
Questions
Forensic science, Labour Party 1138
Hospitals, West Midlands 628-9

Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel, Chancellor of the Exchequer
Questions
Balance of payments 335w
Disposable income 497
EC Finance Council, Capital movements 420w
Jenkins of Hillhead, Rt Hon Lord 496-7
NHS finance 497
Privatisation 487-8
Profit sharing, Departmental leaflets 387w
Public sector borrowing requirement 496
Standard of living 497-8
Tax thresholds 497

LBA see London Boroughs Association

LDDC see London Docklands Development Corporation

Lead pollution
Water supply 540w

Leader of the Opposition
Official cars 657-8w
Pay 657-8w

Lee, Mr John, Under-Secretary of State for Employment
Questions
Average earnings 716w
Average earnings, Manual workers 316-8w
Average earnings, Manufacturing industries 232-4w
Average earnings, Women 716-8w
Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944, Handicapped workers 150w
Electricity tariffs, Employment 470w
Employment 228-9w
Employment, Agriculture 76w
Employment, Northern region 231w
Employment services, Sizewell B 312w
Fraud, Civil service manpower 469w
Handicapped workers, Aids for handicapped 227-8w
Job centres, Ethnic minorities 469-70w
Labour costs, EC countries 312-4w
Overtime 548w
Price increases, Manufacturing industries 548w
Restart programme, Cheshire 150w
Restart programme, Interviews 470w
Self-employed, Cheshire 229w
Service industries, Northwich 313-4w
Take-up of employment, Republic of Ireland 718w
Tourist industry, Cheshire 229-30w
Unemployed, Mental illness 231-2w
Unemployment, Barrow in Furness 473w
Unemployment, Blyth valley 472w
Unemployment, Cheshire 230-2w
Unemployment, Derbyshire 229w
Unemployment, Dundee 75w
Unemployment, Houghton 475w
Unemployment, Lincoln 474w
Unemployment, Northwich 471-2w
Unemployment, Preston 474-5w
Unemployment, Stafford 473-4w
Unemployment, Sudbury 549-50w
Unemployment, York 471-2w
Unemployment benefits, Scotland 471w
Vacancies, Northwich 313-4w
Women's employment 718w
Youth employment, Cheshire 231w
Youth employment schemes, Republic of Ireland 717-8w
Youth training scheme, Dept of Employment 470w

Leeds
Family doctors 264w
Urban development corporations 666w
Urban programme 673w

Leeds-Bradford Airport
Public inquiries 31-2w, 132w

Leeds Eastern Health Authority
Hospital waiting lists 280w

Leeds Western Health Authority
Hospital waiting lists 280w

Legal aid
Belgium 426w
British residents abroad 416w
Scotland 477w

Legislation
Charities 138-9w

Leicester
Exceptional needs payments 694w
Home Office 437w

Leicestershire
Education Reform Bill 1987/88 573w
Police 705w

Leicestershire County Council
Employment discrimination 521w

Leicestershire Health Authority
Hospital beds 196-8w
Nurses 203w

Leigh, Mr Edward
Questions
Association of Chief Police Officers, Official engagements 1133
Doctors, Pay 135w
Income tax, Tax rates & bands 496
Privatisation 337w
Pupil-teacher ratios 580w

Leighton, Mr Ron
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 88, 101, 103-6
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 423-6
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 268-9
Training (16:02:88) 828
Questions
Advertising, Expenditure 295w
Agriculture, GATT 155w
Animal feed, Import duties 155w
Civil service recruitment 391-2w
Employment services, Sizewell B 312w
Industrial tribunals, Ethnic minorities 383w
Job centres, Ethnic minorities 469-70w
Labour costs, EC countries 312-4w
London city action team 441-2w
London Docklands, Building industry 126w
London Docklands, Manpower Services Commission 73w
Metropolitan Police, Privatisation 436w
NHS finance, Regional health authorities 179w
Official Report 58w
Restart programme, Interviews 470w
Youth training scheme, Dept of Employment 470w

Leisure drives
Cheshire 452w

Lestor, Miss Joan
Questions
Children, Sexual offences 169w
Mental health services, North Western Regional Health Authority 639-40w
Mental patients, Salford Health Authority 406-7w
Royal ordnance factories, Privatisation 498
Southern Africa, Debts 429-30w

Leukaemia
Fife 774w
Ionizing radiation 774w

Lewis, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1164
Talkabout service (09:02:88) 330-1
Questions
First Division Association, Official engagements 574w
Telephones, Pornography 350

Leyland Trucks
Profitability 255w

Liberal Party
Wind power 689

Libraries
Office of Population Censuses & Surveys 780w

Licensed conveyancers 365-6w
Examinations 366w
Public appointments 365w

Licensing
Bovine somatotropin 678w
Drugs 271w
Fisheries 729w
Game 303w, 708w
LAW Mining Company 63w
Seals 731w
Veterinary drugs 678-9w

Life imprisonment
Homicide 712-4w

"Lifting the Burden White Paper" (15:02:88) 719-54

Light dues
EC countries 241-2w

Lightbown, Mr David, A Lord Commissioner
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 376

Lighting
Military vehicles 81w
Vehicles 410w

Lilley, Mr Peter, Economic Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Alcoholic drinks duties, Non-alcoholic drinks 648w
Aviation fuels, Excise duties 566w
Bank notes 649w
Budget, Tobacco duties 419-20w
Customs & Excise, Hazardous wastes 95w
Debts 335w
Economic growth 336w
Economic situation, Shares 647w
European Council 340w
Hazardous wastes, Seaham 566-7w
Inflation 331w
Interest rates 331w
Money supply 153-4w
New Zealand, Official engagements 338w
Public sector borrowing 247w
Retail price index, National savings 567w
Tax & price index 331w
Tax harmonisation, Car tax 343-4w
VAT, Confectionery 343w, 568w
VAT, Harvest Chewy bars 343w
VAT, Tax allowances 770w
VAT, Tax harmonisation 770w
VAT zero rated goods, Hospital radio 342w

Lincoln
Unemployment 474w

Listed buildings
Codes of practice 521w

Literacy
Educational finance 807
School leaving 807

Litherland, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 250

Litter
Waste disposal 666w

Little Lowford
Official engagements 688w

Liverpool
Deportation 706w
Government assistance 969

Liverpool Dock Labour Board
Dock workers 770-2w

Liverpool Exchange Bill (HL) 1986/87
Debates etc.
2R* (09:02:88) 169

Liverpool Health Authority 204w
Health service staff 354-6w

Livingstone, Mr Ken
Questions
Army Board, Appeals 449w
Civil servants, Positive vetting 86w
Departmental correspondence, Intelligence services 85w
Holroyd, Fred, Army in Northern Ireland 41w
Intelligence services 45w
Intelligence services, Northern Ireland 83w
Military aircraft, Republic of Ireland 318w
Ministers' correspondence, Disclosure of information 45w
Politicians, USA 85-6w
Privy council, Periodicals 58w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries 46w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Manpower 674w
Security, Northern Ireland office 674w
UK 2000, Public expenditure 669-70w
USA, Northern Ireland 426w
Wallace, Colin, Information 41w

Livsey, Mr Richard
Questions
Assisted areas 256w
Hospital waiting lists, Hip replacements 15
Regional aid, Wales 2-3
Rural transport innovation grant scheme 307w

Lloyd, Sir Ian
Questions
Income tax 493

Lloyd, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Passenger transport executives, Rate precepts (09:02:88) 299-301, 310-2
Questions
Breathalysers, Age 215w
British Museum, Museums & galleries 466w
Industrial accidents 74w
Industrial accidents, Small businesses 74w
Light dues, EC countries 241-2w
London Regional Transport, Government grants 242w
Motor vehicle safety 246-7w
Nurses, Pay 1147-8
Owner occupied housing, House purchase 963
Road finance, Capital investment 358-60w
Road safety 242-3w
Sickle cell disease, NHS 172w
Transport of radioactive materials, Road accidents 241w

Loans
Social Fund 697w

Local authorities 974
Caravan sites 458-60w
Community charge 664w
Contract compliance 971
Food hygiene 622w
Food surpluses 158w
NHS charges 565w
Racial discrimination 971-2
Rent arrears 973
Sex discrimination 972

Local authority powers
Handicapped 290w

Local Development Agencies Development Fund
Finance 618w

Local education authorities
Educational administration 572-3w
Prison education services 40-1w
Special educational needs 602-3w
Swimming pools 47w

Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988
Debates etc.
(08:02:88) 140-61

Local government audit
Craigavon Borough Council 397w

Local Government Bill 1987/88
Questions
289-90w

Local government elections
Inverclyde 369w
Peak Park Joint Planning Board 970-1

Local government expenditure 525-6w
Defective housing 667-8w
Lancashire County Council 382-4w
Rate limitation 526-8w
Rights of way 450-1w
Road finance 358-60w

Local government land
Management 671w
Property transfer 659w

Local government services
Cheshire County Council 521-2w
Companies 289-90w
Direct labour departments 461w
Fees & charges 31w
Privatisation 289-90w
Sports facilities 15-6
Tenders 672-3w

Local government social services
Crimes of violence 197w
Housing benefits 621w

Local government staff
Cheshire County Council 520w
Greater Manchester 6-20w
Residential care 696w

Lofthouse, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 154
Questions
Coal mine closures 507w
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 171w
Industrial development, Castleford 532-3w
Pontefract Health Authority, Hospital beds 560w
Pontefract Health Authority, Hospital consultants 559-60w
Pontefract Health Authority, Nurses 560-1w
Pontefract Health Authority, Public appointments 561w

Log books
HMS Conqueror 318w, 387w

London allowance
Civil service 92w
Expenditure 92w

London Ambulance Service 111-2w
Manpower 185-6w
Official engagements 184w

London boroughs
Council house rents 524w
Council house waiting lists 22w

London Boroughs Association
Rates & rating 663w

London city action team 441-2w

London City Airport
Police 41w

London Docklands
Building industry 126w
Industrial accidents 383w
Manpower Services Commission 73w

London Docklands Development Corporation 126w, 747w, 968
Resignations 127-8w

London Fire Brigade 412w

London Regional Passengers' Committee 454w
Public appointments 743-4w

London Regional Transport 451-2w, 747w
Bus services 452w
Government grants 242w
Official engagements 452w

London Regional Transport Act 1984
Questions
452w
Law reform 451-2w

London Regional Transport Bill 1986/87
Debates etc.
Order for resuming adjourned debate on consideration read (11:02:88) 485, (18:02:88) 1131

London Residuary Body 21w
Offices 381w

London Underground
Fire certificates 412w
Manpower 412w
Railway stations 3w

London University
Defence research 537-8w

Long Lartin Prison 437-8w

Lonrho
House of Fraser 262w
Subsidiary companies 262w

Lord, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 774, 783, 786
Malicious Communications Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 613-5, 619

Lord Chancellor 291w

Lord Chancellor's Office see Lord Chancellor

Lost working days
Dental health 566w
Medical treatments 554-5w
Nurses 555w

Lotteries
NHS finance (16:02:88) 841-6

Loughborough University
Science & technology research 32-3w

Low incomes
Income tax 89-90w

Low pay
Tax burden 418-9w

Lowry, David
Nuclear power 392w

LRT see London Regional Transport

Luce, Rt Hon Richard, Minister of State Privy Council Office (Minister for the Arts)
Questions
Art education 468w
Art works, Obscenity 468w
Arts, Curriculum 466w, 697
Arts, Homosexuality 698
Arts, Inner city areas 281w
Arts, Pensioners 467w
Arts, UNESCO 697-8
Arts Council, Arts finance 152w
Arts Council grants 568-70w
Arts Council grants, Ethnic minorities 698-9, 769w
Arts Council grants, Regional arts associations 570w
Arts finance 468w, 698-9
British Museum, Museums & galleries 466w
Business sponsorship incentive scheme, Arts sponsorship 151w
Civil servants, Codes of practice 465w
Civil servants, Communication skills 700-1
Civil servants, Ministers 700
Civil servants, Performance reviews 702-3
Civil servants, Social security reform 703
Civil service 701-2
Civil Service College, Private sector 703
Civil service dispersal 701
Civil service recruitment 391-2w
Higher civil servants, Communication skills 700
Museums & galleries 466w
Museums & galleries, Arts finance 467w
Museums & galleries, Collections 151-2w
Museums & galleries, Official engagements 468w
National Museum of Photography 467w
National Theatre, Arts Council grants 699-700
Objects in lieu of tax, Office of Arts & Libraries 569-70w
Opera, Official engagements 467w
Opposition Whips' Office, Civil service manpower 649w
Percentage for Arts schemes 466-7w
Public libraries 465-6w
Public libraries, Nottinghamshire 151w
South Bank, Shops 468w
Visual arts, Prisons 568w

Lunar house 136-7w, 543-4w, (16:02:88) 847-924

Luncheon vouchers
Tax allowances 90w

Lychett Minster
Official engagements 134w

Lyell, Lord 164w

Lyell, Sir Nicholas, Solicitor-General
Questions
Nuclear weapons tests, Christmas Island 769w

M1 748w

M3 356w

M3-M27 link
Public inquiries 356w

M6
Elevated sections of motorways 454w

M20 (08:02:88) 161
Road construction 742w

M25
Road traffic 614-5w, 742w

M62
Road construction 748w

McAllion, Mr John
Debates etc.
Community charge, Public petitions (10:02:88) 477
Training (16:02:88) 836
Questions
British Telecom, Disclosure of information 443w
Domestic rates, Rates & rating 70w
Electricity tariffs, Pensioners 691-2
Eye tests, NHS charges 732w
Free school meals, Tayside 65w
Homelessness, Housing capital allocations 66w
Homelessness, Mortgage defaulters 65-6w
Homelessness, Scotland 68-70w
Local authorities, Contract compliance 971
Overseas trade 34w
Regional aid, Dundee 483-4w
School violence, Prosecutions 66w
School violence, Scotland 66w
Schools, Government grants to local authorities 69-70w
Social security claims, Take-up 75w
Supplementary benefits, Dundee 495-6w
Tax burden, Low pay 418-9w
Unemployment, Dundee 65-6w, 75w
University finance 582w
Vacancies, Dundee 540-2w
War widows' pensions, Age allowances 494-5w
Work permits, Law reform 712w
Young offenders, Tayside 479w
Young people, Social security recipients 115w
Youth training scheme, Dundee 478-9w
Youth training scheme, Scotland 479w

McAvoy, Mr Thomas
Questions
National income 339w

McCartney, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 141-2, 155-6
Questions
Health services finance, EC countries 174w
Homelessness, Bed & breakfast accommodation 663w
Manufactured goods, Prices 249w
Planning appeals 455w
Private rented housing, Landlord & tenant 501-2
Skuse, Frank, Evidence 1138-9
Tax yields 343w

Macclesfield Health Authority
Hospital waiting lists 96w

McColl Committee see Artificial Limb & Appliance Centres Review

McCrea, Rev William
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 92
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 988

McCrindle, Mr Robert
Questions
Air safety 23
Air safety, Air traffic control 244w
Air safety, Near misses 244w
Air traffic control, English language 244w
Charities, Law reform 704w
Financial Services Act 1986 338
Housing tenure 963-4
Nurses, Pay 189w
Uniform business rate, Confederation of British Industry 664-5w

McCusker, Mr Harold
Debates etc.
Members, Northern Ireland (16:02:88) 839
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 990-1
Questions
Administration of justice, Northern Ireland 591w
Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, Republic of Ireland 149w, 604w
Business statements 507
Teacher training, Northern Ireland 323w

Macdonald, Mr Calum
Questions
Taxation, Forestry 339w

McFall, Mr John
Questions
Banks, Tax allowances 338w
Clyde Submarine Base, Ionizing radiation 737w
Clyde Submarine Base, Naval bases 737w
Clyde Submarine Base, Nuclear accidents 737w
Clyde Submarine Base, Nuclear submarines 736w
Manufactured goods, Balance of trade 495
Naval Emergency Monitoring Organisation, Nuclear accidents 738w
Nuclear submarines, River Clyde 736w, 738w
Regional aid, "DTI the Department for Enterprise White Paper" 252w
Universities, Scotland 576w

McGrady, Mr Eddie
Questions
Community care, Government grants to local authorities 282-4w
Electricity supply industry, Credit agreements 750w
Electricity supply industry, Northern Ireland 750w
Fisheries, Ardglass 749-50w
Handicapped, Northern Ireland 281-3w

MacGregor, Rt Hon John, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 755-65, 770
Questions
Agricultural chemicals, Set-aside schemes 725w
Agricultural land, Land use 156w
Agricultural production, EC countries 587w
Agricultural subsidies, Expenditure 156w, 464-5w
Agriculture, EC budget 726-7w
EC Agriculture Council 154-5w
Food surpluses, Expenditure 587-8w
Green pound, Farm incomes 674-5w
Green pound, Sterling 771-2w
Set-aside schemes, Land use 586w
Veterinary drugs, Licensing 678-9w

McKay, Mr Allen
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 781-2
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 149-51
Questions
Boxing, Safety 287w
Electricity Council, Public appointments 509w
Food surpluses, Disadvantaged 157-8w
Food surpluses, Local authorities 158w
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 179-80
NHS finance 629
Regional aid, "DTI the Department for Enterprise White Paper" 252w
Social security benefits, Retail price index 114-5w
Universities, Research councils 581w

MacKay, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Structure plans, Berkshire (11:02:88) 602
Questions
Business statements 509
Drug crimes, Proceeds of crime 701w
EC internal trade, Insurance 259w
Examinations, Age 818
Inflation 331w
NHS finance 489
Sex education, Secondary education 581w
Structure plans, Berkshire 668w

McKelvey, Mr William
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1164

McLachlan, Charles (17:02:88) 977-96

McLeish, Mr Henry
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 53-4
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 417-22
Training (16:02:88) 830-1
Questions
Public sector borrowing requirement 335w
Unemployment benefits, Scotland 471w

Maclennan, Mr Robert
Questions
Breast cancer, Scotland 483w
British merchant fleet 414w
Rescue services, Helicopters 387w

McLoughlin, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 381
Rate Support Grant (England) Supplementary Reports (17:02:88) 1115-6
Questions
Ashbourne bypass, Road construction 452w
British Nuclear Fuels, Sellafield 509w
Iron & steel, Production 258-9w
National parks, Planning authorities 971
National parks, Public appointments 133w
Peak Park Joint Planning Board, Public appointments 132-4w, 662w
Pensioners, Investment income 188w

McNair-Wilson, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 560-5, 589
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 196-7
Structure plans, Berkshire (11:02:88) 601-2
Questions
District health authorities, Public appointments 167w
Income tax, Departmental forms 342-3w
Kidney patients, Surgery 779w
NHS Management Board, Public appointments 206-7w
Parole 708w
Religious education 574w
Trident, Atomic Weapons Research Establishment 537w

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 980-1
Questions
Body searches, Durham Prison 544w
Body searches, Risley Remand Centre 544-5w
McNamara, Kevin, Members' correspondence 223w
Maghaberry Prison, Body searches 592w
Migration, Northern Ireland 711w
Ministerial statements, Northern Ireland 223w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Ministerial statements 325w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Prosecutions 223w
Take-up of employment, Republic of Ireland 718w
Youth employment schemes, Republic of Ireland 717-8w

McNamara, Kevin
Members' correspondence 223w

Macrete Ireland 166w

Madden, Mr Max
Debates etc.
Birmingham Children's Hospital, Standing Order No 20 applications (11:02:88) 520, 522
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 195
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 848, 855-6, 860, 862, 883, 890-1, 903
Passenger transport executives, Rate precepts (09:02:88) 291-3, 301
Questions
Akhtar, Nasreen, Immigration applications 149-50w
Birmingham Children's Hospital, Heart diseases 626-7
Bombings, Birmingham 706w
Business statements 511-2
Concessionary television licences, Pensioners 1141
Education Reform Bill 1987/88, Bradford 814-5
Ejoh, Orkocharkwu Emmanuel, Immigrant detainees 138w
Homelessness, Bed & breakfast accommodation 663w
NHS finance 178
Ryan, Michael, Firearms 304w
Synthetic fibres, Turkey 148-9w, 253w
Water supply, Bradford 127w
Water supply, Water charges 288w
Water supply disconnections 288w

Madel, Mr David
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 374, 377-8
Questions
Austin Rover, Privatisation 251-2w
Combined heat & power, Edinburgh 346w
Ford Motor Company, Industrial disputes 26-7, 348

MAFF see Ministry of Agriculture

Maghaberry Prison
Body searches 592w
Prison population 591w

Maginnis, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 991-2
Questions
Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, Expenditure 328w

Magistrates' courts
Prisoners on remand 36w
Remand in custody 36-7w

Magnox reactors
Italy 589w
Nuclear safety 345-6w

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Debates etc.
Passenger transport executives, Rate precepts (09:02:88) 293-4, 297-8
Standing Order No 20 applications, Pullen, Jason (10:02:88) 365
Questions
Children in care 172w
Community charge, Departmental correspondence 960
Examinations, Age 816
London Underground, Manpower 412w
Manufactured goods, Balance of trade 250w

Maintenance 291w

Major, Rt Hon John, Chief Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Balance of payments 335w
Confederation of British Industry, Official engagements 337-8w
Disposable income 335-6w
Economic growth 388w
Economic growth, Unemployment 336w
Employment opportunities 334w
Ford Motor Company, Industrial disputes 492
Industrial investment 491-2
Industrial investment, Manufacturing industries 491
Industrial production 333w
Inflation, Electricity tariffs 338w
Inflation, NHS finance 331-2w
Manufacturing industries 337w
National income 338-9w
NHS finance 488-90
NHS finance, Expenditure 488
Nurses, Pay 340w
Overseas investment 498
Prices 340w
Productivity 335w
Profitability 342w
Profits, Industries 388-92w
Public expenditure 341w, 489
Public expenditure, Education 342w
Public expenditure, Government departments 770w
Public expenditure, Hospitals 341w
Public expenditure, NHS 341w
Public expenditure, Pay 341w, 343w
Public expenditure, Per capita costs 339w
Public expenditure, Private investment 722w
Public investment 332w, 338-9w, 343w
Public sector assets, Overseas investment 336w

Public sector borrowing requirement 335w

Malicious Communications Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R (12:02:88) 607-25, 631-56

Malins, Mr Humfrey
Debates etc.
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 865

Mallon, Mr Seamus
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 938-40, 943
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 989
Questions
Death, Northern Ireland 500

Management consultants
Health services 352-3w

Managers
Average earnings 316-8w

Managing agents (16:02:88) 825-38

Manchester
Urban development corporations 666w

Manchester Airport
Fees & charges 615-6w
Speed limits 615w

Manchester City Council
Redundancy 14

Manpower Services Commission 227-8w, (10:02:88) 371-452, 468-9w, (16:02:88) 825-38
London Docklands 73w

Mans, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 533, 537, 540, 568-72, 588
Questions
Economic growth 336w
Ford Motor Company, Industrial disputes 184
Hospital catering, Privatisation 173w

Manual workers
Average earnings 316-8w

Manufactured exports
Manufactured imports 250w

Manufactured goods
Balance of trade 34w, 249-50w, 495
Prices 249w

Manufactured imports
Manufactured exports 250w

Manufacturing industries 337w
Armed conflict 135w
Average earnings 232-4w
Government assistance to industry 18-9
Industrial investment 491
Northwich 313-4w
Price increases 548w
Productivity 262-4w
Tax allowances 723w

Maples, Mr John
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1009, 1030-3

Marek, Dr John
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 357
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1288-94
Questions
Civil service 702
Coal prices 687-8
Falkland Islands, Fisheries 57w
Income tax 494
Monuments, Millbank Gardens 31w
Railway freight transport, Government grants 453w
Railway stations, Trains 453-4w
School meals, Wales 6

Margam mine 10, 20

Marine insurance
Armed conflict 742w

Marland, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 766, 775, 787-90

Marlow, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Birmingham Children's Hospital, Standing Order No 20 applications (11:02:88) 521
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1010, 1014
Questions
Armed forces training, Health 738w
Community charge, Departmental correspondence 961
House of Commons Library, Procurement 17
Local authorities, Racial discrimination 971-2
Student Awards Review Committee 571w

Marmosets 538w

Marriage
Prisoners 437-8w

Married men
Pay 332w

Married women
Retirement pensions 99w

Marshall, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Education Reform Bill, Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1091-3, 1100
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 995
Questions
Debt collection, Northern Ireland 393-5w
Debts, Northern Ireland 394w
Exceptional needs payments, Leicester 694w
Gypsies, Belfast 396w
Gypsies, Education 324-5w
Gypsies, Environmental health 396w
Gypsies, Northern Ireland 395w
Pre-school education, Special education 578w
Tax burden 342w
Voluntary organisations, Northern Ireland 590-1w

Marshall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1012, 1014, 1039
Questions
Bank services, Codes of practice 262w
City technology colleges 574w
Computers in Government departments, Dept of Trade & Industry 713-4w
Council house sales, Right to buy 296w
Hevenigham hall, Property transfer 720w
House of Fraser, Company investigations 713w
Inner London Education Authority, Expenditure 812
Local authorities 974
Local government services, Privatisation 289-90w
London Regional Transport, Official engagements 452w
M25, Road traffic 742w
Mortgage relief, Costs 418w
Motorways, Road traffic 741-2w
Palestine, Refugees 691w
Profitability 330w
Wind power, Liberal Party 689

Marshall, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 362
Questions
A27, Road construction 742-3w
Telecommunications industry, Europe 340

Martin, Mr David
Questions
Cot deaths 270-1w
Economic growth, Unemployment 336w
Energy research, Nuclear power 684w
Mental patients, St James' Hospital Portsmouth 270w
Social security reform, Means tested benefits 177w

Martin, Mr Michael J
Questions
Childbirth, Caesarian sections 177-8w
School closures, Scotland 728-9w
School closures, St Bede's School Balornock 729w

Martlew, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 785-7, 797
Questions
Export prices, Dollar 342
Public expenditure, Hospitals 341w
Special education, Grant maintained schools 819-20

Mathematics education
Teachers 160w

Mathematics Working Group see National Curriculum Mathematics Working Group

Maude, Mr Francis, Under-Secretary of State for Corporate and Consumer Affairs
Questions
Audio recordings 344
Britoil, Takeovers 34w
Compact discs, Retail trade 344
Company investigations, House of Fraser 262w
Company liquidations 337
Competition 254w, 354
Compliance cost assessments 263w
Consumer credit, Disclosure of information 443w
EC internal trade, Insurance 259w
Financial institutions, "DTI the Department for Enterprise White Paper" 259w
Financial Services Act 1986 337-9
Financial Services Act 1986, Self-regulating organisations 607-8w
Guinness, Company investigations 261w
House of Fraser, Company investigations 713w
Insider trading 536w
Insider trading, Company investigations 621w
Insider trading, Information 255w
Lonrho, House of Fraser 262w
Lonrho, Subsidiary companies 262w
Mergers, Monopolies & Mergers Commission 257w
Securities Association, Financial services 760-1w
Stock market, Capital 249w

Maudsley Hospital
Nervous system disorders 168w

Mawhinney, Dr Brian, Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Questions
Community care, Government grants to local authorities 282-4w
Educational maintenance allowance, Northern Ireland 396-7w
Gypsies, Education 324-5w
Student grants, Northern Ireland 286w, 396w

Teacher training, Northern Ireland 323w

Maxton, Mr John
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1071
Questions
Postgraduate students, Student numbers 813

Maxwell-Hyslop, Mr Robin
Debates etc.
Air accidents, Standing Order No 20 applications (08:02:88) 38
Questions
Air safety, Inquiries 357-8w
Air safety, Near misses 357w
Tax yields, Pensions 720-1w
Visas, Philippines 303-4w

Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick, Attorney-General
Questions
Cash limits, Attorney-General 613w
Conveyancing Standing Committee 364-5w
Council for Licensed Conveyancers 366w
Crown Prosecution Service, Manpower 42-4w
Extradition, Republic of Ireland 685-6w
Herald of Free Enterprise, Hazardous wastes 42w
Holroyd, Fred, Army in Northern Ireland 41w
Intestacy, Administration of estates 612w
Legal aid, British residents abroad 416w
Licensed conveyancers 365-6w
Licensed conveyancers, Examinations 366w
Licensed conveyancers, Public appointments 365w
McNamara, Kevin, Members' correspondence 223w
Maintenance 291w
Ministerial statements, Northern Ireland 223w
Public inquiries, Judges 364w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Prosecutions 223w, 685w
Sexual harassment, Attorney-General 291w
Stalker, John, Prosecutions 291w
Unification Church, Charities 42w, 125-6w, 416w
Unification Church, Christianity 42w
Wallace, Colin, Information 41w

Meacher, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 39-43, 45, 47, 73-5
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 371-5, 407-12, 416-7, 441-4
Training (16:02:88) 826-7
Questions
Average earnings, Manual workers 316-8w
Coal mine closures 346w
Ford Motor Company, Industrial disputes 25-6
Profits, Industries 388-92w

Meale, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Coal Mining Subsidence (Prevention & Public Awareness) Bill, 1R (09:02:88) 186
Malicious Communications Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 653
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1301
Questions
Breast cancer, Screening 628-30w
British Coal Corporation, Privatisation 512w
Coal, Imports 63w
Miscarriages of justice, Home Affairs Select Committee 705w
NHS administration, Costs 166w

Means tested benefits
Social security recipients 185-6w
Social security reform 177w

Medical appeal tribunals 163-4w, 178w, 326w

Medical education
Family doctors 353w

Medical equipment
Members' correspondence 780w

Medical laboratory scientific officers 624-5w
Manpower 640-8w

Medical malpractice
Trent Regional Health Authority 276-8w

Medical profession
NHS administration 486w
Nottingham Health Authority 486w

Medical records
Disclosure of information (12:02:88) 657-67

Medical research
Analgesics 631-2w

Medical Research Council 558w

Medical students
Parental contributions 372w
Student grants 217-8w, 372w
Student numbers 431w

Medical treatments
Administrative delays 199-200w
Lost working days 554-5w
Risley Remand Centre 620w

Mellor, Mr David, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Questions
Afghanistan, Arms exports 391w
Akhtar, Nasreen, Immigration applications 149-50w
Armed conflict, Nuclear power stations 604w
Arms control, Defence industries 292w
BBC external services, Government grants 233w
Belgium, Legal aid 426w
Chile, Human rights 292w
Chile, Referenda 292w
Diplomatic service, Kensington & Chelsea 55w
EC countries, Nuclear safeguards 235w
EC Energy Council, Nuclear safeguards 235w
El Salvador, Mercenaries 529w
Entry clearances, Immigrants' fiancees 690-1w
EURATOM, Nuclear safeguards 235w
European Security Conference, Romania 233w
Falkland Islands, Fisheries 56-7w, 425w
Foreign policy, Disclosure of information 291w
Herald of Free Enterprise, Hazardous materials 57w
Hong Kong, Civil service pensions 391w
Hong Kong, Nature conservation 292-3w
Hong Kong, Official visits 427-8w
International Atomic Energy Agency, Nuclear safeguards 234w
Japan, Nuclear fuels 530w
Japan, Nuclear power 57w
Ministers, Immigration controls 529w
Mozambique, Defence Systems 529-30w
Mozambique, Security 775-6w
NATO, Europe 424w
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 234w
Nuclear test ban, UN disarmament 235w
Palestine, Refugees 691w
Palestine Liberation Organisation, Defence equipment 425-6w
Persian Gulf, Merchant ships 423-4w
Persian Gulf, Western European Union 423w

Plutonium, Nuclear safeguards 530w
Romania, Historic buildings 425w
Sexual harassment, Foreign & Commonwealth Office 55w
Sudan, Nuclear fuels 236w
Syrian Arab Republic, Torture 691w
USSR, Chernobilsky, Boris 149w
USSR, Foreign relations 424w

Members
Home Office 37-8w
Immigration 710w, 1135-6
Speaker's rulings & statements (16:02:88) 839

Members' conduct
Speaker's rulings & statements (08:02:88) 129, (09:02:88) 188, (10:02:88) 454-5, 465, 470-3, (11:02:88) 501, (15:02:88) 795, (16:02:88) 913, (18:02:88) 1253

Members' correspondence
Armilla patrol 756w
McNamara, Kevin 223w
Medical equipment 780w

Members' imprisonment
Beggs, Roy (15:02:88) 685
Speaker's rulings & statements (15:02:88) 685

Members' interventions
Speaker's rulings & statements (09:02:88) 203, 223, 280, 330, (10:02:88) 433, (12:02:88) 648-9, (15:02:88) 717, (16:02:88) 854, 857, 944-5, (17:02:88) 1021, 1041, 1043, 1069, 1071-3, 1084, 1085, (18:02:88) 1161

Members' pensions
Employers' contributions 658w
Personal pensions 658w

Members' speeches
Speaker's rulings & statements (08:02:88) 128, 151, (09:02:88) 192, 237, (11:02:88) 490, (12:02:88) 655, (15:02:88) 780, 785, (17:02:88) 1020, 1025, 1049, (18:02:88) 1193, 1230, 1236, (19:02:88) 1294

Members' suspension
Cohen, Harry (18:02:88) 1246
Speaker's rulings & statements (18:02:88) 1253

MENCAP see Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children & Adults

Meningitis
North West Hertfordshire Health Authority 269w

Mental health community care 267-8w, 562w
Hospital closures 553w, 562-6w
Planning 97w
South Tyneside Health Authority 409w

Mental health services
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority 107w
Mentally ill 486w
NHS finance 117-8w, 822-3
North Western Regional Health Authority 639-40w

Mental hospitals
Hospital closures 196w
Hostels 97w

Mental illness
Nurses 776w
Unemployed 231-2w

Mental patients
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority 107-8w
Complaints 562w
Money 272w
Per capita costs 95-6w
St James' Hospital Portsmouth 270w

Salford Health Authority 406-7w
Schizophrenia 639w
Special hospitals 553-4w

Mentally handicapped
Social security reform 170-1

Mentally ill
Mental health services 486w
Prison population 546w
Prisoners' release 546w
Sheltered housing 562w

Mercenaries
El Salvador 529w

Merchant ships
Armilla patrol 446w, 448-9w
Persian Gulf 423-4w

Mergers
Monopolies & Mergers Commission 257w

Merrison Committee see National Health Service Royal Commission

Mersey Regional Health Authority
Expenditure 192-4w
Family doctors 268-9w
Nurses 204w

Mersey tunnel (09:02:88) 308-28, 739w
Debts 740w

Merseyside
Agency nurses 205w

Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive
Rate precepts (09:02:88) 308-28, 739w

Metal industries
Industrial production 341

Metaldehyde 724-5w

Metalworking
City of London Polytechnic 216-7w

Methiocarb 724-5w

Metropolitan Police 38w, 542-3w, 704w, 1144
Demonstrations 1143-4
Expenditure 547w
Heathrow Airport 37w
Manpower 710w
Privatisation 436w
Sick leave 35-6w

Meyer, Gene
Immigration controls 545-6w

Meyer, Sir Anthony
Questions
European Assembly constituencies, Wales 768w
Multiple occupation, Wales 9
Surgery, North Wales 15

Michael, Mr Alun
Debates etc.
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 917-9
Questions
Immigration appeals 438w
Inflation, NHS finance 331-2w
Insider trading, Information 255w
Manufacturing industries, Government assistance to industry 18-9
Public expenditure, Hospitals 341w
Wales Railway Centre, Unemployment 12

Michie, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1188-90
Training (16:02:88) 833-4
Questions
Museums & galleries, Arts finance 467w

Michie, Mrs Ray
Debates etc.
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1272-6
Questions
Homelessness 661w
Regional selective assistance 252w

Microelectronics industry
Production 535w

Mid Wales Development 2-3

Middle schools 603-4w

Middlesbrough Borough Council 974
Council house rents 974

Migration
Northern Ireland 711w

Military aircraft
Republic of Ireland 318w, 776w

Military exercises
Falkland Islands 736-7w

Military vehicles
Lighting 81w

Milk
Canada 157w
Exports 675-6w
Food prices 725w
Imports 157w, 677-8w
Milk Marketing Board 676w
Production 61w, 726w
Production quotas 726w

Milk Marketing Board
Milk 676w

Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Questions
Britoil, Government shareholding 486
Britoil, Takeovers 34w
Business statements 506-7
Residential care, Elderly 65w

Millbank Gardens
Monuments 31w

Miller, Mr Hal
Questions
Birmingham Children's Hospital, Heart diseases 626
NHS charges, Private patients 498-500w

Mills, Mr Iain
Questions
Cars, Motor vehicle safety 551w
Tyre tread depths, EC action 410w

Minesweepers
Persian Gulf 758w

Minimum wage
Chester 74w
North West region 470w

Mining
Equipment 261w

Mining equipment
Productivity 224-5w

Ministerial duties
Forestry Commission 751-2w
Handicapped 45w, 110w

Ministerial statements
Civil service (18:02:88) 1149-56
European Council (15:02:88) 705-17
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 355-64
Northern Ireland 223w
Republic of Ireland 325w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 325w, (17:02:88) 977-96
Speaker's rulings & statements (08:02:88) 31, (15:02:88) 706, 709, 712, 714, 716, (17:02:88) 977, 981, 987, (18:02:88) 1151
Training (16:02:88) 825-38

Ministers
Civil servants 700
Immigration controls 529w
Stalker, John 394w

Ministers' correspondence 199-200w
Disclosure of information 45w

Ministers' domestic visits
Basildon 708-9w
Nuclear power stations 589w

Ministers' visits abroad
Costs 215w
India 215w
Scottish Office 221w
West Germany 164w

Ministry of Agriculture 751-2w
Sexual harassment 61w

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food see Ministry of Agriculture

Ministry of Defence 240w, 448w
Civil service manpower 446w
Economic League 318w
Protest 1144
Sexual harassment 317w
Thames house Millbank 446w

Miscarriages of justice
Court of appeal 705w
Home Affairs Select Committee 705w

Mitchell, Mr Andrew
Questions
AIDS, Personal social services 168w
Coal mining, Productivity 693-4
Human rights 681w
Infant foods, Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy 276w
Motor industry 250w
New businesses 337
Productivity 494-5

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 201, 203, 227, 255, 258, 262-6
Questions
Agricultural land, Land use 156w
Balance of trade, Unemployment 349
British Steel Corporation, House of Commons questions 444w
British Steel Corporation, Privatisation 147-8w, 351-2
Child safety, EC action 261w
Consumer protection, Food 306-7w
Conveyancing Standing Committee 364-5w
Council for Licensed Conveyancers 366w
EC grants & loans 760w
EC transport policy, EC Consumer Affairs Council 360w
Economic growth 388w
Employment 228-9w
Grimsby Health Authority, Hospital beds 491w
Grimsby Health Authority, Hospital consultants 490-1w
Grimsby Health Authority, Housing 490w
Grimsby Health Authority, Nurses 491w
Grimsby Health Authority, Public appointments 491w
Grimsby Health Authority, Special duty allowances 492w
Licensed conveyancers 365-6w
Licensed conveyancers, Examinations 366w
Licensed conveyancers, Public appointments 365w
Manufacturing industries, Armed conflict 135w
Money supply 153-4w
Plutonium, Transport of radioactive materials 590w
Privatisation, Tenders 92w
Production, Audio equipment 531w
Production, Chemicals 610w
Production, Computer software 535-6w
Production, Fertilisers 607w
Production, Microelectronics industry 535w

Production, Office equipment 530-1w
Production, Recording equipment 532w
Production, Synthetic fibres 609-10w
Production, Tape recorders 532w
Production, Video equipment 531w, 610w
Productivity, Pay 151w
Public sector borrowing 247w
Regional aid, Regional selective assistance 533-6w
Regional aid, York 534w
Safety standards, EC action 260w
Secretarial staff, Pay 134-5w
Severe weather payments, Grimsby 492w
UK contributions to EC budget 152w
Unemployment, Barrow in Furness 473w
Unemployment, Lincoln 474w
Unemployment, Preston 474-5w
Unemployment, Stafford 473-4w
Unemployment, Sudbury 549-50w
Unemployment, York 471-2w

Mitchell, Mr David, Minister of State for Transport
Debates etc.
Passenger transport executives, Rate precepts (09:02:88) 287-9, 291, 298, 301-4, 308-10, 324-6
Taxis, Crimes of violence (15:02:88) 802-5
Questions
Ambulance services, Voluntary organisations 413w
British merchant fleet 414w
British Rail, Capital investment 241-2w
British Rail, Land acquisition 740w
Bus crews, Information 413w
Bus crews, Smoking 413w
Bus services subsidies, Shropshire County Council 1w
Buses, Crime 413-4w
Buses, Crimes of violence 412w
Buses, Greater London 749w
Buses, Motor vehicle safety 741w
Channel ferries, Hazardous wastes 5w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 246w
Channel tunnel, Waste disposal 741w
Heathrow central station, Fire certificates 412w
Herald of Free Enterprise, Freight transport 4-5w
Light dues, EC countries 241-2w
London Regional Transport, Bus services 452w
London Regional Transport, Government grants 242w
London Regional Transport, Official engagements 452w
London Regional Transport Act 1984, Law reform 451-2w
London Underground, Fire certificates 412w
London Underground, Manpower 412w
London Underground, Railway stations 3w
Mersey tunnel, Debts 740w
Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive, Rate precepts 739w
Oil pollution control, Aircraft 739-40w
Passenger transport executives, Finance 748-9w
Ports, Hazardous materials 739w
Public service vehicles, Bus crews 740w
Public service vehicles, Driving licences 613-4w
Public service vehicles, Motor vehicle testing 741w
Railway freight transport, Government grants 453w
Railway Inspectorate, Railway safety 244w
Railway land, Trespass 357w
Railway stations, Trains 453-4w
Rural transport innovation grant scheme 307w
Sudbury-Colchester railway 453w
Taxis 551-2w
Taxis, Basildon 552w
Transport, Inquiries 747w

Mobile homes
Community charge 81w

Mobility allowance
Civil service manpower 327w
Northern Ireland 163-4w, 326-7w
Social security appeals 163-4w, 326-7w
Social security appeals tribunals 178w
Social security claims 327w

Mobility of disabled
Taxis (15:02:88) 799-805

MOD see Ministry of Defence

Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 925
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 983

Monetary compensatory amounts 771-2w
Pigmeat 820

Money
Mental patients 272w

Money supply 153-4w

Monofilament gill nets
Birds 588w
Cornwall 588w

Monopolies & Mergers Commission 34w, 355-6w
Mergers 257w

Monopoly
Post Office 248w

Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Questions
Enterprise & Deregulation Unit, Business 532w
Prisons, Privatisation 1134

Monuments
Millbank Gardens 31w

Moonie, Dr Lewis
Questions
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 170-1
NHS finance 565w
NHS finance, Scotland 539-40w
"Strategy for the Science Base" 583-4w

Moore, Rt Hon John, Secretary of State for Social Services
Questions
Dept of Health & Social Security, Office dispersal 179w
Health 175
Health services finance, EC countries 177-8
Health services finance, OECD countries 179
National insurance contributions, NHS 398-400w
NHS 174-6, 178, 272w, 407w
NHS administration, Costs 166w
NHS & private practice 175
NHS finance 175, 178, 350w
Surgery, NHS & private practice 623w

Moores Wallinstown
Defence procurement 82w

Morgan, Mr Rhodri
Debates etc.
Patent Office, Civil service dispersal (17:02:88) 1120
Questions
Devon & Cornwall Development Bureau, Industrial investment 739-60w
Greenbelt, Departmental circulars 285w
Inflation, Electricity tariffs 338w
Power stations, Public inquiries 686
Regional aid, Wales 1-2
Regional development grants, Wales 75-6w, 364w
Regional selective assistance, Wales 76-7w
Rented housing, Skilled workers 456w

Morley, Mr Elliot
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 783-4
Credit (Control) Bill, 1R (10:02:88) 368-70
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1015
Questions
British Steel Corporation, Privatisation 351
Examinations 574w
Monofilament gill nets, Birds 588w
Museums & galleries 466w
Nature reserves, Privatisation 127-8w
Public expenditure, NHS 341w

Morris, Rt Hon Alfred
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1160
Questions
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 171w, 172, 180
Handicapped drivers, Parking 615w
Manchester Airport, Fees & charges 615-6w
Members' pensions, Employers' contributions 658w
Ministerial duties, Handicapped 45w, 110w
Passenger transport executives, Finance 748-9w

Morris, Rt Hon John
Questions
Extradition, Republic of Ireland 685-6w

Morris, Mr Michael
Questions
British Nuclear Fuels, Exhibitions 226w
Cereals, Intervention Board 586-8w
EC budget, UK repayments 567w
Green pound, Farm incomes 674-5w
Green pound, Sterling 771-2w
Intervention stocks 674-5w
Medical students, Student numbers 431w
Retail price index, National savings 567w

Morrison, Sir Charles
Debates etc.
European Council (15:02:88) 712

Morrison, Mr Peter, Minister of State for Energy
Questions
Britoil, North Sea oil 690
Combined heat & power, Edinburgh 346w
North Sea oil, Offshore suppliers 690
North Sea oil, Petroleum exploration 689-90
Offshore suppliers 510w

Mortgage defaulters
Homelessness 65-6w, 660-1w

Mortgage relief 87w, 334w
Costs 418w

Moss, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1261-70, 1320
Questions
Paper industry, Industrial production 344-5

Motor industry 250w, 341
Exhaust emission controls 605-6w

Motor vehicle safety 246-7w
Buses 741w
Cars 551w
Europe 551w

Motor vehicle testing
Public service vehicles 741w

Motor vehicles
Head restraints 613w

Motorway service areas
Public petitions (08:02:88) 161

Motorways 409w
Road accidents 616w
Road traffic 741-2w

Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Debates etc.
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1190-2
Questions
Balance of payments 348
Community charge 664w
Nuclear weapons 755w
Public investment 343w

Moynihan, Mr Colin, Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sport)
Questions
Abseiling, Women 131w
Archaeology 302w
Hazardous wastes, Import licensing 24w
Hazardous wastes, Imports 24w
Monuments, Millbank Gardens 31w
National parks, Public appointments 133w
Nature Conservancy Council, Official engagements 128w
Nature reserves, Land ownership & tenure 24-32w
Nature reserves, Privatisation 127-8w
Ordnance Survey 129w
Peak Park Joint Planning Board, Public appointments 132-4w
Rights of way, Land ownership & tenure 19w
Swimming, Handicapped 126-7w
Swimming, Training 20-1w
Water charges 128w
Water supply, Bradford 127w
Water supply, Nitrates 127-8w

Mozambique
Defence Systems 529-30w
Security 775-6w

MRC see Medical Research Council

MSC see Manpower Services Commission

Mudd, Mr David
Questions
Road construction, Contracts 2-4w
Road works, Contracts 65w, 119-20w

Mull of Galloway 447-8w

Mullin, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Bombings, Birmingham (16:02:88) 950-4
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Diego Garcia 445-6w
Business statements 514-5
Clift, Alan, Forensic science 439w
Miscarriages of justice, Home Affairs Select Committee 705w
Skuse, Frank 1139
Skuse, Frank, Evidence 438w

Multiple occupation 665w
Fire escapes 321-2w
Housing policy 8-9
Scotland 321-2w
Wales 8-9

Murphy, Mr Paul
Questions
Channel tunnel, Waste disposal 741w
Primary health care, Gwent 8

Museums & galleries 466w
Arts grants 467w
British Museum 466w
Collections 151-2w
Official engagements 468w

NACODS 695-6

Namibia
Official engagements 46w

NAO see National Audit Office

NATFHE see National Association of Teachers in Further & Higher Education

National Air Traffic Services
Air safety 22

National Association of Teachers in Further & Higher Education
Further education colleges 217w

National Audit Office 486

National Coal Board see British Coal Corporation

National Curriculum English Working Group 581-2w

National Curriculum Mathematics Working Group
Resignations 682-3w

National finance see Treasury

National Health Service (National Lottery) Bill 1987/88 (proposed)
Debates etc.
Motion to introduce Bill negatived (16:02:88) 841-6

National Health Service Royal Commission 214w
NHS charges 172-3

National income 338-9w
EC budget 611w
NHS finance 487-8w

National insurance contributions 354w, 630-1w
Employees' contributions 205w
NHS 398-400w
NHS finance 778w
Tax evasion 353-4w

National insurance credits
Expenditure 354w

National Museum of Photography 467w

National parks
Planning authorities 971
Public appointments 133w

National Radiological Protection Board 83-4w, 757w, 771w

National savings
Retail price index 567w

National security
Computer privacy 619w
Intelligence services 500
Television programmes 144-5w, 728w

National Theatre 568-70w
Arts Council grants 699-700

National Union of Mineworkers 511w
Departmental correspondence 344w

National Utility Services 506-7w

Nationalised industries
Economic League 415w

NATO (11:02:88) 524-98, 538w, 755w
Chemical weapons 448w
Defence equipment 613w
Europe 424w
Western European Union 424w

Nature Conservancy Council 24-32w, 72-3w
Official engagements 128w, 665w
Sites of Special Scientific Interest 296w

Nature conservation
Badgers 379w
Hong Kong 292-3w

Nature reserves 959-60
Land ownership & tenure 24-32w, 959
Privatisation 127-8w

Naval bases
Clyde Submarine Base 737w
Nuclear submarines 737w
River Clyde 737w

Naval Emergency Monitoring Organisation
HMS Resolution 756w
Nuclear accidents 738w

Navy
Armed forces storage depots 735w

Nazi war crimes
Offenders (08:02:88) 28-36
Waldheim, Kurt 519-20w, 750w

NCB see British Coal Corporation

Near misses (08:02:88) 38, 244w, 357-8w, 551w, 590w
Air safety 21-2, 244w, 357w

Needham, Mr Richard, Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Questions
AIDS, Laboratories 327w
Bed & breakfast accommodation, Northern Ireland 166w
Cars, Northern Ireland 165w, 284w
Electricity supply industry, Northern Ireland 593w
Family doctors, Northern Ireland 284-6w
Gypsies, Belfast 396w
Gypsies, Environmental health 396w
Gypsies, Northern Ireland 395w
Health insurance, Northern Ireland 284w
Homelessness, Temporary accommodation 325-6w
Local government audit, Craigavon Borough Council 397w
Mobility allowance, Civil service manpower 327w
Mobility allowance, Northern Ireland 326-7w
Mobility allowance, Social security appeals 163-4w, 326-7w
Mobility allowance, Social security claims 327w
NHS finance, Northern Ireland 324w
Nurses, Northern Ireland 283-4w

Negligence
Doctors 187w

Nellist, Mr Dave
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1163
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 889
National Health Service (National Lottery) Bill, Motion to introduce Bill negatived (16:02:88) 841-4
Questions
British citizenship, Departmental correspondence 546-7w
Budget, Unemployment 342w
Community charge rebates, Young people 622w
NHS finance 183-4
Post Office, Monopoly 248w
Rover Group, Positive vetting 444w
School meals, Fees & charges 583w
Unemployment benefits, Social security benefits disqualification 183-4w

Nelson, Mr Anthony
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 192-9, 207, 240
Questions
Business statements 508

Neonatal mortality
Intensive care 558w
Scottish health boards 650-1w

Nervous system disorders
Maudsley Hospital 168w

Network SouthEast 355-6w

New businesses 337, 492
Consultants 254w
North East region 493

New clauses
Speaker's rulings & statements (16:02:88) 848

New Parliamentary building
House of Commons accommodation 522-3w

New York
AIDS 776w

New Zealand
Handicapped drivers 615w
Official engagements 338w

Newcastle Abbey College
Finance 519w

Newbigin, Paul 387w

Newport
Unemployment 9

Newspaper press
VAT 496

Newton, Rt Hon Tony, Minister of State for Health
Questions
Abortion, Disclosure of information 111w, 351w
Abortion, Hospitals 191-2w
Abortion, Private health services 780w
Abortion, Rape 111w
Agency nurses, Expenditure 405-6w
Agency nurses, Merseyside 205w
AIDS, Contraceptives 557-8w
AIDS, Expenditure 499-500w
AIDS, Laboratories 110-1w
AIDS, New York 776w
AIDS, Personal social services 168w
AIDS, Pregnancy 785w
AIDS, Technicians 489w, 626-7w
AIDS Monitoring & Surveillance Committee 167w
Barnet Health Authority, Nurses 190w
Bexley Health Authority, NHS finance 173w
Blood tests, AIDS 199w
Blood tests, Costs 199w
Children, Sexual offences 169w
Community care 183w, 485w
Community care, NHS finance 183w, 196w
Community Care Review 196w
Dental charges 349w
Dental charges, EC countries 349w
District health authorities, Resignations 168-9w
District health authorities, Storms 565w
Doctors, Negligence 187w
Drugs, APS 271w
Drugs, Costs 109w
Drugs, Eli Lilley 628w
Drugs, Expenditure 557w
Drugs, Hospitals 198w
Drugs, Licensing 271w
Eye disorders, Hospital waiting lists 632-8w
Eye tests, NHS 112w
Eye tests, Optical charges 195w
Family credit, Poverty trap 176w
Family doctors, Costs 115w
Family doctors, Leeds 264w
Family doctors, Medical education 353w
Generic prescribing, Family doctors 352w
Health service staff, Business education 556w
Health service staff, Liverpool Health Authority 354-6w
Health service staff, Manpower 488-9w, 624-5w
Health service staff, NHS administration 265w
Health service staff, Pay settlements 115w, 497w
Health service staff, Temporary staff 109w
Health services, Acute beds 270w
Health services, Expenditure 264-6w
Health services, Management consultants 352-3w
Health services finance, EC countries 174w, 204-6w, 402-4w
Health services finance, Health insurance 263-4w
Hospital beds 173-4
Hospital catering, Privatisation 173w
Hospital consultants, Contracts of employment 204w, 490w, 556w
Hospital doctors, Disciplinary proceedings 177-8w
Hospital finance 497-8w
Hospital waiting lists 277-8w
Hospital waiting lists, Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority 278-80w
Hospital waiting lists, District health authorities 503-6w
Hospital waiting lists, Leeds Eastern Health Authority 280w
Hospital waiting lists, Macclesfield Health Authority 96w
Hospital waiting lists, NHS & private practice 485-6w
Hospital waiting lists, North Western Regional Health Authority 623-4w
Hospital waiting lists, Regional health authorities 489w
Hospital waiting lists, Sheffield Health Authority 96w
Hospitals, NHS finance 116-8w
Hospitals, Standards enforcement 188w
Junior hospital doctors, Overtime 172w
Local government social services, Crimes of violence 197w
Medical laboratory scientific officers, Manpower 640-8w
Medical malpractice, Trent Regional Health Authority 276-8w
Medical profession, Nottingham Health Authority 486w
Medical treatments, Lost working days 554-5w
Mental health community care 267-8w, 562w
Mental health community care, Hospital closures 553w
Mental health community care, Planning 97w
Mental patients, Money 272w
Mental patients, Per capita costs 95-6w
Mental patients, Special hospitals 553-4w
Mentally ill, Mental health services 486w
National Health Service Royal Commission 214w
National Health Service Royal Commission, NHS charges 172-3
NHS 173-4
NHS, Abortion 173, 269-70w
NHS, Expenditure 276w, 278w
NHS, Industrial relations 173-4w
NHS, Per capita costs 632w
NHS, Performance indicators 353w, 403w
NHS charges 174
NHS charges, Local authorities 565w
NHS charges, Private patients 498-500w
NHS finance 176w, 349-50w, 556w, 565w
NHS finance, Capital investment 97w
NHS finance, Direct taxation 556-8w
NHS finance, District health authorities 177w, 180w
NHS finance, Emergency planning 197w
NHS finance, Greater London 211-3w
NHS finance, Health service staff 195w
NHS finance, Inquiries 176w
NHS finance, National income 487-8w
NHS finance, Regional health authorities 181w
NHS finance, South East region 213w
NHS Management Board 403w
NHS Management Board, Public appointments 206-7w
North Western Regional Health Authority, Official engagements 179w
Nurses, Employment 487w
Nurses, Geriatrics 624w
Nurses, Lost working days 555w
Nurses, Manpower 207-11w
Nurses, Mersey Regional Health Authority 204w
Nurses, Pay 189w
Nurses, Recruitment 167w
Nurses, Shift work 116w
Nurses' training 176-7w
Nurses' training, Expenditure 176w
Nurses' training, Student wastage 785-6w
Nursing Staff & Professions Allied to Medicine Review Body 184w
Optical charges, Eye tests 349w
Prescription charges, Income 174w
Prescriptions, Costs 622-3w
Prescriptions, Family doctors 555w
Private patients, Administrative costs 625w
Proprietary drugs, Hospital doctors 352w
Regional health authorities, Expenditure 698w
Residential care, Local government staff 696w
Social workers, Hospitals 565w
Social workers' training 347w
Speech therapists, Pay 266-8w

"Next Steps" 294-5w

NHS 173-6, 178, 272w, 407w
Abortion 173, 269-70w
Demonstrations 1143-4
Eli Lilley 628w
Expenditure 18, 276w, 278w, 496w
Eye tests 112w
Gynaecology 270w
Hospital beds 502w
Industrial relations 173-4w
National insurance contributions 398-400w
Nurses 207-11w
Operating theatres 401w
Per capita costs 632w
Performance indicators 191w, 353w, 403w
Public expenditure 341w
Scotland 139-40w, 221w
Sickle cell disease 172w
Surgery 490w
Wales 18, 223-4w

NHS administration
Costs 166w
Health service staff 141-2w, 265w
Manpower 11-2
Medical profession 486w
Wales 11-2
West Dorset Health Authority 1147

NHS & private practice 174-5
Hospital beds 407-8w
Hospital waiting lists 485-6w
Surgery 623w

NHS charges 174
Eye tests 732w
Foreign patients 745-6w
Income 401-2w
Local authorities 565w
National Health Service Royal Commission 172-3
Private patients 498-500w
Wales 745-6w

NHS finance 45w, 175, 176w, 177-8, 183-4, 276w, 278w, 349-50w, 488-90, 493, 497, 556w, 565w, 629-30, 1145
Ambulance services 502w
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority 99-100w, 279w
Bassetlaw Health Authority 213w
Bexley Health Authority 173w

Capital investment 97w
Community care 183w, 196w
Community health services 116-8w
Direct taxation 556-8w
District health authorities 177w, 180w
Emergency planning 197w
Expenditure 488
Greater London 211-3w
Health service staff 195w
Hospitals 116-8w
Inflation 331-2w
Inner London boroughs 211-3w
Inquiries 176w
Lotteries (16:02:88) 841-6
Mental health services 117-8w, 822-3
National income 487-8w
National insurance contributions 778w
Northern Ireland 324w
Oldham Hospital 184-5
Prime Minister's questions 182
Private health services 623w
Regional health authorities 179-81w
Scotland 322-4w, 479w, 539-40w
South East region 213w
South Wales 5
Wales 19-20

NHS Management Board 403w
Public appointments 206-7w

NI Office see Northern Ireland Office

Nicaragua
Overseas aid 428w

Nicholls, Mr Patrick, Under-Secretary of State for Employment
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 44-8, 72-3, 78, 121-3, 133-5
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 387-9, 407, 433
Questions
Dock labour scheme 454-5w
Dock workers, Liverpool Dock Labour Board 770-2w
Dock workers, Manpower 455w
Hazardous materials, Durham 150-1w
Industrial accidents 74w
Industrial accidents, London Docklands 383w
Industrial accidents, Small businesses 74w
Industrial accidents, West Glamorgan 74w
Industrial health & safety 232w
Industrial tribunals, Ethnic minorities 383w
Ionizing radiation, Radiation protection 771w
Minimum wage, North West region 470w
Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, Manpower 468w
Parental leave, EC countries 469-70w
Productivity, Pay 151w
Reading Borough Council, Training 315-6w
Sexual harassment, Dept of Employment 73-4w
Wages Inspectorate, Northumbria 74w

Nicholson, Mr David
Debates etc.
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1279-84
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 37w
Drug crimes, Proceeds of crime 701w
Enterprise counsellors, Accountants 148w
Eye tests, Optical charges 195w
Food aid from EC, Cereals 687w
"Home Improvement Policy Consultation Paper" 719w
Milk, Exports 675-6w
Milk, Milk Marketing Board 676w
Police right of search, Offensive weapons 617w
Road finance, Local government expenditure 358w
Romania, Historic buildings 425w
Telecommunications industry, Competition 349-50

Nicholson, Miss Emma
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 211, 244, 261-2
Questions
Educational finance, Capital investment 159w
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 171w
Urban development corporations 665w

Night flying
Aircraft noise 245-6w
Greater London 245-6w

NIREX see Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive

Nitrates
Infant foods 571-2w
Water supply 127-8w

Non-alcoholic drinks
Alcoholic drinks duties 648w
Drinking & driving 133-4w
House of Commons catering 517w

North Angus
Employment opportunities 728w

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation see NATO

North Devon District Council 670w

North East region 180-2w
British Coal Corporation 509w
Exceptional needs payments 500-2w
New businesses 493

North East Thames Regional Health Authority 174-5w, 213w, 496-7w

North Killingholme Cargo Terminal Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (11:02:88) 485, (18:02:88) 1131

North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board
Hydroelectric power 319-20w

North Peckham task force
Government grants 253-4w

North Sea oil
Britoil 690
Offshore suppliers 690
Petroleum exploration 689-90

North Staffordshire Health Authority
Construction 189w

North Wales
Surgery 15

North West Hertfordshire Health Authority
Meningitis 269w

North West region
Minimum wage 470w

North West Thames Regional Health Authority 213w

North Western Regional Health Authority
Hospital waiting lists 623-4w
Mental health services 639-40w
Official engagements 179w

Northern Ireland
Administration of justice 149w, 591w
AIDS 327w
Bed & breakfast accommodation 166w
Building workers 593w
Cars 165w, 284w
Death 500
Debt collection 393-5w
Debts 394w
Educational maintenance allowance 396-7w
Electricity supply industry 592-3w, 750w
Emergency powers 165-6w, (16:02:88) 925-49
Employment discrimination 440-2w, 594-6w, 674w
Extortion 519w, 594w
Fair Employment Commission 749w
Family doctors 284-6w
Government departments 821
Gypsies 324-5w, 395-6w
Handicapped 281-3w
Health insurance 284w
Homelessness 325-6w
Homicide 441w
Intelligence services 83w
Interviews 283w
Migration 711w
Ministerial statements 223w
Mobility allowance 163-4w, 326-7w
NHS finance 324w
Nurses 283-4w
Official visits 85-6w
Personal social services 324w
Positive vetting 86w
Punishment attacks 86w
Rural areas 592w
Salmon 325-6w
Special educational needs 818
Student grants 286w, 396w
Student numbers 766w
Take-up of employment 718w
Tax evasion 593-4w
Teacher training 323w
Terrorism (16:02:88) 925-49
USA 426w
Voluntary organisations 590-1w
Youth employment schemes 717-8w

Northern Ireland Dept of Health & Social Services 324w

Northern Ireland Education & Library Boards 286w, 396w

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1987
Questions
594w

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts
Questions
165-6w

Northern Ireland Office
Security 674w
Sexual harassment 323-4w

Northern region
Cervical cancer 493w
Employment 231w
Small businesses 227w

Northern Regional Assembly Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (12:02:88) 676

Northern Regional Health Authority
Administrative costs 172w

Northumberland
Ambulance services 692w
Forests 480w
Housing associations 520-1w
Police 620w, 1133
Pre-school education 578w
Private education 585w
School buildings 579w

Northumberland Health Authority 409w
Dogs 493w
Nurses 776w

Northumbria
Wages Inspectorate 74w

Northwich
Employment schemes 468-9w
Manufacturing industries 313-4w
Service industries 313-4w
Unemployment 471-2w
Vacancies 313-4w

Norwich Health Authority
Land values 692-4w

Nottingham
Crime prevention 702w

Nottingham Development Enterprise 968-9

Nottingham Health Authority
Medical profession 486w

Nottinghamshire
British Coal Corporation 512w
Public libraries 151w

NRPB see National Radiological Protection Board

NSRB see Nursing Staff & Professions Allied to Medicine Review Body

Nuclear accidents
Clyde Submarine Base 737w
Greenland 240-1w
Naval Emergency Monitoring Organisation 738w
Nuclear submarines 735-8w

Nuclear fuel reprocessing 589-90w
Okg Aktiebolag 589w

Nuclear fuels 515-6w
Exports 225-6w
Japan 530w
Nuclear safeguards 393w
Sudan 236w

Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive
Official engagements 671w
Radioactive waste disposal 666w

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate 509-10w
Manpower 468w

Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 234w

Nuclear power
Electricity generation 510w
Energy research 684w
Japan 57w
Lowry, David 392w
Privatisation 507-8w
Public sector assets 226w
Republic of Ireland 512w
Television programmes 346w

Nuclear power stations 225w
Air accidents 590w
Armed conflict 604w
Environment protection 344-5w
Fire services 436w, 512w
Ministers' domestic visits 589w
Opinion polls 345w
Testing 392w, 510w
Wylfa power station 510w

Nuclear reactors
Testing 510-1w

Nuclear safeguards
EC countries 235w
EC Energy Council 235w
EURATOM 235w
International Atomic Energy Agency 226w, 234w
Nuclear fuels 393w
Plutonium 530w

Nuclear safety 63w
Magnox reactors 345-6w

Nuclear submarines 737-8w, 756-7w
Clyde Submarine Base 736w
Cormack, Jim (08:02:88) 162-8
Faslane 735-6w
HMS Resolution 736w, 756w
Naval bases 737w
Nuclear accidents 735-8w
River Clyde 736-8w

Nuclear test ban
UN disarmament 235w

Nuclear weapons 735w
Transport of radioactive materials 136w
Treaties 383-4w

Nuclear weapons deployment
Western Europe 538w

Nuclear weapons tests
Armed forces pensions 758w
Christmas Island 709w
Disclosure of information 769w
Exservicemen 83-4w, 757-8w

NUM see National Union of Mineworkers

Nurses 500-1
Barnet Health Authority 190w
Employment 487w
Geriatrics 624w
Grimsby Health Authority 491w
Leicestershire Health Authority 203w
Lost working days 555w
Manpower 190w, 207-11w
Mental illness 776w
Mersey Regional Health Authority 204w
NHS 207-11w
Northern Ireland 283-4w
Northumberland Health Authority 776w
Pay 134-5w, 189w, 340w, 1147-8
Pay settlements 185-6
Pontefract Health Authority 560-1w
Recruitment 167w
Schools 283-4w
Scotland 480w
Shift work 116w
Special duty allowances 492w
Voluntary redundancy 480w

Nurses' homes 490w

Nurses' training 176-7w
Expenditure 176w
Student wastage 785-6w

Nursing homes
Scotland 65w

Nursing Staff & Professions Allied to Medicine Review Body 184w

Nutrition & health
School meals 6

Nutrition labelling
Coronary Prevention Group 727w

OAL see Office of Arts & Libraries

Objects in lieu of tax
Office of Arts & Libraries 569-70w

O'Brien, Mr William
Debates etc.
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 140
Questions
Banks, Tax allowances 338w

Obscene Publications Act 1959
Questions
Citizens' Advice Bureaux 620-1w

Obscenity
Art works 468w

Obstetrics
Wales 79w

Occupational pensions
Unemployment benefits 191w

OECD countries
Food aid 604-5w
Health services finance 179

Offenders
Electronic surveillance 139-40w
Nazi war crimes (08:02:88) 28-36

Offensive weapons
Greater London 38w
Police right of search 617w

Office dispersal
Dept of Energy 511w
Dept of Health & Social Security 179w
Economic & Social Research Council 579w
Insolvency Service 761w
Patent Office 761w

Office equipment
Production 530-1w

Office of Arts & Libraries
Cash limits 569-70w
Objects in lieu of tax 569-70w

Office of Fair Trading 34w, 307w

Office of Population Censuses & Surveys
Libraries 780w

Office of Telecommunications (09:02:88) 329-36, 443w

Office of the Social Security Commissioners see Social Security Commissioners

Office workers
Health service staff 265w

Offices
London Residuary Body 381w

Official cars
Costs 131w
Leader of the Opposition 657-8w

Official engagements 45w, 135w, 294w, 520w, 690w
Aberdeen University 577w
Advisory Council on Science & Technology 519w
Association of British Chambers of Commerce 251w
Association of Chief Police Officers 1133
Barnsley 519w
Basingstoke 293w
British Coal Corporation 20, 508w, 511w, 693
Bury 13
Central Electricity Generating Board 511w
Committee of Vice Chancellors & Principals 809
Confederation of British Industry 337-8w
Consumers' Association 251w
East Stow 294w
European Commission 689w
European fighter aircraft 134w
European Regional Development Fund 254w
First Division Association 574w, 812
France 615w
Gwynedd Health Authority 81w
Housing Corporation 966
Independent Broadcasting Authority 709w
Little Lowfield 688w
London Ambulance Service 184w
London Regional Transport 452w
Lychett Minster 134w
Museums & galleries 468w
Namibia 46w
Nature Conservancy Council 128w, 665w
New Zealand 338w
North Western Regional Health Authority 179w
Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive 671w
Opera 467w
RAF Lakenheath 688w
Schools 584w
South Africa 46w
Teesside Development Corporation 518w
Thurrock 294w
Trade unions 46w, 294w
Union of Democratic Mineworkers 344w
Vacant land 688w
Wales 134w

Water authorities 296w, 669w
Welsh Arts Council 11
Wolston 518w

Official Report 58w

Official secrets
Law reform 1140-1
Public records 241w

Official Secrets Act 1911
Questions
1140-1

Official visits
Hong Kong 427-8w
Northern Ireland 85-6w
Schools 219w

Offshore suppliers 510w
North Sea oil 690

OFT see Office of Fair Trading

Oftel see Office of Telecommunications

Ogwr valley
Valleys initiative 10

Oil pollution control
Aircraft 739-40w

Olg Aktieboleg
Nuclear fuel reprocessing 589w

Old people's homes
Disciplinary proceedings 98w
Prosecutions 98w

Oldchurch Hospital 115-6w

Oldham
Council house rents 974

Oldham Hospital
NHS finance 184-5

O'Neill, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 530-1, 541

Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Questions
Immigration applications 215w

OPCS see Office of Population Censuses & Surveys

Opencast Coal Act 1958
Questions
684w

Opencast Executive (10:02:88) 478-84

Opencast mining 697
Clwyd (10:02:88) 478-84
Environment protection 661w
Privately owned mines 684w

Opera
Official engagements 467w

Operating theatres
NHS 401w

Ophthalmic services
Waiting lists 463w
Wales 463w

Opinion polls
Nuclear power stations 345w

Oppenheim, Mr Phillip
Debates etc.
Training (16:02:88) 830
Questions
Balance of trade, USA 280w
Central Electricity Generating Board, Official engagements 511w
Educational finance, Derbyshire 430-1w
School governors 579w
Unemployment, Derbyshire 229w

Opposition parties
Public expenditure 657w

Opposition Whips' Office 657w
Civil service manpower 649w
Pay 649w

Optical Appliances (Blind & Partially Sighted Persons) Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R (12:02:88) 668-9

Optical charges 349w
EC countries 349w
Eye tests 195w, 349w

Optical charges exemptions
Blind (12:02:88) 668-9

Optical fibres
Telecommunications cables 145w

Order paper (09:02:88) 286, 388w

Orders & regulations
Battery hens 726w
Speaker's rulings & statements (18:02:88) 1168

Ordnance Survey 129w

Organic farming
Agricultural production 329w

Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Debates etc.
European Council (15:02:88) 714, 716

Out-patient clinics
Per capita costs 626w

Out-patients 169w

Overseas aid
Bophuthatswana 33w, 428-9w
Cyprus 125w
Nicaragua 428w
Population 430w
Warships 32w

Overseas Aid (Assistance to the Poorest) Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (12:02:88) 670

Overseas development see Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Overseas investment 498
Public sector assets 336w
South Africa 233w

Overseas students
Community charge 456w

Overseas trade 34w

Overtime 548w
Immigration & Nationality Division 543-4w
Junior hospital doctors 172w

Owen, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
European Council (15:02:88) 715
Nazi war crimes (08:02:88) 31

Own resources (15:02:88) 705-17

Owner occupied housing
House prices 963
House purchase 963

Oxfordshire Health Authority
Hospital patients 169w

Paediatrics
South Wales 319w

Page, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Self-employed (15:02:88) 722
Questions
Business, Company law 353
Corporation tax 349
Insider trading, Company investigations 621w

Insolvency Service, Office dispersal 761w
Patent Office, Office dispersal 761w
Police custody, Fees & charges 138w
Private health services, France 187w
Public sector assets, Overseas investment 336w
Securities Association, Financial services 760-1w

Paice, Mr James
Debates etc.
Training (16:02:88) 828-9

Paisley Grammar School 688w

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc.
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 983-4
Questions
Homicide, Fermanagh 441-2w
Homicide, Northern Ireland 441w

Palace of Westminster
Energy conservation 58w

Palestine
Refugees 691w

Palestine Liberation Organisation
Defence equipment 425-6w
Export licensing 306w
Exports 305w
Training 437w

Paper
Government departments 537w
Recycling 537w

Paper industry
Industrial energy prices 345
Industrial production 344-5
Patent Office 345

Paramilitary forces
Tax evasion 593-4w

Parental contributions
Medical students 372w
Schools 808-9

Parental leave
EC countries 469-70w

Parish councils
Community charge 664w

Parkhead stadium
Public order policing 653w

Parkhurst Prison
Prison accommodation 1140

Parking
Bus stops 451w
Handicapped drivers 615w

Parking offences
Caravans 539w

Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil, Secretary of State for Energy
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Official engagements 508w, 511w, 693
Coal, South of Scotland Electricity Board 694
Coal fired power stations, Central Electricity Generating Board 509w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 696
Coal mining, Pay 695-6
Coal mining, Productivity 693-4
Electricity Council, Public appointments 509w
Electricity generation, Coastal areas 688
Electricity supply industry 688-9
Electricity supply industry, Advertising 508w
Electricity supply industry, Emergency planning 62w
Electricity supply industry, Privatisation 507-8w

Fast reactors, Science & technology research 507w
Hinkley Point C, Public inquiries 686-7
Lowry, David, Nuclear power 392w
National Union of Mineworkers, Departmental correspondence 344w
Nuclear power, Republic of Ireland 512w
Nuclear power, Television programmes 346w
Nuclear power stations, Ministers' domestic visits 589w
Office dispersal, Dept of Energy 511w
Power stations, Air pollution control 689
Power stations, Public inquiries 686
Union of Democratic Mineworkers, Official engagements 344w

Parliamentary constituencies
Scotland 734w

Parliamentary gifts
Australia (09:02:88) 169
St Christopher & Nevis (09:02:88) 169

Parliamentary privilege
Speaker's rulings & statements (09:02:88) 286

Parole 708w

Parry, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 939
Questions
Deportation, Liverpool 706w
Homelessness, Young people 658-9w

Part-time education
Tuition fees 216w

Passenger transport executives
Finance 748-9w

Passports
Administrative delays 707w

Patchett, Mr Terry
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Official engagements 511w
Coal mining, Capital investment 392w
Coal mining, Subsidence 393w
Coal reserves, Coal mining 392w
Community care, Barnsley 381-2w
Crime, Barnsley 361w
Hospital doctors, Disciplinary proceedings 177-8w
Job training scheme, Professional qualifications 151w
Medical malpractice, Trent Regional Health Authority 276-8w
Police, Barnsley 362w
Schools, Barnsley 373w

Patent Office 145-6w
Civil service dispersal (17:02:88) 1122-30
Office dispersal 761w
Paper industry 345

Patients
Blackburn Hyndburn & Ribble Valley Health Authority 558-60w

Patnick, Mr Irvine
Debates etc.
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 153
Questions
Hospital catering, Privatisation 173w
Hospital waiting lists, Sheffield Health Authority 96w
Productivity 494
Rate limitation 659w
Residuary bodies, Public appointments 753-4w
Schools, Sports facilities 577w

Patten, Mr Chris, Minister of State for Overseas Development
Questions
Bophuthatswana, Overseas aid 33w, 428-9w
Cyprus, Educational aid 125w
Cyprus, Overseas aid 125w
Developing countries, Family planning 428w
Food aid, OECD countries 604-5w
Food aid from EC, Cereals 687w
Food & Agriculture Organisation, USA 293w
Nicaragua, Overseas aid 428w
Overseas aid, Population 430w
Overseas aid, Warships 32w
Science & technology research, Loughborough University 32-3w
Science & technology research, York University 32w
Southern Africa, Debts 429-30w

Patten, Mr John, Minister of State at the Home Office
Debates etc.
Bombings, Birmingham (16:02:88) 954-8
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 141-5, 147, 150, 152
Malicious Communications Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 609, 617, 622-5, 631-8
Questions
Bombings, Birmingham 706w
Charities, Law reform 436w, 704w, 707-8w
Charities, Legislation 138-9w
Charities, Religious sects 704w
Crime, Barnsley 361w
Crime, Seaham 361w
Crime prevention, Nottingham 702w
Crime prevention, Private sector 702w
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board 543w, 707w
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, Administrative delays 707w
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, Police 544w
Disclosure of information, Trade unions 305w
Football, Hooliganism 438w
Forensic science, Dismissal 1138
Forensic science, Labour Party 1138
Gaming machines, Advisory services 304w
Homicide, Children 434w
Homicide, Life imprisonment 712-4w
Kidnapping, Insurance 545w
Local Development Agencies Development Fund, Finance 618w
Ministers' domestic visits, Basildon 708-9w
Miscarriages of justice, Court of appeal 705w
Miscarriages of justice, Home Affairs Select Committee 705w
Nuclear power stations, Fire services 436w
Offenders, Electronic surveillance 139-40w
Offensive weapons, Greater London 38w
Prisoners on remand, Remand in custody 1132
Public order offences 541w
Remand in custody 1132
Remand in custody, Community charge 1133
Road traffic offences, Greater London 542w
Skuse, Frank 701w, 1139
Skuse, Frank, Evidence 438-9w, 547w, 1138-9
Taxis, Crimes of violence 619-20w
Taxis, Homicide 767w
Youth custody, Alternatives to prison 709w

Pawsey, Mr James
Debates etc.
Consumer Arbitration Agreements Bill, Com (12:02:88) 671

Education Reform Bill, Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1084
Questions
Cars, Retail trade 255-6w
Education Reform Bill 1987/88 186
Extracurricular activities, Fees & charges 683-4w
Inflation 331w
Official engagements, Little Lowford 688w
School discipline 583w, 808
Wolston, Official engagements 518w

Pay
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority 100w
Coal mining 695-6
Dentists 135w
Doctors 135w
Juries 350w
Leader of the Opposition 657-8w
Married men 332w
Nurses 134-5w, 189w, 340w, 1147-8
Opposition Whips' Office 649w
Pharmacists 266-8w
Productivity 151w
Public expenditure 341w, 343w
Scotland 734-6w
Secretarial staff 134-5w
Service Children's Education Authority 383w
Speech therapists 266-8w
Teachers 578w

Pay settlements
Health service staff 115w, 497w
Nurses 185-6

PAYE
Tax evasion 422w

"Paying for Local Government Consultation Paper" 527-9w

Payments for Debt (Emergency Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1971
Questions
393-5w

Peachey Property
Insider trading 621w

Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Debates etc.
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 140, 142, 151
Questions
Community charges register, Voting rights 823-4
Drugs, APS 271w
Drugs, Licensing 271w
Entry clearances, Immigration controls 40w
Leeds-Bradford Airport, Public inquiries 31-2w, 132w
Management, Education 248w
Social security recipients 177

Peak Park Joint Planning Board
Local government elections 970-1
Public appointments 132-4w, 662w

Pedestrian crossings
Schools 46-7w

Peel, Robert 13-4

Pendry, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 235-7
Questions
Chelsea Football Club, Planning inquiries 298w
Football, Hooliganism 964-5

Pens
Consumer protection 340-1

Pension funds
Company investigations 90w
Tax allowances 90w

Pensioners
Age allowances 266w
Arts 467w
Concessionary television licences 1141-2
Electricity tariffs 691-2
Invalid care allowances 493w
Investment income 188w
Personal income 171w, 180w
Population 179-80w
Social security benefits 203-4w
Television licences 303w, 707w

Pensions
Tax yields 720-1w
Women 625-6w

Per capita costs
Hospital patients 487w
Mental patients 95-6w
NHS 632w
Out-patient clinics 626w
Public expenditure 339w
Surgery 626w

Percentage for Arts schemes 466-7w

Performance indicators
NHS 191w, 353w, 403w

Performance related pay
Higher civil servants 812-3

Performance reviews
Civil servants 702-3

Periodicals
Privy council 58w

Persian Gulf
Merchant ships 423-4w
Minesweepers 758w
Western European Union 423w

Personal equity plans 340w
Tax allowances 87-9w

Personal income 93-4w
Household surveys 527-8w
Pensioners 171w, 180w

Personal pensions 168w
Members' pensions 658w

Personal records
Police 137-8w
Social security benefits 694-5w

Personal social services
AIDS 168w
Expenditure 264-6w
Northern Ireland 324w
Scotland 139-40w
Wales 223-4w

Personal tax allowances 333w
Income tax 493
Tax yields 417w

Perth
Housing construction 649w

Pest control
Gastropods 724-5w

Pesticides
Gastropods 724-5w
Safety standards 329-30w

Peterloo 361w
Social security benefits 186-8w
Social security recipients 269w

Petroleum exploration
North Sea oil 689-90

Pharmacies
Family practitioner committees 200-2w
Population 201-2w
Wales 598w

Pharmacists
Manpower 624-5w
Pay 266-8w

Philippines
Visas 303-4w

Photographic equipment
Production 531w

Pigmeat
Exports 675-6w
Monetary compensatory amounts 820
Wales 463w

Pigs
Animal breeding 58-62w

Pike, Mr Peter L
Debates etc.
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1232
Rate Support Grant (England) Supplementary Reports (17:02:88) 1114-5
Questions
BBC 702-3w
Electricity tariffs, Price increases 690-1
European Regional Development Fund, EC grants & loans 146-7w
Hartley Hospital, Hospital closures 698w
Hospital consultants, Contracts of employment 556w
NHS finance 556w
NHS finance, Emergency planning 197w
Nurses, Geriatrics 624w
Official engagements 135w
Private patients, Administrative costs 623w
Public expenditure, Pay 343w
Remand in custody, Community charge 1133
St Mary's Hospital Manchester, Hospital closures 501
South Africa, Economic sanctions 425w
Sportsgrounds, Public order policing 663w
Student Awards Review Committee 571w
Surgery, NHS & private practice 623w

Pilgrim School Bedford
School closures 310w

Plain language
EC law 57w

Planning
Mental health community care 97w

Planning appeals 455w, 660w, 662w
Administrative delays 288w, 719w
Planning authorities 660w
Scotland 320w
Worthing Borough Council 19-20w

Planning authorities
National parks 971
Planning appeals 660w
Town & country planning 660w

Planning inquiries
Chelsea Football Club 298w
Hypermarkets 969-70

Planning permission 660w
Administrative delays 669w
Chelsea Football Club 962-3
Farm buildings 662w
Illuminated signs 21w
Property development 660w
Urban planning 961-2
Westminster pier 670w

Play groups 581w

Plutonium
Nuclear safeguards 530w
Transport of radioactive materials 590w

Plymouth Health Authority 184w

Points of order
Speaker's rulings & statements (08:02:88) 24, (10:02:88) 364, 366-7, 373, 473, (16:02:88) 827, 839-40, 925, 935-6, 944-6, (17:02:88) 1124

Poison pen letters (12:02:88) 607-25, 31-56

Poisons
Birds 61w

Police
Barnsley 362w
Computer applications 617-8w
Computer privacy 305w
Computers 728w
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board 544w
Domestic violence 65w
Ethnic minorities 704w
Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1987/88 1137-8
Hampshire 435-6w
Injuries 136w
Leicestershire 705w
London City Airport 41w
Manpower 620w, 1133
Northumberland 620w, 1133
Personal records 137-8w
Scotland 728w
West Yorkshire 1134

Police & Criminal Evidence Act 1984
Questions
1142-3
Crime prevention 1142

Police authorities
Rate precepts (08:02:88) 140-61

Police Authority for Northern Ireland (17:02:88) 977-96

Police community liaison committees
Isle of Wight 434w

Police Complaints Authority 303w

Police custody 703w
Fees & charges 138w
Prisoners on remand 435w, 703w
Young people 434-5w

Police detention (16:02:88) 925-49

Police Federation see Police Federation of England & Wales

Police Federation of England & Wales 617w

Police misconduct
Stalker, John 216w

Police national computer 35w, 617-8w
Government data network 721w
Scotland 728w

Police right of search
Offensive weapons 617w

Police stations 37-8w

Politicians
USA 85-6w

Pollution
Forests 775w

Pollution control
Sulphur dioxide 666-7w

Polychlorinated biphenyl
Land pollution 741w

Polytechnics & Colleges Funding Council 308-9w
Public appointments 309w

Pontefract Health Authority
Hospital beds 560w
Hospital consultants 559-60w
Nurses 560-1w
Public appointments 561w

Population
Clydesdale 142w, 656w
Overseas aid 430w

Pensioners 179-80w
Pharmacies 201-2w

Pornography
Telephones 350

Porter, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Passenger transport executives, Rate precepts (09:02:88) 299, 309, 311-2, 316, 321-2

Porter, Mr David
Questions
Pensioners, Population 179-80w

Portillo, Mr Michael, Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security
Debates etc.
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1201-4
Questions
Availability for work, Social security benefits disqualification 696-7w
Board & lodging charges, Social security recipients 113w
Capital rules 177
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices, Camberwell 698-700w
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices, Civil service manpower 351w
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices, Greenock 404w
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices, Resignations 180-2w
Dept of Health & Social Security special investigators, Cost effectiveness 492w
Dept of Health & Social Security special investigators, Seaham 402w
Exceptional needs payments, Camberwell 700w
Exceptional needs payments, Expenditure 116w, 699w
Exceptional needs payments, Leicester 694w
Exceptional needs payments, North East region 500-2w
Exceptional needs payments, Social security recipients 205-6w
Family income 399w
Housing benefits, Lambeth 559w
Housing benefits, Local government social services 621w
Housing benefits, Private rented housing 347w
Housing benefits, Social security benefits rules 779w
Housing benefits, Social security reform 177, 775w
Housing benefits, Thamesmead Town 110w
Housing benefits, Wakefield District Council 347w
Means tested benefits, Social security recipients 185-6w
National insurance contributions 354w, 630-1w
National insurance contributions, Tax evasion 353-4w
National insurance credits, Expenditure 354w
NHS finance, National insurance contributions 778w
Office of Population Censuses & Surveys, Libraries 780w
Pay, Juries 350w
Resettlement units, Bishopbriggs 98w
Sexual harassment, Dept of Health & Social Security 554w
Social Fund, Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 181
Social security, Advisory services 566w
Social security benefits, Computer privacy 693-4w
Social security benefits, Personal records 694-5w
Social security benefits, Peterlee 186-8w
Social security benefits, Students 695w
Social security benefits uprating 176-7
Social security claims, Take-up 75w
Social security payments 177
Social security recipients 177
Social security recipients, Seaham 269w
Social security reform 180-1
Social security reform, Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 351-2w
Supplementary benefits, Cleveland 114w
Supplementary benefits, Darlington 113-4w
Supplementary benefits, Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 493w
Supplementary benefits, Dundee 495-6w
Supplementary benefits, Scotland 302-4w
Supplementary benefits, Social security recipients 348w
Unemployment benefits, Social security benefits disqualification 696w
War widows' pensions, Age allowances 494-5w

Ports
Hazardous materials 739w

Positive vetting
Civil servants 86w
Northern Ireland 86w
Rover Group 305w, 444w

Post Office 306w, 415w
Monopoly 248w

Postgraduate students
Student numbers 813

Poverty trap
Family credit 176w

Powell, Mr Ray
Debates etc.
Grandparents (Adoption of Children) Bill, 1R (17:02:88) 997-9
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Official engagements 20
Coal prices 687
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 170-1w
Valleys initiative, Ogwr valley 10
Welsh Grand Committee, Press conferences 746w

Powell, Mr William
Questions
British Steel Corporation, Privatisation 351
Economic growth 336w

Power station closures 589w

Power stations 589w
Air pollution control 689
Public inquiries 686

Prais, Sigbert 682-3w

Precept Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Greater Manchester Transport Authority) Order 1988
Debates etc.
(09:02:88) 287-307

Precept Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Inner London Education Authority) Order 1988
Debates etc.
(10:02:88) 453-76

Precept Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority) Order 1988
Debates etc.
(09:02:88) 308-28

Precept Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority) Order 1988
Debates etc.
(09:02:88) 287-307

Pregnancy
AIDS 785w

Pre-school education
Northumberland 578w
Scotland 71w
Special education 578w

Prescott, Mr John
Questions
Electricity supply industry 688-9
Electricity supply industry, Privatisation 508w
Electricity tariffs, Price increases 692-3

Prescription charges
Income 174w

Prescriptions
Costs 622-3w
Family doctors 555w
Fraud 622-3w

Press conferences
Welsh Grand Committee 746w

Press releases
Dept of Education & Science 373w

Preston
Unemployment 474-5w

Prestwich
Shopping centres 969-70

Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984
Questions
41w, 703w, 705w

Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988
Debates etc.
(16:02:88) 925-49

Price, Sir David
Questions
Fawley A, Electricity generation 512w
Superconductivity, Industry 607w

Price increases
Electricity tariffs 690-3
Manufacturing industries 548w

Prices 340w
Manufactured goods 249w
Wheat 726w

Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Questions
"Family Fortunes" 175w
Financial institutions, "DTI the Department for Enterprise White Paper" 259w
Homelessness, Bristol 972
Skuse, Frank 701w

Primary education
Burntwood 811-2
Cost per pupil 811
Scotland 481w

Primary health care
Gwent 8

Prime Minister 134-5w, 182

Prime Minister's Efficiency Unit 295w
Civil service 294-5w

Prime Minister's questions
NHS finance 182
Speaker's rulings & statements (09:02:88) 187, 188, (16:02:88) 822, 823, (18:02:88) 1145

Printing industry
Production 248w

Prison accommodation
Parkhurst Prison 1140
Remand in custody 362w

Prison education services
Local education authorities 40-1w

Prison medical services
Wormwood Scrubs 302w

Prison overcrowding 438w

Prison population
Maghaberry Prison 591w
Mentally ill 546w
Scotland 71w
Young offenders 71w

Prison riots
Costs 1139-40

Prison staff
Brixton Prison 1140
Chelmsford Prison 702w

Prisoners
Advisory services 542w
AIDS 620w
Marriage 437-8w
Road traffic offences 439-40w
USA 709-10w
Welsh language 701w

Prisoners on remand
Magistrates' courts 36w
Police custody 435w, 703w
Remand in custody 1132

Prisoners' release
Mentally ill 546w

Prisons
Bibles 619w
Crown immunity 704w
Fine defaulters 71w
Privatisation 361w, 704w, 1134
Speech therapy 541-2w
Visual arts 568w

Prisons Inspectorate see HM Inspectorate of Prisons

Private education
Northumberland 585w
Pupils 765-8w
South East region 765-8w

Private health services
Abortion 780w
France 187w
Germany 187w
NHS finance 623w
Wales 318-9w

Private investment
Public expenditure 722w
UK 2000 669-70w
Wales 3

Private Members' Bills (09:02:88) 186
Speaker's rulings & statements (12:02:88) 675

Private Members' motions (17:02:88) 996
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1261-320

Private patients 503w
Administrative costs 623w
NHS charges 498-500w

Private rented housing
Housing benefits 347w
Landlord & tenant 501-2

Private sector
Civil Service College 703
Crime prevention 702w
Inner city areas 258w

Privately owned mines
Opencast mining 684w

Privatisation 95w, 337w, 486-8
Austin Rover 251-2w
British Coal Corporation 509w, 512w
British Steel Corporation 147-8w, 341-2, 351-2
Crown Suppliers 126w
Electricity supply industry 507-8w
Hospital catering 173w
Laundries 173w
Local government services 289-90w
Metropolitan Police 436w
Nature reserves 127-8w
Nuclear power 507-8w
Prisons 361w, 704w, 1134
Property Services Agency 967
Roads 243w
Rolls-Royce Aeroengines 486-7
Royal ordnance factories 498
Tenders 92w
Water supply industry 461w

Privy council
Periodicals 58w

Proceeds of crime
Drug crimes 541w, 701w

Procurators fiscal
Sexual offences 321-2w
Tayside 321-2w

Procurement
House of Commons Library 17

Production quotas
Cereals 612w
Milk 726w

Productivity 335w, 494-5
Coal mining 693-4
Coal prices 687
Manufacturing industries 262-4w
Mining equipment 224-5w
Pay 151w

Professional qualifications
Accountants 647-8w
Job training scheme 151w

Profit sharing
Departmental leaflets 387w

Profitability 330w, 342w
Electricite de France 513w
Leyland Trucks 255w

"Project 2000" 176-7w

Property development
Demolition 660w
Planning permission 660w

Property Services Agency
Bradford 967
Cash limits 720w
Civil service manpower 967-8
Efficiency scrutinies 299-302w
Privatisation 967
Trading funds 967

Property transfer (11:02:88) 523
Heveningham hall 720w
Local government land 659w
Thamesmead Town 21w

Proprietary drugs
Generic prescribing 555w
Hospital doctors 352w

Prosecutions
Election offences 361w
Indecent Displays (Control) Act 1981 616w
Old people's homes 98w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 223w, 685w
School violence 66w
Stalker, John 291w
Tax evasion 421w

Prosthetics
Administrative delays 200w

Protest
Ministry of Defence 1144

PSA see Property Services Agency

Public access 720w, 780w

Public Accounts Commission
Expenditure 44w

Public appointments
District health authorities 167w
Electricity Council 509w
Grimsby Health Authority 491w
Inner London Education Authority 308-9w
Licensed conveyancers 365w
London Regional Passengers' Committee 743-4w
National parks 133w
NHS Management Board 206-7w
Peak Park Joint Planning Board 132-4w, 662w
Polytechnics & Colleges Funding Council 309w
Pontefract Health Authority 561w
Regional health authorities 167w
Residuary bodies 753-4w
Universities Funding Council 217w
Wales 597-600w

Public bodies
Accounting 420w

Public corporations 415w
Accounting 420w

Public expenditure 341w, 489
Derelict land grants 671w
Education 342w
Government departments 770w
Hospitals 341w
Inflation 331-2w
NHS 341w
Opposition parties 657w
Pay 341w, 343w
Per capita costs 339w
Private investment 722w
Scotland 773-4w
UK 2000 669-70w
Wales 319w

"Public Expenditure White Paper" 773-4w

Public footpaths 295w

Public houses
Smoking 190w

Public inquiries
Hinkley Point B 345w
Hinkley Point C 686-7
Judges 364w
Leeds-Bradford Airport 31-2w, 132w
M3-M27 link 356w
Power stations 686

Public investment 332w, 338-9w, 343w

Public libraries 465-6w
Nottinghamshire 151w

Public order offences 541w

Public order policing
Parkhead stadium 653w
Sportsgrounds 663w

Public petitions
Community charge (10:02:88) 477
Motorway service areas (08:02:88) 161

Public records
Official secrets 241w
Waldheim, Kurt 750w

Public sector assets
Nuclear power 226w
Overseas investment 336w

Public sector borrowing 247w

Public sector borrowing requirement 335w, 496

Public service pensions
Retail price index 688w

Public service vehicles
Bus crews 740w
Driving licences 613-4w, 740w
Motor vehicle testing 741w

Publicity
Computer privacy 618-9w

Publishing 350
Industrial production 350
Research 350w
Stalker, John 824

Pullen, Jason
Standing Order No 20 applications (10:02:88) 365

Punishment attacks
Criminal injuries compensation 86w
Northern Ireland 86w

Pupil records
Disclosure of information 309-10w

Pupil-teacher ratios 580w

Pupils
Inner London boroughs 162w
Private education 765-8w
Swimming 158-9w

Purbeck
Unemployment 10

Quin, Ms Joyce
Questions
Electricity tariffs, Competition 506-7w
Forests 480w
Forests, Northumberland 480w
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 171w
Nature Conservancy Council, Official engagements 665w
Tax allowances, Forestry 95w
Universities 580w

Racal Tacticom 305w, 425-6w, 437w

Racial discrimination
Local authorities 971-2

Radiation hazards
HMS Resolution 756-7w
Rain 238w
Safety standards 225w

Radiation protection
Ionizing radiation 771w

Radice, Mr Giles
Questions
Business statements 506

Radio
Broadcast journalism 40w
Broadcasting controls 362w
Drama 708w
Radio frequencies 40w
Rural areas 39w

Radio Authority 39-40w

Radio frequencies
Radio 40w

Radioactive waste disposal
European Commission 461-2w
Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive 666w
Seas & oceans 286w

Radioactive wastes
EC action 753w
European Commission 287w
European Parliament 286-7w
Sellafield 287w
Transport of hazardous materials 286-7w

Radioactivity
Agricultural research 62w, 465w
Cumbria 62w
Land pollution 465w
Lasers 695-6w
Sheep 369w

Radiotherapy 782-4w
Southend Hospital 174-5w, 496-7w, 699w

RAF see Air force

RAF Lakenheath
Official engagements 688w

Raffan, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Training (16:02:88) 831
Questions
Community charge, Mobile homes 81w
Regional aid, Wales 2
School meals, Wales 6-7

Railway freight transport
Government grants 453w

Railway Inspectorate 412w
Railway safety 244w

Railway land
Trespass 357w

Railway network
Channel tunnel 246w

Railway safety
Railway Inspectorate 244w

Railway stations
London Underground 3w
Trains 453-4w

Railway travel
South East region 355-6w

Rain
Radiation hazards 238w
West Yorkshire 238w

Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1051-5
Questions
Capital rules 177

Ramsden, Michael 384-6w

Randall, Mr Stuart
Debates etc.
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 849-51, 859, 863-7, 888, 892-7
Questions
Genetics, Blood tests 1137
Immigration, Members 1136
Immigration controls, Genetics 708w

Rape
Abortion 111w

Rate increases
Cleveland County Council 347
Uniform business rate 457-8w

Rate limitation 382w, 524-5w, 659w
Basildon District Council 665w
Local government expenditure 526-8w

Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximums) (Rates) Order 1988
Debates etc.
(18:02:88) 1208-52

Rate precepts 218-20w
Fire services (08:02:88) 140-61
Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive (09:02:88) 287-307
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 453-76
Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive (09:02:88) 308-28, 739w
Police authorities (08:02:88) 140-61
West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (09:02:88) 287-307

Rate rebates
Dundee 70w

"Rate Support Grant (England) Supplementary (No 3) Report 1986/87" (17:02:88) 1109-21

"Rate Support Grant (England) Supplementary (No 4) Report 1983/84" 754-5w

"Rate Support Grant (England) Supplementary (No 4) Report 1984/85" (17:02:88) 1109-21

Rate support grants 754-5w
Inner London Education Authority 308w
Scotland 731w

Rates & rating 455-6w
Domestic rates 70w
Electorate 369w
Farm buildings 462w
Income support scheme 489-90w
London Boroughs Association 663w

Rathbone, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1156
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 361
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 275

Reading Borough Council
Training 315-6w

Rear seat belts
Car hire 616w

Recording equipment
Production 532w

Recruitment
Nurses 167w

Recycling
Paper 537w

Redmond, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 116-7
Questions
Health 175
Royal Observer Corps 440w

Redundancy
Iron & steel industry 533w
Manchester City Council 14

Redundant churches 15
Church Commissioners 14-5

Redwood, Mr John
Debates etc.
Structure plans, Berkshire (11:02:88) 599-601
Questions
Disposable income 497
Town & country planning 963

Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1161
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 279-82
Nazi war crimes (08:02:88) 30
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 987-8
Questions
Community charges register, Electoral register 961
Skuse, Frank 701w

Referenda
Chile 292w

"Reform of Social Security White Paper" 786-7w

Refugees
Palestine 691w
South Africa 236w

Regional aid 346
Bridgend 352
"DTI the Department for Enterprise White Paper" 252w
Dundee 483-4w
European Regional Development Fund 253w
Regional selective assistance 533-6w
Strathclyde 368w
Tayside 483-4w
Wales 1-3, 6, 352, 686-7w
York 534w

Regional arts associations
Arts Council grants 570w

Regional development grants
Scotland 483w
Wales 75-6w, 363-4w

Regional health authorities
Expenditure 698w
Hospital consultants 272-4w
Hospital patients 272-4w
Hospital waiting lists 489w
NHS finance 179-81w
Public appointments 167w

Regional selective assistance 1-2, 252-3w, 363w, 534w, 686-7w
Employment opportunities 306w
Greenock 368w
Regional aid 533-6w
Wales 76-7w, 517w

Reid, Dr John
Debates etc.
Bombings, Birmingham (16:02:88) 955
Business statements (18:02:88) 1162-3
Questions
Community charge 664w
Electricity supply industry, Privatisation 508w
Hospital waiting lists 277-8w
Immigration, Members 710w
Nurses, Pay settlements 185-6
Public investment 338-9w

Religious education 574w

Religious sects
Charities 704w

Relocation of employees
Wales 76-7w

Remand in custody 1132, 1134
Community charge 1133
Magistrates' courts 36-7w
Prison accommodation 362w
Prisoners on remand 1132

Rent arrears 667w
Council house rents 973
Local authorities 973

Rent control
Thamesmead Town 22w

Rent increases
Housing associations 669w
Housing subsidies 527w

Rented housing
Skilled workers 456w

Renton, Mr Tim, Minister of State at the Home Office
Debates etc.
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 847-921 passim
Questions
AIDS, Immigration 546w
BBC 702-3w
Begum, Salema, Immigration applications 1136-7
British citizenship, Departmental correspondence 546-7w
Computer privacy, National security 619w
Computer privacy, Publicity 618-9w
Concessionary television licences, Pensioners 1141-2
Deportation, Liverpool 706w
Ejoh, Orkechurkwu Emmanuel, Immigrant detainees 138w
Entry clearances, Immigration controls 40w
Genetics, Blood tests 362w, 1137
Immigrant detainees 215-6w
Immigrant detainees, Ethnic groups 39w
Immigration, Members 710w, 1135-6
Immigration, Tower Hamlets Borough Council 710w
Immigration & Nationality Division, Administrative delays 136w
Immigration & Nationality Division, Civil service manpower 137w
Immigration & Nationality Division, Languages 543w
Immigration & Nationality Division, Overtime 543-4w
Immigration appeals 438w
Immigration applications 215w
Immigration controls, Genetics 708w
Immigration rules 709w
Indecent Displays (Control) Act 1981, Prosecutions 616w
Independent Broadcasting Authority, Official engagements 709w
Leicester, Home Office 437w
Meyer, Gene, Immigration controls 545-6w
Migration, Northern Ireland 711w
Ministers' visits abroad, Costs 215w
Palestine Liberation Organisation, Training 437w
Passports, Administrative delays 707w
Radio, Broadcast journalism 40w
Radio, Broadcasting controls 362w
Radio, Drama 708w
Radio, Radio frequencies 40w
Radio, Rural areas 39w
"Sex", Terrence Higgins Trust 620-1w
Television, Broadcasting controls 703w
Television licences, Pensioners 303w, 707w
Television licences, Students 38w
Television programmes, Army in Northern Ireland 712w
Temporary immigrants, Immigration applications 137w
Visas, Immigration applications 140w
Visas, Philippines 303-4w
Work permits, Law reform 712w

Representation of the People Act 1983
Questions
361w

Reprography
Copyright 145w

Republic of Ireland
Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference 149w, 328w, 604w
Contracts 166w
Extradition 164-5w, 685-6w
Immigration 711w
Military aircraft 318w, 776w
Ministerial statements 325w
Nuclear power 512w
Rescue services 755-6w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 391w
Take-up of employment 718w
Youth employment schemes 717-8w

Rescue services
Air force 238-9w, (11:02:88) 524-98
Costs 739w
Helicopters 387w
Republic of Ireland 755-6w

Research
Higher education 47w
Inner London Education Authority 682w
Publishing 350w

Research councils
Universities 581w

Research finance
France 582w
Science & technology research 163w, 813-4
West Germany 582w

Resettlement Review Advisory Steering Group 182w

Resettlement units
Bishopbriggs 98w
Homelessness 182w

Residential care
Elderly 65w
Local government staff 696w
Scotland 729-30w
Wales 6886w

Residuary bodies
Annual reports 658w
Public appointments 753-4w

Resignations
Army 83w
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 180-2w
District health authorities 168-9w
London Docklands Development Corporation 127-8w
National Curriculum Mathematics Working Group 682-3w

Restart programme
Cheshire 150w
Interviews 470w

Restrictive labour practices 204w

Retail price index
National savings 567w
Public service pensions 688w
Retirement pensions 272w
Social security benefits 114-5w, 247-8w, 272w, 349w, 722w, 779-80w, 821-2, 1146
Social security payments 494w
Voluntary organisations 266w

Retail prices
Butter 676-7w

Retail trade 442w
Cars 255-6w
Compact discs 344
Electronic equipment 33-4w
Telecommunications industry 339

Retirement
Teachers 310w

Retirement age
Women 625-6w

Retirement pensions 173w
Age addition 98-9w
Married women 99w
Retail price index 272w

Rhodes James, Mr Robert
Questions
Business statements 506
Higher education 809-10
Waldheim, Kurt, Nazi war crimes 519-20w, 750w
Waldheim, Kurt, Public records 750w
Waldheim, Kurt, United Nations 750-1w

Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 460-1
Questions
Budget, EC Finance Council 419w
Diplomatic service, Kensington & Chelsea 55w
Family income 399w
Health services, Expenditure 264-6w
NHS, Scotland 139-40w
NHS, Wales 223-4w
NHS finance, Northern Ireland 324w
Uniform business rate, Rate increases 457-8w

Urban programme 129-31w

Richardson, Ms Jo
Questions
Sexual harassment, Attorney-General 291w
Sexual harassment, Dept of Education & Science 158w
Sexual harassment, Dept of Employment 73-4w
Sexual harassment, Dept of Health & Social Security 554w
Sexual harassment, Dept of the Environment 20w
Sexual harassment, Dept of Trade & Industry 33w
Sexual harassment, Dept of Transport 1-2w
Sexual harassment, Foreign & Commonwealth Office 55w
Sexual harassment, Home Office 302w
Sexual harassment, Ministry of Agriculture 61w
Sexual harassment, Ministry of Defence 317w
Sexual harassment, Northern Ireland Office 323-4w
Sexual harassment, Scottish Office 320w
Sexual harassment, Treasury 92w

Richmond house 522-3w

Riddick, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Training (16:02:88) 834
Questions
Community charge, Government grants to local authorities 456w
EC internal trade, Trade barriers 256w
Margam mine 10
Privatisation 337w
Urban planning, Planning permission 961-2

Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas, Secretary of State for the Environment
Debates etc.
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1208-14, 1216, 1218-9, 1242
Questions
Boxing, Safety 287w
Community charge 961, 976
Community charge, Departmental correspondence 960-1
Community charges register, Electoral register 961
Dept of the Environment, Cash limits 128-9w
Dept of the Environment, Civil service dispersal 287w
Domestic rates 960
Economic League, Dept of the Environment 297w
Football 965
Football, Alcoholic drinks 965
Football, Hooliganism 964-5
Homelessness, Bed & breakfast accommodation 661w
Homelessness, Bristol 972
Housing Corporation 966-7
Local government expenditure 525-6w
Local government services, Direct labour departments 461w
Local government services, Privatisation 289-90w
National parks, Planning authorities 971
Nature reserves 959-60
Nature reserves, Land ownership & tenure 959
Peak Park Joint Planning Board, Local government elections 970-1
Rate limitation 382w, 524-5w
Rate limitation, Local government expenditure 526-8w
Rate support grants 754-5w
Sewers, Fulmer 659w
Sexual harassment, Dept of the Environment 20w

Skiing, Death 458w
Sportsgrounds, Public order policing 663w
Storms, Government grants to local authorities 522w
Water authorities, Official engagements 296w, 669w
Water authorities, Water pollution 669w

Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm, Secretary of State for Scotland
Questions
A74, Road works 477w, 540w
Breast cancer, Scotland 483w
Ministers' visits abroad, Scottish Office 221w
Multiple occupation, Fire escapes 321-2w
Parliamentary constituencies, Scotland 734w
Procurators fiscal, Sexual offences 321-2w
Public expenditure, Scotland 773-4w
Residential care, Elderly 65w
Sexual harassment, Scottish Office 320w

Right of Privacy Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (12:02:88) 676

Right to buy
Council house sales 296w
Departmental publications 670w

Rights of way
Land ownership & tenure 19w
Local government expenditure 450-1w

Risley Remand Centre
Body searches 544-5w
Medical treatments 620w

Ritblat, John 621w

River Clyde
Naval bases 737w
Nuclear submarines 736-8w

River Mersey 739w

Road accidents
Buses 410-1w
Cycling 412-3w
Motorways 616w
Transport of radioactive materials 241w
Winchester bypass 356w

Road construction
A27 742-3w
Ashbourne bypass 452w
Bypasses 451w
Contracts 2-4w
Disley bypass 748w
M20 742w
M62 748w

Road damage
Axle weights 245w

Road finance
Capital investment 358-60w
Local government expenditure 358-60w

Road safety 242-3w

Road tax
Tax evasion 452-3w

Road tolls
Severn bridge 9, 450w

Road traffic
Car ownership 357w
Greater London 614w
M25 614-5w, 742w
Motorways 741-2w
Surrey 357w

Road traffic offences
Greater London 542w
Prisoners 439-40w

Road works
A74 477w, 540w
Contracts 65w, 119-20w
Scotland 65w
Wales 119-20w

Roads
Privatisation 243w

Roberts, Mr Allan
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 209, 215, 216
Questions
Defence land, Horse riding 384w
Exhaust emissions 381w
Housing associations 966
NHS administration, Costs 166w
Public expenditure, Pay 341w
Water pollution, EC law 380-1w
Water pollution, Yorkshire Water Authority 379-80w

Roberts, Mr Wyn, Minister of State for Wales
Questions
Bus services, Wales 77w
Bypasses, Wales 77w
Education, Clwyd 463w
Education, Expenditure 745w
Road works, Contracts 119-20w
School meals, Wales 6-7
Teacher training, Wales 224w
Welsh Arts Council, Official engagements 11

Robertson, Mr George
Questions
Armilla patrol, Members' correspondence 756w
Armilla patrol, Merchant ships 446w, 448-9w
EC internal trade, Conferences 536-7w
EC internal trade, Employment 537w
Income tax, Personal tax allowances 493
Persian Gulf, Merchant ships 423-4w
Scottish Special Housing Association 321w

Roe, Mrs Marion, Under-Secretary of State for the Environment
Debates etc.
Structure plans, Berkshire (11:02:88) 603-6
Questions
Badgers, Nature conservation 379w
Caravan sites, Local authorities 458-60w
Council house rents, London boroughs 524w
Council house waiting lists 22-4w
Council house waiting lists, London boroughs 22w
Empty housing, Vale Royal 297w
Environment protection, Disclosure of information 462w
European Year of the Environment, Environment protection 523-4w
Hazardous wastes, Seaham 379w
Heveningham hall, Property transfer 720w
"Home Improvement Policy Consultation Paper" 719w
Homelessness 661w
Homelessness, Bed & breakfast accommodation 663w
Homelessness, Departmental leaflets 22w, 661w
Homelessness, Greater London 296-7w
Homelessness, Households 661w
House renovation grants, Age 457w
Housing associations, Finance 379w
Housing associations, Northumberland 520-1w
Housing associations, Rent increases 669w
Housing construction, Housing finance 456-7w
Housing improvement, Housing Corporation 662w
Listed buildings, Codes of practice 521w
Litter, Waste disposal 666w
Multiple occupation 665w
Nature Conservancy Council, Official engagements 665w
Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive, Official engagements 671w

Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive, Radioactive waste disposal 666w
Public footpaths 295w
Radioactive waste disposal, European Commission 461-2w
Radioactive waste disposal, Seas & oceans 286w
Radioactive wastes, EC action 753w
Radioactive wastes, European Commission 287w
Radioactive wastes, European Parliament 286-7w
Radioactive wastes, Sellafield 287w
Rented housing, Skilled workers 456w
Rural areas, Development Commission 753w
Rural areas, Government assistance 461w
Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Nature Conservancy Council 296w
South West Housing Society, Government grants 5-6w
Sulphur dioxide, Pollution control 666-7w
Thamesmead Town, Greenwich 21w
Thamesmead Town, Property transfer 21w
Thamesmead Town, Rent control 22w
Thamesmead Town, Tenants' rights 22w
Tree conservation 673w
Urban development corporations, Telford 666w
Waste disposal, Hazardous wastes 297w
Waste disposal, West Yorkshire 296w
Water, Infant foods 571-2w
Water authorities, External financing limits 752-3w
Water authorities, Official engagements 669w
Water pollution, EC law 380-1w
Water pollution, Yorkshire Water Authority 379-80w
Water supply, Water charges 288w
Water supply disconnections 288w
Water supply industry, Privatisation 461w
Water supply industry, Sewers 459-61w

Rogers, Mr Allan
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 530, 536-43, 551, 555, 563, 570, 587-90, 592
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 945
Private notice question point of order (08:02:88) 24
Questions
Coal mine closures, South Wales 5-6

Rolls-Royce Aeroengines 257w
Privatisation 486-7
Shares 486

Romania
European Security Conference 233w
Historic buildings 425w

Rooker, Mr Jeff
Debates etc.
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1243-5
Rate Support Grant (England) Supplementary Reports (17:02:88) 1112-3
Questions
Community charge 961
Finance Act 1984, Companies 419-20w
Industrial development, Birmingham 969
Social security benefits, Retail price index 115w

Ross, Mr Ernie
Debates etc.
Training (16:02:88) 833
Questions
Universities Funding Council, Scotland 579w

Ross, Mr William
Questions
Cars, Northern Ireland 165w, 284w
Extradition, Republic of Ireland 164-5w
Salmon, Fishery protection 325-6w

Rost, Mr Peter
Questions
Copyright, Reprography 145w
Electricity supply industry, Privatisation 508w
Electricity tariffs, Price increases 692

Rotherham
Exceptional needs payments 175w

Rougier, Jeremy 127-8w

Rover Group
Positive vetting 305w, 444w

Rowe, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 104
Public petitions, Motorway service areas (08:02:88) 161
Self-employed (15:02:88) 725, 740, 744, 752-3
Training (16:02:88) 829
Questions
Film, Voluntary organisations 500
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 180
Teachers, Conditions of employment 53w

Rowlands, Mr Ted
Questions
South Wales, Government assistance 5
WINvest 363-4w

Royal Association for Disability & Rehabilitation 615w

Royal College of General Practitioners 353w

Royal Observer Corps 440w

Royal Opera House 568-70w

Royal ordnance factories
Privatisation 498

Royal prerogative
Intelligence services 39w

Royal Shakespeare Company 568-70w

Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children & Adults 170-1

Royal Ulster Constabulary 83w, 216w, 723-4w, 824, 1146-7
Inquiries 46w, 165w, 394w, 499, 502, (17:02:88) 977-96, 1146-7
Manpower 674w
Ministerial statements 325w, (17:02:88) 977-96
Prosecutions 223w, 685w
Republic of Ireland 391w
Sick leave 85-6w

RSC see Royal Shakespeare Company

RUC see Royal Ulster Constabulary

Ruddock, Mrs Joan
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1049-51
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1212
Questions
AIDS, Immigration 546w
Bombings, Birmingham 436-7w
Buses, Crimes of violence 412w
Community care, NHS finance 183w
Housing associations, Finance 379w
Inner London Education Authority 575w
Meyer, Gene, Immigration controls 545-6w
NHS finance, South East region 213w
Official engagements 690w

Rumbold, Mrs Angela, Minister of State for Education & Science
Debates etc.
Education Reform Bill, Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1095-6, 1098
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 472, (17:02:88) 1068-73
Questions
City technology colleges 574w
City technology colleges, Wolverhampton 574w
Curriculum 572w
Dept of Education & Science, Press releases 373w
Education Reform Bill 1987/88, Leicestershire 573w
Educational administration, Inner London boroughs 371-2w
Educational administration, Local education authorities 572-3w
English education 581-2w
Examinations 573-4w
Examinations, Curriculum 371w, 572w
First Division Association, Official engagements 574w, 812
General Certificate of Secondary Education 575-6w
General Certificate of Secondary Education, Examinations 163w
Higher civil servants, Performance related pay 812-3
Inner London Education Authority 308w, 575w
Inner London Education Authority, Educational standards 575w
Inner London Education Authority, Expenditure 218-20w
Inner London Education Authority, Rate support grants 308w
Inner London Education Authority, Sports 162w
Literacy, Educational finance 807
National Curriculum Mathematics Working Group, Resignations 682-3w
Pupil records, Disclosure of information 309-10w
Pupils, Swimming 158-9w
Religious education 574w
School admission, Rural areas 819
School discipline 583w, 808
School leaving, Further education 582w
School leaving, Literacy 807
Schools, Rural areas 819
Schools, Swimming 159w
Schools, Water safety 158w
Sex education, Secondary education 581w
Sexual harassment, Dept of Education & Science 158w
Teachers, Conditions of employment 53w
Teachers, Degrees 371w
Teachers, Educational standards 582-3w
Teachers, Industrial disputes 371w
Teachers, Mathematics education 160w
Teachers, Pay 578w
Teachers, Retirement 310w
Teachers, Trade union membership 371w
Teachers, Trade unions 578w, 581w

Run of the river schemes 319-20w

Runcorn 74w

Rural areas
Development Commission 288w, 753w
Government assistance 461w
Northern Ireland 592w
Private Members' motions (19:02:88) 1261-320
Radio 39w
School admission 819
Schools 819

Rural development 288w, 461w, (19:02:88) 1261-320

Rural transport innovation grant scheme 307w

Ryan, Michael
Firearms 304w

Sackville, Mr Tom
Questions
Coal prices, Electricity tariffs 688
Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, Manpower 468w

Safety
Boxing 287w

Safety belts
Buses 411w

Safety standards
Ambulance services 409w
EC action 260w
Pesticides 329-30w
Radiation hazards 225w
Tyre tread depths 749w

Sainsbury, Mr Tim, Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement
Debates etc.
Clyde Submarine Base, Fraud (08:02:88) 163-8
Questions
Armoured fighting vehicles, Turkey 317w
Arms exports, Turkey 317-8w
Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, Defence research 82-3w
Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, Manpower 444-5w
British Nuclear Fuels, Arms control 240w
Chemical weapons, Animal experiments 538w
Defence, USA 383-4w
Defence contracts, Shipping accidents 446-7w
Defence procurement, Altonjet 82w
Defence procurement, Moores Wallisdown 82w
Defence procurement, USA 755w
Defence research, Educational institutions 82w
Defence research, London University 537-8w
DROPS, Defence equipment 758-9w
Economic League, Ministry of Defence 318w
European fighter aircraft 84w
European fighter aircraft, F18 aircraft 84w
European fighter aircraft, West Germany 84w
Exservicemen, Nuclear weapons tests 83-4w, 757-8w
Ministry of Defence, Civil service manpower 446w
NATO, Defence equipment 613w
Nuclear weapons 755w
Service Children's Education Authority, Pay 383w
Sexual harassment, Ministry of Defence 317w
Trident, Atomic Weapons Research Establishment 537w
Trident, Defence contracts 239w
Trident, Defence procurement 239w
Trident submarines, Sea transport 448w
Trident submarines, Shipping accidents 447-8w, 539w
Tritium, Chapelcross power station 240w

St Andrew's Hospital Norwich 692w

St Bede's School Balornock
School closures 729w

St Boniface Down 551w

St Christopher & Nevis
Parliamentary gifts (09:02:88) 169

St George's Hill Weybridge Estate Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (11:02:88) 485, (18:02:88) 1131

St James' Hospital Portsmouth
Mental patients 270w

St Mary's Hospital Manchester
Hospital closures 501

St Peter's Gaelic Athletics Association Club 397w

St Tydfil's Hospital 5

St Vincent House 381w

Salford Health Authority
Mental patients 406-7w

Salmon
Fish farming 730-1w
Fishery protection 325-6w
Northern Ireland 325-6w
Scotland 730-1w
Seals 731w

Salmond, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1166
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 256, 260
Questions
Business statements 512
Coal, South of Scotland Electricity Board 694
Consultants, Business 346-7
Edinburgh University, Higher education admission 816
Jenkins of Hillhead, Rt Hon Lord 496-7
Student Awards Review Committee 432w
Student grants 432w
University finance 431-2w

Sampson, Colin 165w, (17:02:88) 977-96

Satellite communications
Competition 608-10w

Sayeed, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 528, 533, 537, 538, 542
Questions
Immigration, Members 1136
Nurses 500-1
Public expenditure 489
South West Housing Society, Government grants 5-6w

Schedule D income tax (15:02:88) 719-54

Schizophrenia
Expenditure 561-2w
Hospital discharges 561w
Mental patients 639w

School administration
Devon 573w
Educational finance 815

School admission
Greater London 53-6w
Rural areas 819
Secondary education 47-8w

School buildings
Northumberland 579w
Scotland 69-70w

School closures
Pilgrim School Bedford 310w
St Bede's School Balornock 729w
Scotland 688w, 728-9w

School discipline 583w, 808

School governors 579w

School leaving
Further education 582w
Literacy 807
Take-up of employment 231w

School leaving certificates 583w

School libraries 160-1w

School meals
Fees & charges 583w
Nutrition & health 6
Wales 6-7

School nurses
Scotland 142-3w

School population
Scotland 481w

School uniforms 583w

School violence
Dundee 66w
Prosecutions 66w
Scotland 66w

Schools
Barnsley 373w
Clydesdale 63-4w
Easington 48w
Fees & charges 808-9
Government grants to local authorities 69-70w
Nurses 283-4w
Official engagements 584w
Official visits 219w
Parental contributions 808-9
Pedestrian crossings 46-7w
Rural areas 819
Sports facilities 577w
Swimming 159w
Water safety 158w

Schools & parents
Education 820-1

Science & technology research
Education & industry 254-5w
Expenditure 255w
Fast reactors 507w
High technology (19:02:88) 1321-2
Loughborough University 32-3w
Research finance 163w, 813-4
Space technology 248-9w
York University 32w

Science budget 571w

Science Museum 467w

Scope of debate
Speaker's rulings & statements (08:02:88) 47, 51, 55-9, 69, 83, 127, (09:02:88) 323, (12:02:88) 639, (15:02:88) 760, (16:02:88) 890, 908, (17:02:88) 1102, 1105, 1116-7, (18:02:88) 1234, 1238, 1242

Scotland
AIDS 64-5w
Breast cancer 483w
Brucellosis 223w
Cancer 773w
Capital investment 143-4w
Care proceedings 143w
Cervical cancer 772-3w
Community charge 478w, 585w
Community charge rebates 780-1w
Community charges register 63w
Community education 731w
Criminal records 539w
Death 654-6w
Decriminalisation 64w
Domestic violence 65w
Dyslexia 732w
Electoral register 774w
Employment by sector 733-4w
Epilepsy 70w
Eye tests 732w
Fine defaulters 71w
Fisheries 729w
Forestry 775w
Gaming machines 476w
Health insurance 143w
Health service staff 141-2w
Higher education colleges 370w
Homelessness 65-6w, 68-70w
Hospital beds 320w, 482-4w
Hospital catering 655w
Hospital waiting lists 482w
Hospitals 482w
Housing Corporation 774w
Housing finance 144w
Income support scheme 404w
Languages education 367-8w, 477w, 654w

Legal aid 477w
Multiple occupation 321-2w
NHS 139-40w, 221w
NHS finance 322-4w, 479w, 539-40w
Nurses 480w
Nursing homes 65w
Parliamentary constituencies 734w
Pay 734-6w
Personal social services 139-40w
Planning appeals 320w
Police 728w
Police national computer 728w
Pre-school education 71w
Primary education 481w
Prison population 71w
Public expenditure 773-4w
Rate support grants 731w
Regional development grants 483w
Residential care 729-30w
Road works 65w
Salmon 730-1w
School buildings 69-70w
School closures 688w, 728-9w
School nurses 142-3w
School population 481w
School violence 66w
Seals 731w
Sheep 369w
Social security claims 75w
Student grants 369w
Students 373-4w
Supplementary benefits 502-4w
Surgery 656-7w
Teachers 481w
Telephones 70-1w
Test tube babies 654w
Unemployment 75w
Unemployment benefits 471w
Universities 576-8w
Universities Funding Council 579w
University finance 576w, 809
Veterinary services 221-2w
Women's employment 733w
Youth training scheme 479w

Scott, Mr Nicholas, Minister of State for Social Security and the Disabled
Debates etc.
Access to Medical Reports Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 664-6
Optical Appliances (Blind & Partially Sighted Persons) Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 669
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1175-80
Questions
Age allowances, Pensioners 266w
Artificial Limb & Appliance Centres Review 203w
Birmingham Children's Hospital, Heart diseases 626-8
Census of population, Community charge 695w
Child benefit, Family income 777w
Child benefit, Social security benefits uprating 346-7w
Chronically Sick & Disabled Persons Act 1970 191w
Community charge rebates, Scotland 780-1w
Community charge rebates, Young people 622w
Deaf, Telephone exchanges 214w, 781-2w
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 184w
Diets, Supplementary benefits 182w
Elderly, Heating 187-8w
Family credit, Disclosure of information 176w
"Family Fortunes" 175w
Handicap benefits, Social security payments 348w
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 170, 170w, 171, 171w, 172, 179-80, 554w
Handicapped, Discrimination 188-9w
Hospital waiting lists 629-30
Hospitals, West Midlands 628-9
Income support scheme, Handicap benefits 630w
Income support scheme, Housing benefits 630w
Income support scheme, Rates & rating 489-90w
Income support scheme, Scotland 404w
Income support scheme, Social security recipients 113w
Income support scheme, Social security reform 630w
Information technology, Dept of Health & Social Security 174w
Invalid care allowances, Availability for work 627-8w
Invalid care allowances, Pensioners 493w
Invalid care allowances, Social security recipients 406w, 628w
Medical treatments, Administrative delays 199-200w
Ministerial duties, Handicapped 110w
National insurance contributions, Employees' contributions 205w
NHS finance 629-30
Pensioners, Investment income 188w
Pensioners, Personal income 171w, 180w
Pensioners, Population 179-80w
Pensioners, Social security benefits 203-4w
Personal pensions 168w
Prosthetics, Administrative delays 200w
Resettlement units, Homelessness 182w
Retirement age, Women 625-6w
Retirement pensions 173w
Retirement pensions, Age addition 98-9w
Retirement pensions, Married women 99w
Retirement pensions, Retail price index 272w
Rotherham, Exceptional needs payments 175w
Severe weather payments 170
Severe weather payments, Grimsby 492w
Social Fund, Debts written off 490w
Social Fund, Expenditure 401w
Social Fund, Loans 697w
Social Fund, Social workers 214w
Social Security Act 1986 179w
Social security appeals tribunals, Administrative delays 178w
Social security benefits, Retail price index 114-5w, 247-8w, 349w, 779-80w
Social security benefits, Social security claims 174w
Social security benefits, Voluntary organisations 266w
Social security benefits, Young people 189-90w
Social security claims, Administrative delays 186w
Social Security Management Board 403-4w
Social security payments, Retail price index 494w
Social security reform 786-7w
Social security reform, Means tested benefits 177w
Supplementary benefits, Social security benefits uprating 786w
Unemployment benefits, Occupational pensions 191w
Unemployment benefits, Social security benefits disqualification 183-4w
Winter Warmth Line, Advisory services 170
Young people, Social security recipients 115w

Scottish Development Agency
Clydebank 480w
Shaw Medical Centre 320-1w

Scottish Education Department 71w

Scottish Education Dept see Scottish Education Department

Scottish Fire Service Training School
Complaints 652-3w
Inquiries 652-3w
Interviews 652-3w

Scottish health boards
Hospital closures 730w
Neonatal mortality 650-1w

Scottish Office 751-2w
Ministers' visits abroad 221w
Sexual harassment 320w

Scottish Special Housing Association 144w, 321w, 732w

Screening
Breast cancer 556w, 628-30w
Cancer 75w
Cervical cancer 772-3w
Wales 75w

SDA see Scottish Development Agency

Sea rescue 238-9w, 739w

Sea transport
Trident submarines 448w

Seabees
Crime 361w
Dept of Health & Social Security special investigators 402w
Fraud 469w
Hazardous wastes 379w, 566-7w
Social security benefits 186-8w
Social security recipients 269w

Seals
Fish farming 731w
Licensing 731w
Salmon 731w
Scotland 731w

Seas & oceans
Radioactive waste disposal 286w

Secondary education
Cumbria 813
School admission 47-8w
Sex education 581w

"Secret Society" 144-5w
BBC 728w

Secretarial staff
Pay 134-5w

Securities & Investments Board 608w, 760-1w

Securities Association
Financial services 760-1w

Security
Electricity supply industry 684-5w
Mozambique 775-6w
Northern Ireland Office 674w

"Security & Counter Intelligence" 752w

SED see Scottish Education Department

Sedgemore, Mr Brian
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 461-3
Questions
Bombings, Birmingham 706w
Higher education, Research 47w
Inner London Education Authority 575w
Inner London Education Authority, Public appointments 308-9w
Inner London Education Authority, Rate support grants 308w
NHS administration, Costs 166w
Percentage for Arts schemes 466-7w
Polytechnics & Colleges Funding Council, Public appointments 309w

Select Committee reports 1134, 1144

Self-employed
Cheshire 229w

Self-regulating organisations
Financial Services Act 1986 607-8w

Sellafield 226w, 240w, 590w
British Nuclear Fuels 509w
Radioactive wastes 287w
Testing 7

Service Children's Education Authority
Pay 383w

Service industries
Northwich 313-4w

Set-aside schemes (15:02:88) 705-17, 755-98
Agricultural chemicals 725w
Land use 586w

Severe weather payments 170, 401w
Grimsby 492w

Severn bridge
Construction 10, 20
Road tolls 9, 450w

Severn
Fulmer 659w
Water supply industry 459-61w

"Sex"
Terrence Higgins Trust 606w, 620-1w

Sex discrimination
Local authorities 972

Sex education
Secondary education 581w

Sexual harassment
Attorney-General 291w
Dept of Education & Science 158w
Dept of Employment 73-4w
Dept of Health & Social Security 554w
Dept of the Environment 20w
Dept of Trade & Industry 33w
Dept of Transport 1-2w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office 55w
Home Office 302w
Ministry of Agriculture 61w
Ministry of Defence 317w
Northern Ireland Office 323-4w
Scottish Office 320w
Treasury 92w

Sexual offences
Children 169w
Procurators fiscal 321-2w

Share option scheme
Tax allowances 89w

Shared ownership schemes 973
Council housing 973

Shares
Economic situation 647w
Rolls-Royce Aeroengines 486
Tax allowances 89w

Shaw, Mr David
Questions
Accountants, Civil service manpower 647-8w
Business statements 513
Council house rents, Rent arrears 973
Employment opportunities 334w
Health service staff, Business education 556w
House of Commons catering, Non-alcoholic drinks 517w
Housing Corporation, Cash limits 298-9w
Public bodies, Accounting 420w
Surgery, Per capita costs 626w
Tax yields, Tax rates & bands 494

Shaw, Sir Giles
Debates etc.
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 142-3
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 937

Shaw Medical Centre
Scottish Development Agency 320-1w

Sheep
Radioactivity 369w
Scotland 369w

Slaughterhouses 156w

Sheep premiums
Judgments 330w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Self-employed (15:02:88) 720, 741-5
Questions
British Paediatric Association, Upper waiting hall 264w
New Parliamentary building, House of Commons accommodation 522-3w

Sheffield
Training allowances 533w

Sheffield Health Authority
Hospital waiting lists 96w

Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 537
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1153-4
Questions
Civil service 701-2
Industrial investment 491

Sheltered housing
Mentally ill 562w

Shelton, Mr William
Debates etc.
Council house sales, Lambeth (19:02:88) 1323-5
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1036-9

Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 791-2

Shepherd, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 759
Questions
Cider, Tax yields 490
Surgery, Costs 182w
West Mercia Police, Manpower 709w

Shepherd, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 273
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 994

Shersby, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Civil service, Management (18:02:88) 1155
Questions
Employment, Northern region 231w
Eye tests, NHS 112w
House of Commons publications, Administrative delays 388w
House of Commons publications, House of Commons Standing Committees 388w
Offensive weapons, Greater London 38w
VAT, Confectionery 343w

Shetland
Housing 732w

Shetland Islands Council 732w

Shift work
Nurses 116w

Shipping 340w
EC countries 414w

Shipping accidents
Defence contracts 446-7w
Trident submarines 447-8w, 539w

Shopping centres
Prestwich 969-70

Shops
South Bank 468w
Urban areas 970

Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
European Council (15:02:88) 711, 716-7
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 229-33
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1026-30
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1213, 1230-2

Short, Ms Clare
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 47, 58, 64-5, 106
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 384-5, 414, 417-8, 428, 431-6
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 927, 930, 940
Training (16:02:88) 838
Questions
Bombings, Birmingham 706w
Health services finance, EC countries 177-8

Short Brothers 317w

Shropshire County Council
Bus services subsidies 1w

Sick leave
Metropolitan Police 35-6w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 85-6w

Sickle cell disease
NHS 172w

Simkins, Anthony 752w

Sims, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 359
Questions
Ethics 185
Hypermarkets, Greenbelt 970
NHS & private practice 175
Youth training scheme, Deaf 717w

Sinclair Committee see Child Care Law in Scotland Review Group

Singleton Hospital
Hospital waiting lists 518w

Sites of Special Scientific Interest
Nature Conservancy Council 296w

Sizewell B
Employment services 312w

Skeet, Sir Trevor
Questions
School closures, Pilgrim School Bedford 310w

Skiing
Death 458w

Skilled workers
Rented housing 456w

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Birmingham Children's Hospital, Standing Order No 20 applications (11:02:88) 520-1
Business questions intervention (11:02:88) 507
Business statements (18:02:88) 1159, 1163-4
Coal mine closures, Abernant Colliery (18:02:88) 1256
Education Reform Bill, Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1099-100
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 40, 42, 99-100, 107-11, 113-4
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 361

House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 200, 202, 209, 215
Oral question time intervention (10:02:88) 341, (15:02:88) 691, 696
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1174-5
Trident submarines, Mull of Galloway (10:02:88) 366-7
Questions
Bankruptcy 492-3
Business statements 514
Coal mining, Dismissal 695
Debts 335w
Ford Motor Company, Industrial disputes 27
House of Commons Library, "Spycatcher" 18
Prime Minister's questions, NHS finance 182
Retirement pensions 173w
Social security benefits, Retail price index 821-2

Skoal Bandits 197w

Skuse, Frank 701w, (16:02:88) 950-8, 1138-9
Evidence 438-9w, 547w, 1138-9

Slaughter of Deer Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
Order for resumed 2R read (12:02:88) 676

Slaughterhouses
Sheep 156w

Small businesses
Company law 353
Consultants 346
Industrial accidents 74w
Northern region 227w

Smith, Mr Andrew
Questions
Arms embargoes 714w
Availability for work, Social security benefits disqualification 696-7w
Battery hens, Animal welfare 726w
English education 581-2w
Entry clearances, Immigrants' fiancees 690-1w
Exceptional needs payments, Social security recipients 205-6w
Homelessness 661w
Mental health community care 562w
Mental patients, Complaints 562w
Mental patients, Schizophrenia 639w
Mentally ill, Sheltered housing 562w
Prison population, Mentally ill 546w
Prisoners' release, Mentally ill 546w
Schizophrenia, Expenditure 561-2w
Schizophrenia, Hospital discharges 561w
Social Fund, Loans 697w
Social security benefits, Social security claims 174w
Tax harmonisation, Car tax 343-4w
Taxpayers, Income tax 247w
Unemployment benefits, Social security benefits disqualification 696w

Smith, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Education Reform Bill, Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1089-91
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 464, (17:02:88) 1031
Questions
AIDS, Expenditure 499-500w
Privatisation 487

Smith, David 159-60w

Smith, Sir Dudley
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Young people 710-1w
Chlamydia, Diagnosis 626w
Retirement age, Women 625-6w

Smith, Rt Hon John
Questions
NHS finance 497
Productivity 495

Smith, Mr Tim
Questions
Company investigations, House of Fraser 262w
Electricity supply industry, Privatisation 508w
Financial Services Act 1986 337-8
Guinness, Company investigations 261w
Inner London Education Authority 575w
Lonrho, House of Fraser 262w
Lonrho, Subsidiary companies 262w
NHS, Performance indicators 403w
NHS Management Board 403w
Nursing Staff & Professions Allied to Medicine Review Body 184w
Official engagements 690w
Public sector borrowing requirement 496
Rolls-Royce Aeroengines, Shares 486
Sewers, Fulmer 659w
Social Security Management Board 403-4w

Smith Committee see AIDS Monitoring & Surveillance Committee

Smoke detection (09:02:88) 189-91

Smoke Detectors in Houses Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
1R (09:02:88) 189-91

Smoking
Air travel 2w, 351w
Bus crews 413w
Public houses 190w

Smyth, Rev Martin
Debates etc.
Calling of Members, Oral questions (11:02:88) 522-3
Questions
Bed & breakfast accommodation, Northern Ireland 166w
Bophuthatswana, Overseas aid 33w, 428-9w
Building workers, Terrorism 593w
Cervical cancer, Death 195w
Community care 183w
Employment discrimination, Appeals 440-2w
Employment discrimination, Northern Ireland 674w
Extortion, Building industry 593w
Extortion, Terrorism 519w, 594w
Fair Employment Agency for Northern Ireland 594-6w
Interviews, Northern Ireland 283w
IRA, Extortion 545w
Kidnapping, Insurance 545w
Metropolitan Police, Sick leave 35-6w
Northern Ireland, Government departments 821
Paramilitary forces, Tax evasion 593-4w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Sick leave 85-6w
Special educational needs, Northern Ireland 818
Tax exemption certificates, Building industry 723w
Tax yields, Extortion 723-4w

Snape, Mr Peter
Questions
Heathrow central station, Fire certificates 412w
London Underground, Fire certificates 412w
Railway Inspectorate, Railway safety 244w

Soames, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Education Reform Bill, Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1102
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 362
Questions
Civil service 702
Prisons, Privatisation 1134
Visas, Immigration applications 140w

Social class
Cancer 773w

Social Fund
Debts written off 490w
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 181
Expenditure 401w
Loans 697w
Social workers 214w

Social Fund (Application for Review) Regulations 1988
Debates etc.
(18:02:88) 1169-207

Social Fund Maternity & Funeral Expenses (General) Amendment Regulations 1988
Debates etc.
(18:02:88) 1169-207

Social Fund (Recovery by Deductions from Benefits) Regulations 1988
Debates etc.
(18:02:88) 1169-207

Social security
Advisory services 566w

Social Security Act 1986
Questions
179w, 180-1

Social security appeals
Mobility allowance 163-4w, 326-7w

Social security appeals tribunals
Administrative delays 178w
Mobility allowance 178w

Social security benefits
Computer privacy 693-4w
Pensioners 203-4w
Personal records 694-5w
Peterlee 186-8w
Retail price index 114-5w, 247-8w, 272w, 349w, 722w, 779-80w, 821-2, 1146
Seaham 186-8w
Social security claims 174w
Students 695w
Tax allowances 722w
Voluntary organisations 266w
Young people 189-90w

Social security benefits disqualification
Availability for work 696-7w
Unemployment benefits 183-4w, 696w

Social security benefits rules
Housing benefits 779w

Social security benefits uprating 176-7
Child benefit 346-7w
Supplementary benefits 786w

Social security claims
Administrative delays 186w
Mobility allowance 327w
Scotland 75w
Social security benefits 174w
Take-up 75w

Social Security Commissioners 163-4w

Social Security Management Board 403-4w

Social security payments 177
Handicap benefits 348w
Retail price index 494w

Social security recipients 177
Board & lodging charges 113w
Exceptional needs payments 205-6w
Income support scheme 113w
Invalid care allowances 406w, 628w
Means tested benefits 185-6w
Peterlee 269w
Seaham 269w
Supplementary benefits 348w
Young people 115w

Social security reform 180-1, 786-7w
Children 176-7
Civil servants 703
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 351-2w
Family income 777w
Greater London 351-2w
Handicap benefits 170, 170w, 171, 171w, 172, 179-80, 554w
Housing benefits 177, 775w
Income support scheme 630w
Means tested benefits 177w
Mentally handicapped 170-1

Social services finance
Voluntary organisations 180w

Social Services Inspectorate 494w

Social Services Select Committee 485w

Social workers
Hospitals 565w
Social Fund 214w

Social workers' training 347w

Soley, Mr Clive
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 473
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1988 (16:02:88) 928
Questions
Council housing 974-5
Government data network, Computer privacy 247w
Government data network, Government contracts 247w
Homelessness, Departmental leaflets 22w
Housing 964
Housing benefits, Thamesmead Town 110w
Thamesmead Town, Greenwich 21w
Thamesmead Town, Property transfer 21w
Thamesmead Town, Rent control 22w
Thamesmead Town, Tenants' rights 22w

"Some Mother's Son" 712w

South Africa
Economic sanctions 425w
Official engagements 46w
Overseas investment 233w
Refugees 236w

South Bank
Shops 468w

South East region
NHS finance 213w
Private education 765-8w
Railway travel 355-6w
Transport 747w

South East Thames Regional Health Authority 213w

South Glamorgan Health Authority
Heart diseases 319w

South Korea
Generalised system of preferences 714-6w

South of Scotland Electricity Board 461-2w
Coal 694

South Tyneside Health Authority
Mental health community care 409w

South Wales 6, 10
Coal mine closures 5-6
Family doctors 8
Government assistance 5
NHS finance 5
Paediatrics 319w

South West Housing Society
Government grants 5-6w

South Western Electricity Board
Electricity tariffs 691

Southampton University 82w

Southend Hospital
Radiotherapy 174-5w, 496-7w, 699w

Southern Africa
Debts 429-30w

Southern African Development Coordination Conference 429-30w

Southern Derbyshire Health Authority 629-30w

Southern Water Authority
Water pollution 379-80w

Southern Water Authority Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (11:02:88) 485, (18:02:88) 1131

Space technology
Science & technology research 248-9w

Spain
Air force bases 538w

Speaker and his deputies, For rulings & statements see separate heading
Speaker's rulings & statements
Debates etc.
Amendments & new clauses (08:02:88) 121, (10:02:88) 393, 407, (17:02:88) 1000
Disallowed questions (08:02:88) 7, (10:02:88) 337, (11:02:88) 486, (18:02:88) 1144
Members' suspension, Cohen, Harry (18:02:88) 1246
Orders & regulations motions (10:02:88) 367, (18:02:88) 1169
Private Members' Bills, 2R order read (12:02:88) 670, 675-6
Procedure (08:02:88) 27, 141, (09:02:88) 184, 267, 287, (10:02:88) 337, 354, (11:02:88) 490, 500, 513, 514, (17:02:88) 962, 1103, (18:02:88) 1139, 1167, 1180
Standing Order No 20 applications, Anglo-Irish Agreement (15:02:88) 718
Standing Order No 20 applications, British Petroleum (08:02:88) 37
Standing Order No 20 applications, Pullen, Jason (10:02:88) 365
Standing Order No 20 applications, Wise, Claire (11:02:88) 519-20
Questions
Britoil, Government shareholding 486
Protest, Ministry of Defence 1144
Sellafield, Testing 7

Speaker's chair (09:02:88) 169

Speaker's rulings & statements
Adjournment debates (09:02:88) 330
Calling of Members (10:02:88) 358, 363, (11:02:88) 522-3, (15:02:88) 709, 716, (17:02:88) 992, 996, (19:02:88) 1259-60
House of Commons chamber (12:02:88) 619
House of Commons debates (08:02:88) 143-4
House of Commons galleries (10:02:88) 344
House of Commons Select Committees (09:02:88) 286
House of Commons Standing Committees (17:02:88) 996
Members (16:02:88) 839
Members' conduct (08:02:88) 129, (09:02:88) 188, (10:02:88) 454-5, 465, 470-3, (11:02:88) 501, (15:02:88) 795, (16:02:88) 913, (18:02:88) 1253
Members' imprisonment (15:02:88) 685
Members' interventions (09:02:88) 203, 223, 280, 330, (10:02:88) 433, (12:02:88) 648-9, (15:02:88) 717, (16:02:88) 854, 857, 944-5, (17:02:88) 1021, 1041, 1043, 1069, 1071-3, 1084, 1085, (18:02:88) 1161
Members' speeches (08:02:88) 128, 151, (09:02:88) 192, 237, (11:02:88) 490, (12:02:88) 655, (15:02:88) 780, 785, (17:02:88) 1020, 1025, 1049, (18:02:88) 1193, 1230, 1236, (19:02:88) 1294
Members' suspension (18:02:88) 1253
Ministerial statements (08:02:88) 31, (15:02:88) 706, 709, 712, 714, 716, (17:02:88) 977, 981, 987, (18:02:88) 1151
New clauses (16:02:88) 848
Orders & regulations (18:02:88) 1168
Parliamentary privilege (09:02:88) 286
Points of order (08:02:88) 24, (10:02:88) 364, 366-7, 373, 473, (16:02:88) 827, 839-40, 925, 935-6, 944-6, (17:02:88) 1124
Prime Minister's questions (09:02:88) 187, 188, (16:02:88) 822, 823, (18:02:88) 1145
Private Members' Bills (12:02:88) 675
Scope of debate (08:02:88) 47, 51, 55-9, 69, 83, 127, (09:02:88) 323, (12:02:88) 639, (15:02:88) 760, (16:02:88) 890, 908, (17:02:88) 1102, 1105, 1116-7, (18:02:88) 1234, 1238, 1242
Standing Order No 20 applications (10:02:88) 366-7, (11:02:88) 520
Statutory Instruments Select Committee (09:02:88) 286
Supplementary questions (08:02:88) 2, (10:02:88) 345
Ten minutes rule (19:02:88) 1259-60
Unparliamentary expressions (10:02:88) 402, (11:02:88) 499, (16:02:88) 835-6, 957-8, (17:02:88) 1102-3
Written questions (09:02:88) 188

Spearing, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 760, 770
European Council (15:02:88) 713
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 463, (17:02:88) 1005, 1038, 1048
Questions
Air safety, National Air Traffic Services 22
Ambulance services, Greater London 111-2w
Day release 584w
EC budget 152-4w
Education, Inner London boroughs 160-1w
Educational finance, Inner London boroughs 161w
European Council, Economic agreements 688-9w
Free school meals, Inner London Education Authority 162w
Further education, Inner London boroughs 161w
Higher civil servants, Performance related pay 812-3
Industrial accidents, London Docklands 383w
Inner London Education Authority 308w
Inner London Education Authority, Educational standards 161-2w
Inner London Education Authority, Expenditure 218-20w
London Ambulance Service, Official engagements 184w
London Underground, Railway stations 3w
M25, Road traffic 614-5w
NHS finance 45w
Pupils, Inner London boroughs 162w
Road traffic, Greater London 614w
Schools, Official visits 219w
VAT, Tax harmonisation 770w

Special aids to employment scheme 227-8w

Special constables 1133-4

Special duty allowances
Grimsby Health Authority 492w
Nurses 492w

Special education 572w, 579-80w
EC action 584w
Education Reform Bill 1987/88 573-4w
Further education colleges 577w
Grant maintained schools 819-20
Handicapped pupils 572w
Pre-school education 578w

Special educational needs 46w, 433w
Local education authorities 602-3w
Northern Ireland 818
Teachers 818
University finance 373w

Special hospitals
Mental patients 553-4w

Spectacles 167w

Speech therapists
Pay 266-8w

Speech therapy
Prisons 541-2w
Wales 518w

Speed, Mr Keith
Questions
M20, Road construction 742w

Speed limits
Buses 411w
Manchester Airport 615w

Speller, Mr Tony
Questions
Housing action trusts, Departmental publications 670w
School administration, Devon 573w
Television licences, Pensioners 707w

Spicer, Sir Jim
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 756

Spicer, Mr Michael, Under-Secretary of State for Energy
Debates etc.
Coal mine closures, Abernant Colliery (18:02:88) 1256-8
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Capital investment 509w
British Coal Corporation, Privatisation 509w, 512w
British Nuclear Fuels, Exhibitions 226w
British Nuclear Fuels, Sellafield 509w
Central Electricity Generating Board, Official engagements 511w
Coal, Imports 63w, 694-5
Coal, International trade 225w
Coal, South of Scotland Electricity Board 694
Coal fired power stations 225w
Coal mine closures 346w, 507w
Coal mining 688
Coal mining, British Coal Corporation 511w
Coal mining, Capital investment 392w
Coal mining, Costs 511-2w
Coal mining, Dismissal 695
Coal mining, Equipment 512w
Coal mining, Government grants 344w
Coal mining, Productivity 694
Coal mining, Subsidence 393w
Coal prices 687-8
Coal prices, Dollar 696
Coal prices, Electricity tariffs 688
Coal prices, Productivity 687
Coal reserves, Coal mining 392w
Electricite de France, Profitability 513w
Electricity generation, Nuclear power 510w
Electricity supply industry, France 62w
Electricity supply industry, Security 684-5w
Electricity tariffs, Competition 506-7w
Electricity tariffs, Industrial energy prices 691
Electricity tariffs, Industry 507w
Electricity tariffs, Pensioners 691-2
Electricity tariffs, Price increases 690-3
Electricity tariffs, South Western Electricity Board 691
Energy consumption, Industry 513-4w
Energy research, Nuclear power 684w
Fawley A, Electricity generation 512w
Hinkley Point B, Public inquiries 345w
Hinkley Point C, Construction 509-10w
International Atomic Energy Agency, Nuclear safeguards 226w
International Atomic Energy Agency, UK contributions 226-7w
LAW Mining Company, Licensing 63w
Magnox reactors, Italy 589w
Mining equipment, Productivity 224-5w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing 589-90w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing, Okg Aktiebolag 589w
Nuclear fuels 515-6w
Nuclear fuels, Nuclear safeguards 393w
Nuclear power, Public sector assets 226w
Nuclear power stations 225w
Nuclear power stations, Air accidents 590w
Nuclear power stations, Environment protection 344-5w
Nuclear power stations, Fire services 512w
Nuclear power stations, Opinion polls 345w
Nuclear power stations, Testing 392w, 510w
Nuclear reactors, Testing 510-1w
Nuclear safety 63w
Nuclear safety, Magnox reactors 345-6w
Opencast mining 697
Opencast mining, Privately owned mines 684w
Plutonium, Transport of radioactive materials 590w
Power stations 589w
Radiation hazards, Safety standards 225w
Transport of radioactive materials 225-6w
Trawsfynydd power station, Testing 510w
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, Finance 513-6w
Wind power, Government assistance 689
Wind power, Liberal Party 689

Sporting events
Hooliganism 501

Sports
Inner London Education Authority 162w

Sports administration
Tax allowances 423w

Sports facilities
Local government services 15-6
Schools 577w
Wales 15-6

Sportsgrounds
Public order policing 663w

Springfields 226w

"Spycatcher"
House of Commons Library 17-8

Squire, Mr Robin
Questions
Community charge 663w
Ford Motor Company, Industrial disputes 26
Housing associations 966
Public expenditure, Private investment 722w
Tax allowances, Sports administration 423w

SSEB see South of Scotland Electricity Board

SSHA see Scottish Special Housing Association

Stafford
Unemployment 473-4w

Staffordshire County Council 811

"Stalker" 291w, 824

Stalker, John 165w, (17:02:88) 977-96
Ministers 394w
Police misconduct 216w
Prosecutions 291w
Publishing 824

Stanbrook, Mr Ivor
Debates etc.
Nazi war crimes (08:02:88) 29

Standard of living 497-8

Standards enforcement
Hospitals 188w

Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights 681w

"Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights Annual Report, 1986/87" 681w

Standing charges 173w

Standing Order No 20 applications
Air accidents (08:02:88) 38
Anglo-Irish Agreement (15:02:88) 718
Birmingham Children's Hospital (11:02:88) 519-20
British Petroleum (08:02:88) 37
Pullen, Jason (10:02:88) 365
Speaker's rulings & statements (10:02:88) 366-7, (11:02:88) 520

Stanley, Rt Hon John, Minister of State for Northern Ireland
Questions
Administration of justice, Northern Ireland 591w
Building workers, Terrorism 593w
Civil servants, Positive vetting 86w
Debt collection, Northern Ireland 393-5w
Debts, Northern Ireland 394w
Extortion, Building industry 593w
Extortion, Terrorism 594w
Extradition, Republic of Ireland 164-5w
Homicide, Fermanagh 441-2w
Homicide, Northern Ireland 441w
Maghaberry Prison, Body searches 592w
Maghaberry Prison, Prison population 591w
Paramilitary forces, Tax evasion 593-4w
Politicians, USA 85-6w
Punishment attacks, Criminal injuries compensation 86w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Manpower 674w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Sick leave 85-6w
Security, Northern Ireland office 674w
Sexual harassment, Northern Ireland Office 323-4w
Voluntary organisations, Northern Ireland 590-1w

Stansted Airport
Air routes 410w

Stationery Office see HMSO

Statistics of Trade & Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 1988
Debates etc.
(10:02:88) 367

Statutory Instruments Select Committee
Speaker's rulings & statements (09:02:88) 286

Steel, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
European Council (15:02:88) 710
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries (17:02:88) 985-6
Questions
Air safety, Air traffic control 21
Business statements 505
Profit sharing, Departmental leaflets 387w

Steen, Mr Anthony
Questions
EC internal trade, Trade barriers 256w
Plymouth Health Authority 184w
Urban development corporations, Government grants 666w
Vacant land, Official engagements 688w

Steinberg, Mr Gerry
Questions
Army, Clinical depression 445w
Buses, Motor vehicle safety 741w
Buses, Road accidents 410-1w
Buses, Safety belts 411w
Buses, Speed limits 411w
Dept of Education & Science, Press releases 373w
Education Reform Bill 1987/88, Special education 573-4w
Government shareholding 334w
NHS finance 630
Opencast mining, Privately owned mines 684w
Prisoners, Advisory services 542w
Prisons, Speech therapy 541-2w
Public service vehicles, Bus crews 740w
Public service vehicles, Driving licences 613-4w
Public service vehicles, Motor vehicle testing 741w
Remand in custody 1132

Sterling
Green pound 771-2w

Stern, Mr Michael
Questions
Artificial Limb & Appliance Centres Review 203w
Electricity generation, Coastal areas 688
Local Development Agencies Development Fund, Finance 618w
Official engagements 135w, 520w, 690w
Rear seat belts, Car hire 616w
Shared ownership schemes 973
Teachers, Trade union membership 371w

Stevens, Mr Lewis
Questions
Personal pensions 168w

Stewart, Mr Allan
Questions
Higher education colleges, Educational finance 370w
Manufacturing industries 337w
Parliamentary constituencies, Scotland 734w

Stewart, Mr Andy
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 766
Malicious Communications Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 607-9, 635, 647, 655-6
Questions
Cash limits, Attorney-General 613w
Coal prices, Productivity 687
Inflation 331w

Stewart, Mr Ian, Minister of State for Defence
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 524-36
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Diego Garcia 445-6w
Armilla patrol, Members' correspondence 756w
Armilla patrol, Merchant ships 446w, 448-9w
Arms control, Civil service manpower 240w
Chemical weapons, NATO 448w
Chemical weapons, USA 448w
Clyde Submarine Base, Ionizing radiation 737w
Clyde Submarine Base, Naval bases 737w
Clyde Submarine Base, Nuclear accidents 737w
Clyde Submarine Base, Nuclear submarines 736w
Exercise Teamwork 88, Amphibious vehicles 239w
F16 aircraft, Air force bases 538w
Falkland Islands, Military exercises 736-7w
Frigates, Armed forces deployment 735w
HMS Conqueror, Log books 318w, 387w
HMS Resolution, Naval Emergency Monitoring Organisation 756w
HMS Resolution, Nuclear submarines 756w
HMS Resolution, Radiation hazards 756-7w
Military aircraft, Republic of Ireland 318w
Minesweepers, Persian Gulf 758w
NATO 538w
Naval bases, River Clyde 737w
Naval Emergency Monitoring Organisation, Nuclear accidents 738w
Nuclear accidents, Greenland 240-1w
Nuclear submarines, Faslane 735-6w
Nuclear submarines, HMS Resolution 736w
Nuclear submarines, River Clyde 736-8w
Nuclear weapons, Transport of radioactive materials 136w
Nuclear weapons deployment, Western Europe 538w

Stock market
Capital 249w

Stoke-on-Trent
Water supply 127-8w

Stokes, Mr John
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 233-4, 244-6
Questions
Church of England, Ethics 821
Official secrets, Law reform 1141

Storms
District health authorities 565w
Government grants to local authorities 522w

Stott, Mr Roger
Questions
Coal, International trade 225w
Coal fired power stations 225w
Mining, Equipment 261w
Mining equipment, Productivity 224-5w
Science & technology research, Expenditure 255w

Strang, Mr Gavin
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 78-82, 117, 121, 123-5, 135-6
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 392-7, 402-3, 407, 447

"Strategy for the Science Base" 583-4w

Strathclyde
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 404w
Regional aid 368w
Structure plans 64w

Straw, Mr Jack
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1002, 1008-21, 1064, 1069
Questions
Educational finance 50-4w
Ideal Homes Exhibition, Dept of Education & Science 219-20w
Inner London Education Authority, Educational standards 219w

Structure plans
Berkshire (11:02:88) 599-606, 668w
Strathclyde 64w
Wales 598w

Stubbs, William 308-9w

Student Awards Review Committee 432w, 571w, 585w

Student grants 159w, 432-3w, 476-7w, 585w
Community charge 369w, 585w
Housing benefits 369w, 585w
Index linking 372w, 475-6w
Medical students 217-8w, 372w
Northern Ireland 286w, 396w
Scotland 369w

Student numbers
Medical students 431w
Northern Ireland 766w
Postgraduate students 813
Universities 762-6w
Wales 766w

Student wastage
Nurses' training 785-6w

Students
Further education 577w
Scotland 373-4w
Social security benefits 695w
Television licences 38w
Universities 373-4w

Stun guns 1138

Sub post offices 306w
Finance 609w

Subsidence (09:02:88) 186
Coal mining 393w

Subsidiary companies
Lonrho 262w

Subsidies
Airbus Industrie 444w

Sudan
Nuclear fuels 236w

Sudbury
Unemployment 549-50w

Sudbury-Colchester railway 453w

Sulphur dioxide
Pollution control 666-7w

Sumberg, Mr David
Questions
Bury, Official engagements 13
Ford Motor Company, Industrial disputes 27
Hypermarkets, Planning inquiries 969-70
Mortgage relief 334w
North Western Regional Health Authority, Official engagements 179w

Summerson, Mr Hugo
Debates etc.
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 148
Malicious Communications Bill, 2R (12:02:88) 611, 617-22, 632, 640-1
Questions
British strategic nuclear force, Labour Party 1145-6
Civil servants, Performance reviews 702-3
Pensioners, Personal income 180w

Summertime 619w

Superconductivity
Industry 607w

Supplementary benefits
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority 108w
Cleveland 114w
Darlington 113-4w
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 493w
Diets 182w
Dundee 495-6w

Scotland 502-4w
Social security benefits uprating 786w
Social security recipients 348w

Supplementary Benefits (Conditions of Entitlement) Regulations 1981
Questions
Invalid care allowances 627-8w

Supplementary questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (08:02:88) 2, (10:02:88) 345

Surgery
Basingstoke & North Hampshire Health Authority 101-4w
Costs 182w
Expenditure 557w
Gynaecology 213-4w
Kidney patients 779w
NHS 400w
NHS & private practice 623w
North Wales 15
Per capita costs 626w
Scotland 656-7w

Surrey
Road traffic 357w

Swimming
Handicapped 126-7w
Health education 267w
Pupils 158-9w
Schools 159w
Training 20-1w

Swimming pools
Local education authorities 47w

Synthetic fibres
Imports 148-9w
Production 609-10w
Turkey 148-9w, 253w

Syrian Arab Republic
Torture 691w

Takeovers
British Bakeries 354
Britoil 34w

Talkabout service
Young people (09:02:88) 329-36

Tape recorders
Production 532w

Tax allowances
Agriculture 723w
Banks 338w
Enterprise zones 421w
Forestry 95w, 339w, 490-1
Health insurance 90w
Luncheon vouchers 90w
Manufacturing industries 723w
Pension funds 90w
Personal equity plans 87-9w
Share option scheme 89w
Shares 89w
Social security benefits 722w
Sports administration 423w
Tax rates & bands 93-5w
Town & country planning (15:02:88) 719-54
Tree planting 490-1
VAT 770w

Tax & price index 331w

Tax burden 342w
Income tax 247w, 333-4w
Low pay 418-9w

Tax collection offices
Durham 419w

Tax evasion 421w, 425w
Community charges register 975
National insurance contributions 353-4w
Northern Ireland 593-4w
Paramilitary forces 593-4w
PAYE 422w
Prosecutions 421w
Road tax 452-3w

Tax exemption certificates
Building industry 723w

Tax harmonisation
Car tax 343-4w
VAT 770w

Tax rates & bands
Income tax 90w, 417-8w, 423w, 496
Tax allowances 93-5w
Tax yields 494
Taxpayers 417-8w

Tax thresholds 497

Tax yields 333w, 343w, 423w
Capital gains tax 87w
Cider 490
Corporation tax 722w
Deeds of covenant 721w
Extortion 723-4w
Income tax 417w
Pensions 720-1w
Personal tax allowances 417w
Tax rates & bands 494

Taxation 495-6
Forestry 339w

Taxis 551-2w
Basildon 552w
Crimes of violence 619-20w, (15:02:88) 799-805
Homicide 767w
Mobility of disabled (15:02:88) 799-805

Taxpayers
Income tax 247w

Taylor, Mrs Ann
Questions
Brixton Prison, Prison staff 1140
Complaints against police, Ethnic monitoring 303w
Concessionary television licences, Pensioners 1142
Young people, Police custody 434-5w

Taylor, Mr Ian
Questions
Car ownership, Road traffic 357w

Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 286
Questions
Bray District Council, Contracts 166w
Ministers' visits abroad, West Germany 164w
Parkhead Stadium, Public order policing 653w
Republic of Ireland, Royal Ulster Constabulary 391w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries 394w

Taylor, Mr John M
Questions
Army, Intimidation 755w
Capital gains tax, Investment 87w
Church schools, Church of England 216w
Drugs, Expenditure 557w
Nature reserves 960
Public order offences 541w
Rate limitation 659w

Taylor, Mr Matthew
Questions
Electricity tariffs, Price increases 692
Homelessness, Households 661w
Nuclear power stations, Testing 392w
Pigs, Animal breeding 58-62w
Sub post offices 306w
Teachers, Pay 578w
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, Finance 513-6w

Taylor, Mr Teddy
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 757-8
European Council (15:02:88) 711
Questions
Agricultural subsidies, Expenditure 464-5w
Agriculture, EC budget 726-7w
Airbus Industrie, Subsidies 444w
Airbuses, Government assistance to industry 444w
Butter, Intervention stocks 689-90w
Cereals, Agricultural production 690w
Cereals, Production quotas 612w
Common agricultural policy 498-9
Common agricultural policy, EC budget 689w
Council house waiting lists 22-4w
Dock labour scheme 454-5w
Dock workers, Manpower 455w
European Council 688w
European Council, Butter 612w
European Council, Common agricultural policy 611w
European Council, EC budget 294w, 611-2w
European Council, Foreign relations 612w
Farmers, Manpower 464w
Food surpluses, Expenditure 587-8w, 612w
Food surpluses, Intervention stocks 689w
Generalised system of preferences, South Korea 715-6w
Housing associations, House purchase 668w
Invalid care allowances, Social security recipients 406w
Manufactured goods, Balance of trade 34w
Police custody, Prisoners on remand 703w
Prison overcrowding 438w
Prisoners on remand, Police custody 435w
Rates & rating, Farm buildings 462w
Set-aside schemes, Land use 586w
Southend Hospital, Radiotherapy 174-5w, 496-7w, 699w
Tax allowances, Agriculture 723w
Trade agreements, EC action 715w
VAT zero rated goods, European Court of Justice 332-3w

Taylor, Teddy 41w

Tayside
Caravans 539w
Crime 650w
Crime prevention 732w
Free school meals 65w
Procurators fiscal 321-2w
Regional aid 483-4w
Young offenders 479w

Tayside Health Board
Health service staff 370-1w

Teacher training
Northern Ireland 323w
Wales 224w

Teachers
Conditions of employment 53w
Curriculum 815
Degrees 371w
Educational standards 582-3w
Greater London 183
Health 310w
Industrial disputes 371w
Mathematics education 160w
Pay 578w
Retirement 310w
Scotland 481w
Special educational needs 818
Trade union membership 371w
Trade unions 578w, 581w

Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 194-5, 221-30, 247-8, 251, 281
Questions
Air safety, Near misses 21-2

Technicians
AIDS 489w, 626-7w
Industrial health & safety 626-7w

Teesside
Dept of Trade & Industry 345-6

Teesside Development Corporation
Official engagements 518w

Teignmouth Quay Company Bill 1985/86
Debates etc.
2R order read (11:02:88) 485, (18:02:88) 1131

Telecommunications cables
Optical fibres 145w

Telecommunications industry
Competition 349-50
Europe 340
Exports 339
Retail trade 339

Telecommunications (Premium Services) (Regulation) Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (12:02:88) 670

Telephone calls 145w, 170

Telephone directories
Exports 339-40

Telephone exchanges
Deaf 214w, 781-2w

Telephone Talkabout (Abolition) Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
2R order read (12:02:88) 670

Telephone tapping
Judicial review 303w

Telephones
Doctors 70-1w
Equipment 350
Pornography 350
Scotland 70-1w

Television
Broadcasting controls 703w
House of Commons broadcasting 183, (09:02:88) 192-286

Television advertising
Dept of Trade & Industry 256w

Television licences
Pensioners 303w, 707w
Students 38w

Television programmes
Army in Northern Ireland 712w
National security 144-5w, 728w
Nuclear power 346w

Telford
Urban development corporations 666w

Temporary accommodation
Homelessness 325-6w

Temporary immigrants
Immigration applications 137w

Temporary staff
Health service staff 109w

Ten minutes rule
Speaker's rulings & statements (19:02:88) 1259-60

Tenants' rights
Thamesmead Town 22w

Tenders
Local government services 672-3w
Privatisation 92w

Terrence Higgins Trust
"Sex" 608w, 620-1w

Terrorism
Building workers 593w
Extortion 519w, 594w
Northern Ireland (16:02:88) 925-49

Test tube babies
Hospitals 654w
Scotland 654w

Testing
Agricultural chemicals 237-8w
Bovine somatotropin 678w
Nuclear power stations 392w, 510w
Nuclear reactors 510-1w
Sellafield 7
Trawsfynydd power station 7-8, 416w, 510w

Textile industry 251w

Textiles 348-9
Imports 377-8w
West Bank 377-8w

Thames house Millbank
Ministry of Defence 446w

Thames Water Authority 659w

Thamesmead Town
Greenwich 21w
Housing benefits 110w
Property transfer 21w
Rent control 22w
Tenants' rights 22w

Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service
Debates etc.
European Council, Ministerial statements (15:02:88) 705-17
Ministerial statements, Civil service (18:02:88) 1149-56
Questions
Advisory Council on Science & Technology, Official engagements 519w
Barnsley, Official engagements 519w
British strategic nuclear force, Labour Party 1145-6
British strategic nuclear force, USSR 822
Butter, Intervention stocks 689-90w
Cereals, Agricultural production 690w
Cereals, Production quotas 612w
Church of England, Ethics 821
Common agricultural policy, EC budget 689w
Community charges register, Voting rights 823-4
Doctors, Pay 135w
Economic League, Employment schemes 415w
Economic League, Nationalised industries 415w
Education, Schools & parents 820-1
Education Reform Bill 1987/88 186
Ethics 185
European Commission, Official engagements 689w
European Council 688w
European Council, Butter 612w
European Council, Common agricultural policy 611w
European Council, EC budget 611-2w
European Council, Economic agreements 688-9w
European Council, Foreign relations 612w
European fighter aircraft, Official engagements 134w
Evidence, Criminal appeals 1144
Extortion, Terrorism 519w
Food surpluses, Expenditure 612w
Food surpluses, Intervention stocks 689w
Ford Motor Company, Industrial disputes 184
Forestry Commission, Ministerial duties 751-2w
House of Commons broadcasting, Television 183
Housing compensation 1146
Intelligence services 45w
Intelligence services, Australia 46w
Lychett Minster, Official engagements 134w
Manufacturing industries, Armed conflict 135w
Mental health services, NHS finance 822-3
Ministerial duties, Handicapped 45w
Ministers' correspondence, Disclosure of information 45w
Newbattle Abbey College, Finance 519w
NHS finance 45w, 183-4, 1145
Northern Ireland, Government departments 821
Nurses, Pay 1147-8
Nurses, Pay settlements 185-6
Official engagements 45w, 135w, 520w, 690w
Official engagements, Little Lowford 688w
Official engagements, RAF Lakenheath 688w
Official engagements, South Africa 46w
Official engagements, Trade unions 46w
Oldham Hospital, NHS finance 184-5
Pigmeat, Monetary compensatory amounts 820
Prime Minister's questions, NHS finance 182
Public corporations 415w
Public service pensions, Retail price index 688w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries 46w, 1146-7
School closures, Scotland 688w
Secretarial staff, Pay 134-5w
"Security & Counter Intelligence" 752w
Social security benefits, Retail price index 821-2, 1146
Stalker, John, Publishing 824
Teachers, Greater London 183
Teesside Development Corporation, Official engagements 518w
Transnuklear 519w
Trawsfynydd power station, Testing 416w
Unemployment 1148
Vacant land, Official engagements 688w
VAT 821
Waldheim, Kurt, Nazi war crimes 519-20w, 750w
Waldheim, Kurt, Public records 750w
Waldheim, Kurt, United Nations 750-1w
Wales, Official engagements 134w
West Dorset Health Authority, NHS administration 1147
Western European Union 183
Wolston, Official engagements 518w

Thelwall viaduct 454w

Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 529, 572-6
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 223-4, 236, 243-4
Questions
Armed conflict, Nuclear power stations 604w
Coal mining, Government grants 344w
Customs & Excise, Hazardous wastes 95w
Debts, Developing countries 332w
Electricite de France, Profitability 513w
Electricity supply industry, Privatisation 507-8w
Electricity supply industry, Security 684-5w
European Year of the Environment, Environment protection 523-4w
Foreign policy, Disclosure of information 291w
Hinkley Point B, Public inquiries 345w
House of Commons questions, Costs 295w
Japan, Nuclear fuels 530w

Japan, Nuclear power 57w
Lowry, David, Nuclear power 392w
Magnox reactors, Italy 589w
Nature Conservancy Council, Official engagements 128w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing 589-90w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing, Okg Aktiebolag 589w
Nuclear fuels 515-6w
Nuclear power, Television programmes 346w
Nuclear power stations, Air accidents 590w
Nuclear power stations, Environment protection 344-5w
Nuclear power stations, Ministers' domestic visits 589w
Nuclear power stations, Opinion polls 345w
Nuclear safety, Magnox reactors 345-6w
Plutonium, Nuclear safeguards 530w
Radioactive wastes, EC action 753w
Regional aid, Wales 3
Television licences, Pensioners 303w
Trawsfynydd power station, Testing 7
Turkey, Armoured fighting vehicles 236w
Universities Funding Council, Public appointments 217w
Welsh Arts Council, Official engagements 11

Thompson, Mr Donald, Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture
Questions
Agricultural chemicals, Easington 328w
Agricultural chemicals, Testing 237-8w
Agricultural land, Cereals 465-6w
Agricultural research, Radioactivity 62w
Agriculture, Agricultural research 464w
Animal feed, Health warnings 675w
Battery hens, Animal welfare 726w
Birds, Poisons 61w
Bovine somatotropin 156-7w
Bovine somatotropin, EC countries 678w
Bovine somatotropin, Licensing 678w
Bovine somatotropin, Testing 678w
Butter, Retail prices 676-7w
Cereals, Co-responsibility levy 329w
Cereals, EC countries 677w
Cereals, Intervention Board 586-8w
Dairy farming, Animal husbandry 237w
Dairy farming, Food inspection 328w
Farm rents 677w
Farmers, Manpower 464w
Fish farming, Chemicals 464w
Food contamination, Emergency planning 157w
Food labelling, EC action 727w
Food prices, Milk 725w
Gastropods, Pest control 724-5w
Intervention stocks 674-5w
Milk, Canada 157w
Milk, Exports 675-6w
Milk, Imports 677-8w
Milk, Milk Marketing Board 676w
Milk, Production 61w, 726w
Organic farming, Agricultural production 329w
Pesticides, Safety standards 329-30w
Pigs, Animal breeding 58-62w
Radioactivity, Agricultural research 465w
Radioactivity, Land pollution 465w
Rain, Radiation hazards 238w
Sexual harassment, Ministry of Agriculture 61w
Sheep, Slaughterhouses 156w
Sheep premiums, Judgments 330w
Wheat, Common farm prices 679w
Wheat, Intervention prices 680w
Wheat, Prices 726w
Wool, Guaranteed prices 328w

Thompson, Mr Jack
Debates etc.
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 151-3
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Official engagements 693
Electricity supply industry, France 62w
General Certificate of Secondary Education 575w

Thompson, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Rate Support Grant (England) Supplementary Reports (17:02:88) 1118-20
Questions
Hospital catering, Privatisation 173w
Inflation 331w
Minesweepers, Persian Gulf 758w
Telecommunications industry, Retail trade 339

Thorne, Mr Neil
Questions
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 41w

Thornton, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Passenger transport executives, Rate precepts (09:02:88) 309

Thrombosis
International conferences 783-5w

Thurnham, Mr Peter
Questions
Curriculum, Examinations 572w
Deaf, Telephone exchanges 781-2w
Energy consumption, Industry 513-4w
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 171
Interest rates 331w
Planning permission 660w
Police & Criminal Evidence Act 1984, Crime prevention 1142
Privatisation 487-8
Redundant churches, Church Commissioners 14-5
Special educational needs, Local education authorities 602-3w
Town & country planning 962

Thurrock
Official engagements 294w

Tobacco duties
Budget 419-20w

Toddingtons 501-2

Toll bridges
Erskine bridge 320w

Torture
Syrian Arab Republic 691w

Tourism
Angus 476w

Tourist industry
Cheshire 229-30w

Tower Hamlets
Departmental correspondence 437w

Tower Hamlets Borough Council
Immigration 710w

Town & country planning 659w, 962-3
Planning authorities 660w
Tax allowances (15:02:88) 719-54

Town & Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (Amendment No 2) Regulations 1987
Debates etc.
(16:02:88) 840

Townend, Mr John
Questions
Printing industry, Production 248w
Prison riots, Costs 1139-40
Productivity 495

Townsend Thoresen 42w

Tracey, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 196, 216, 220, 266-7
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1014, 1024, 1034, 1045-6

Trade agreements
EC action 715w

Trade barriers
EC internal trade 256w, 259w

Trade competitiveness 342

Trade union membership
Teachers 371w

Trade unions (08:02:88) 39-139, 353-4, (10:02:88) 371-452
Disclosure of information 305w
Official engagements 46w, 294w
Teachers 578w, 581w

Trading funds
Property Services Agency 967

Traffic forecasting 741-2w

Traffic wardens
Greater London 542-3w

Training (10:02:88) 371-452
Family doctors 284-6w
Ministerial statements (16:02:88) 825-38
Palestine Liberation Organisation 437w
Reading Borough Council 315-6w
Swimming 20-1w

Training allowances (10:02:88) 371-452, (16:02:88) 825-38
Sheffield 533w

Training Commission (10:02:88) 371-452

"Training for Employment White Paper" (16:02:88) 825-38

Trains
Railway stations 453-4w

Transnuklear 519w

Transport
Inquiries 747w
South East region 747w

Transport of hazardous materials
Radioactive wastes 286-7w

Transport of radioactive materials 225-6w
Air safety 23
Nuclear weapons 136w
Plutonium 590w
Road accidents 241w

Travelling expenses
Council for Licensed Conveyancers 366w
Interviews 283w

Trawsfynydd power station
Testing 7-8, 416w, 510w

Treasure trove 302w

Treasury
Higher civil servants 91w
Sexual harassment 92w

Treaties
Nuclear weapons 383-4w

Tree conservation 673w

Tree planting
Tax allowances 490-1

Trent Regional Health Authority
Medical malpractice 276-8w

Trespass
Railway land 357w

Trident
Atomic Weapons Research Establishment 537w
Defence contracts 239w
Defence procurement 239w

Trident submarines
Sea transport 448w
Shipping accidents 447-8w, 539w

Trippier, Mr David, Under-Secretary of State for the Environment
Questions
Chelsea Football Club, Planning inquiries 298w
Derelict land grants, Public expenditure 671w
Environment protection, Opencast mining 661w
Government assistance, Liverpool 969
Industrial development, Birmingham 969
Inner city areas, "Faith in the City" 962
Leeds-Bradford Airport, Public inquiries 31-2w, 132w
Local government land, Property transfer 659w
London Docklands, Building industry 126w
London Docklands Development Corporation 968
London Docklands Development Corporation, Resignations 127-8w
Nottingham Development Enterprise 968-9
Planning permission, Chelsea Football Club 962-3
Rural areas, Development Commission 288w
Town & country planning 962-3
UK 2000, Public expenditure 669-70w
Urban development corporations 665w
Urban development corporations, Bristol 666w
Urban development corporations, Government grants 666w
Urban development corporations, Inner city areas 968
Urban development corporations, Leeds 666w
Urban development corporations, Manchester 666w
Urban planning, Planning permission 961-2
Urban programme 129-31w
Urban programme, Leeds 673w
Urban regeneration grants 521w, 719-20w
Woolwich Polytechnic, Building repairs 753w

Tritium
Chapelcross power station 240w

Trotter, Mr Neville
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 528, 532, 543-8

Tale, Terry 236w

Tuition fees
Part-time education 216w

Turkey
Armoured fighting vehicles 236w, 317w
Arms exports 317-8w
Synthetic fibres 148-9w, 253w

Turner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Local Government Act 1985 (Police & Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1988 (08:02:88) 158
Questions
London Residuary Body, Offices 381w

Twinn, Dr Ian
Questions
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 171w
Manufacturing industries 337w

Tyre tread depths 410w, 551w
EC action 410w, 749w
Safety standards 749w

UDM see Union of Democratic Mineworkers

UGC see University Grants Committee

UK 2000
Private investment 669-70w
Public expenditure 669-70w

UK contributions to EC budget 152w, 387-8w, 648w

UK repayments from EC budget 567w, 648w

UKAEA see United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority

UN see United Nations

UN disarmament
Nuclear test ban 235w

Unemployed
Handicapped 281-2w
Mental illness 231-2w

Unemployment 1148
Balance of trade 349
Barrow in Furness 473w
Blyth valley 472w
Budget 342w
Cheshire 230-2w
Derbyshire 229w
Dundee 65-6w, 75w
Economic growth 336w
Handicapped 281-2w
Houghton 475w
Lincoln 474w
Newport 9
Northwich 471-2w
Preston 474-5w
Pwllheli 10
Scotland 75w
Stafford 473-4w
Sudbury 549-50w
Wales 3-4
Wales Railway Centre 12
York 471-2w

Unemployment benefits
Occupational pensions 191w
Scotland 471w
Social security benefits disqualification 183-4w, 696w

UNESCO
Arts 697-8

Unification Church 138-9w
Charities 42w, 125-6w, 416w
Christianity 42w

Uniform business rate 664w
Association of British Chambers of Commerce 664-5w
Confederation of British Industry 664-5w
Rate increases 457-8w

Union of Democratic Mineworkers
Official engagements 344w

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority 226w, 461-2w, 515-6w
Disclosure of information 240w
Finance 513-6w

United Nations 235w, 292w
Waldheim, Kurt 750-1w

Universities 580w, 810-1
Academic freedom 159-60w
Education Reform Bill 1987/88 49-50w
Research councils 581w
Scotland 576-8w
Student numbers 762-6w
Students 373-4w
Wales 580w

Universities Funding Council
Public appointments 217w
Scotland 579w

University College 537-8w

University College London Bill (HL) 1986/87
Debates etc.
3R* (08:02:88) 1
Royal assent (09:02:88) 169

University finance 431-2w, 582w, 810
Cash limits 767w
Extracurricular activities 372w
Scotland 576w, 809
Special educational needs 373w
University Grants Committee 311-2w

University Grants Committee 372-3w, 576w
University finance 311-2w

University of Wales 224w

Unpaid taxes 422w

Unparliamentary expressions
Speaker's rulings & statements (10:02:88) 402, (11:02:88) 499, (16:02:88) 835-6, 957-8, (17:02:88) 1102-3

Upminster 533-6w

Upper waiting hall
British Paediatric Association 264w

Urban areas
Shops 970

Urban development corporations 665w
Bristol 666w
Government grants 666w
Inner city areas 968
Leeds 666w
Manchester 666w
Telford 666w

Urban planning
Planning permission 961-2

Urban programme 129-31w
Bradford 673w
Leeds 673w

Urban regeneration grants 129-31w, 521w, 719-20w

Urgent case payments 696-7w

USA
Armed forces deployment 418w
Balance of trade 260w
Chemical weapons 448w
Defence 383-4w
Defence procurement 755w
Food & Agriculture Organisation 293w
Inter-American Development Bank 293w
Northern Ireland 426w
Politicians 85-6w
Prisoners 709-10w

USSR
British strategic nuclear force 822
Chernobilsky, Boris 149w
Foreign relations 424w

Vacancies
Derbyshire 229w
Dundee 540-2w
Northwich 313-4w

Vacant land
Official engagements 688w

Vaccination 623w
Wales 77-80w

Vale Royal
Empty housing 297w

Valleys initiative 6
Ogwr valley 10

VAT 821
Armed forces 770w
Confectionery 231w, 343w, 568w
Global Communication 770w
Harvest Chewy bars 343w
Newspaper press 496
Tax allowances 770w
Tax harmonisation 770w

VAT zero rated goods
European Court of Justice 332-3w
Hospital radio 342w

Vaz, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 851, 854, 857-9, 862, 879, 891, 903-8
Questions
Arts, Pensioners 467w
Arts Council grants, Ethnic minorities 769w
Banks, Developing countries 152w
Departmental correspondence, Tower Hamlets 437w
Education Reform Bill 1987/88, Leicestershire 573w
Genetics, Blood tests 362w
Home Office, Members 37-8w
Hospital beds, Leicestershire Health Authority 196-8w
Immigration, Members 1135-6
Immigration, Tower Hamlets Borough Council 710w
Immigration & Nationality Division, Administrative delays 136w
Immigration & Nationality Division, Civil service manpower 137w
Immigration & Nationality Division, Languages 543w
Immigration & Nationality Division, Overtime 543-4w
Leicester, Home Office 437w
Ministers' visits abroad, Costs 215w
Nurses, Leicestershire Health Authority 203w
Nurses, Pay 340w
Police stations 37-8w
Temporary immigrants, Immigration applications 137w

Vehicles
Lighting 410w

Vellmdre Hospital 518w

Veterinary drugs
Licensing 678-9w

Veterinary services
Scotland 221-2w

Video equipment
Production 531w, 610w

Viggers, Mr Peter, Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Questions
Bray District Council, Contracts 166w
Electricity supply industry, Credit agreements 750w
Electricity supply industry, Northern Ireland 592-3w, 750w
Employment discrimination, Appeals 440-2w
Employment discrimination, Northern Ireland 674w
Fair Employment Agency for Northern Ireland 594-6w
Fair Employment Commission, Northern Ireland 749w
Fisheries, Ardglass 749-50w
Handicapped, Northern Ireland 281-3w
Interviews, Northern Ireland 283w
Ministers' visits abroad, West Germany 164w
Rural areas, Northern Ireland 592w
Salmon, Fishery protection 325-6w

Village schools 819

Visas
Immigration applications 140w
Philippines 303-4w

Visual arts
Prisons 568w

Voluntary organisations
Ambulance services 413w
Film 500
Northern Ireland 590-1w
Retail price index 266w
Social security benefits 266w
Social services finance 180w

Voluntary redundancy
Nurses 480w

Voluntary unemployment 696w

Voting rights
Community charges register 823-4

Waddington, Rt Hon David, Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (17:02:88) 1073

Wages Inspectorate 470w
Northunnel 74w

Waiting lists
Ophthalmic services 463w

Wakefield District Council
Housing benefits 347w

Wakefield Health Authority
Hospital catering 180w

Wakeham, Rt Hon John, Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1157-68
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 204-8
Questions
Access to Parliament 449-50w
Advertising, Expenditure 295w
Anglo-Irish Agreement 499-500
Business statements 503-18
Channel tunnel, Investment 502
Civil service, Inquiries 294w
Civil service, Prime Minister's Efficiency Unit 294-5w
Common agricultural policy 498-9
Death, Northern Ireland 500
European Council, EC budget 294w
Film, Voluntary organisations 500
House of Commons, Industrial health & safety 772w
House of Commons catering, Artificial sweeteners 727w
House of Commons catering, Non-alcoholic drinks 517w
House of Commons Library, Procurement 17
House of Commons Library, "Spycatcher" 17-8
House of Commons questions, Costs 295w
Intelligence services, National security 500
Leader of the Opposition, Pay 657-8w
Members' pensions, Employers' contributions 658w
Nurses 500-1
Official engagements 294w
Official engagements, Basingstoke 293w
Official engagements, East Stow 294w
Official engagements, Thurrock 294w
Official engagements, Trade unions 294w
Official Report 58w
Opposition parties, Public expenditure 657w
Palace of Westminster, Energy conservation 58w
Prime Minister's Efficiency Unit 295w
Private rented housing, Landlord & tenant 501-2
Privy Council, Periodicals 58w
Royal ordnance factories, Privatisation 498
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Inquiries 499, 502
St Mary's Hospital Manchester, Hospital closures 501
Sporting events, Hooliganism 501

Waldegrave, Mr William, Minister of State for the Environment (Housing & Planning)
Debates etc.
Council house sales, Lambeth (19:02:88) 1327-30
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1281, 1316-20
Questions
Asbestos, Housing estates 755w
Council house rents, Middlesbrough Borough Council 974
Council house rents, Oldham 974
Council house rents, Rent arrears 973
Council house sales, Discounts 462w
Council house sales, Right to buy 296w
Council housing 974-5
Council housing, Housing improvement 527w
Defective housing, House renovation grants 667w
Defective housing, Local government expenditure 667-8w
Exhaust emissions 381w
Furs, Farms 297w
Greenbelt, Departmental circulars 285w
Greenbelt, Eddisbury 672w
Greenbelt, Hertfordshire 21w
Homelessness, Mortgage defaulters 660-1w
Homelessness, Young people 658-9w
House renovation grants, Flats 673-4w
Housing 964
Housing action trusts, Departmental publications 670w
Housing associations 966
Housing associations, House purchase 668w, 672w
Housing Corporation, Cash limits 298-9w
Housing Corporation, Official engagements 966
Housing improvement, Estate Action 662w
Housing subsidies, Rent increases 527w
Housing tenure 963-4
Hypermarkets 970
Hypermarkets, Greenbelt 970
Hypermarkets, Planning inquiries 969-70
Land Registry Office 964
Local authorities 974
Middlesbrough Borough Council 974
Owner occupied housing, House purchase 963
Peak Park Joint Planning Board, Public appointments 662w
Planning appeals 455w, 662w
Planning appeals, Administrative delays 288w, 719w
Planning appeals, Planning authorities 660w
Planning appeals, Worthing Borough Council 19-20w
Planning permission 660w
Planning permission, Administrative delays 669w
Planning permission, Farm buildings 662w
Planning permission, Illuminated signs 21w
Planning permission, Property development 660w
Rent arrears 667w
Shared ownership schemes 973
Shared ownership schemes, Council housing 973
Shops, Urban areas 970
Structure plans, Berkshire 668w
Town & country planning 659w

Town & country planning, Planning authorities 660w
Westminster pier, Planning permission 670w

Walden, Mr George
Debates etc.
Inner London Education Authority (10:02:88) 467-9, 471, (17:02:88) 1067

Waldheim, Kurt
Nazi war crimes 519-20w, 750w
Public records 750w
United Nations 750-1w

Wales
Accident & emergency departments 123w
AIDS 79-80w
Arts 11
Board & lodging charges 113w
Bus services 77w
Bypasses 77w
Cervical cancer 12
Civil service dispersal 10-1
Coal mining 4
Common agricultural policy 16
Community charge 13
Community health services 518w
Congenital abnormalities 463w
Craft industries 11, 517w
Dentistry 464w
Economic situation 4-5
Education 745w
Employment 81w
Employment opportunities 597w
European Assembly constituencies 768w
European Regional Development Fund 75-6w
Family doctors 123w
Government assistance to industry 18-9
Health insurance 318-9w
Homelessness 120-4w
Hospital beds 18
Hospital catering 123-4w
Hospital waiting lists 15, 81w, 123-4w
Multiple occupation 8-9
NHS 18, 223-4w
NHS administration 11-2
NHS charges 745-6w
NHS finance 19-20
Obstetrics 79w
Official engagements 134w
Ophthalmic services 463w
Personal social services 223-4w
Pharmacies 598w
Pigmeat 463w
Private health services 318-9w
Private investment 3
Public appointments 597-600w
Public expenditure 319w
Regional aid 1-3, 6, 352, 686-7w
Regional development grants 75-6w, 363-4w
Regional selective assistance 76-7w, 517w
Relocation of employees 76-7w
Residential care 686w
Road works 119-20w
School meals 6-7
Screening 75w
Speech therapy 518w
Sports facilities 15-6
Structure plans 598w
Student numbers 766w
Teacher training 224w
Unemployment 3-4
Universities 580w
Vaccination 77-80w
Water (12:02:88) 677
Wind power 689

Wales Railway Centre
Unemployment 12

Walker, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 525, 539, 576-80, 588, 591-2
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1289-90, 1305, 1308-10, 1314
Questions
Caravans, Parking offences 539w
Crime, Tayside 650w
Crime prevention, Tayside 732w
Dunkeld Cathedral, Bellringing 650w
EC grants & loans, Angus 476w
Employment opportunities, North Angus 728w
Housing construction, Angus 649w
Housing construction, Perth 649w
Metropolitan Police 1144
Multiple occupation, Fire escapes 321-2w
Procurators fiscal, Sexual offences 321-2w
Tayside Health Board, Health service staff 370-1w
Tourism, Angus 476w

Walker, Rt Hon Peter, Secretary of State for Wales
Questions
Abernant Colliery, Coal mine closures 9
British Coal Corporation, Official engagements 20
Civil service dispersal, Wales 10-1
Coal mine closures, South Wales 5-6
Coal mining, Wales 4
Common agricultural policy, Wales 16
Craft industries, Wales 11, 517w
Economic situation, Wales 4-5
Employment, Wales 81w
Employment opportunities, Wales 597w
European Regional Development Fund, Wales 76w
Manufacturing industries, Government assistance to industry 18-9
Margam mine 10
NHS finance, Wales 19-20
Pigmeat, Wales 463w
Private investment, Wales 3
Public appointments, Wales 597-600w
Public expenditure, Wales 319w
Regional aid, Wales 1-3, 686-7w
Regional development grants, Wales 75-6w, 363-4w
Regional selective assistance, Wales 76-7w, 517w
Severn bridge, Construction 10, 20
South Wales, Government assistance 5
Trawsfynydd power station, Testing 7-8
Unemployment, Newport 9
Unemployment, Pwllheli 10
Unemployment, Wales 3-4
Valleys initiative 6
Valleys initiative, Ogwr valley 10
Wales Railway Centre 12
Wales Railway Centre, Unemployment 12
Welsh Grand Committee, Press conferences 746w
WINwest 363-4w

Wall, Mr Pat
Debates etc.
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 359
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 914-7
Standing Order No 20 applications (10:02:88) 366
Questions
Handicapped, Discrimination 188-9w
Skuse, Frank 701w

Wallace, Colin 41w, 83w
Information 41w

Wallace, Mr James
Debates etc.
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 217-22, 233
Questions
Balance of payments 335w
Exercise Teamwork 88, Amphibious vehicles 239w
Leader of the Opposition, Pay 657-8w
Opposition parties, Public expenditure 657w
Opposition Whips' Office, Civil service manpower 649w
Rate support grants, Scotland 731w
Regional aid, European Regional Development Fund 253w
Social Security Act 1986 179w
Trident, Defence contracts 239w
Trident, Defence procurement 239w

Waller, Mr Gary
Debates etc.
Passenger transport executives, Rate precepts (09:02:88) 297-9, 302
Questions
M62, Road construction 748w

Walley, Ms Joan
Debates etc.
Birmingham Children's Hospital (16:02:88) 839-40
Birmingham Children's Hospital, Standing Order No 20 applications (11:02:88) 519-20
Questions
Birmingham Children's Hospital, Heart diseases 497-8w, 700-1w
Dental charges, Dental health 181-2
Driving tests 411-2w
Electricity tariffs, Employment 470w
Electricity tariffs, Industry 507w
Food hygiene, Local authorities 622w
Water, Infant foods 571-2w
Water supply, Nitrates 127-8w

War crimes
Inquiries 304w

War Crimes Inquiry (08:02:88) 28-36, 304w

War Widows' Association of Great Britain 494-5w

War widows' pensions
Age allowances 494-5w

Ward, Mr John
Questions
Charities, Law reform 707-8w
Concessionary television licences, Pensioners 1142
Inflation 331w
M3-M27 link, Public inquiries 356w
Winchester bypass, Road accidents 356w

Wardell, Mr Gareth
Questions
AIDS, Contraceptives 557-8w
Caravan sites, Local authorities 458-60w
Community health services, Wales 518w
Hospital waiting lists, Cervical cancer 518w
Industrial health & safety 232w
Medical research, Analgesics 631-2w
Mental patients, Money 272w
Nature reserves, Land ownership & tenure 24-32w
Neonatal mortality, Intensive care 558w
Obstetrics, Wales 79w
Vaccination 623w
Vaccination, Wales 77-80w
Water supply industry, Sewers 459-61w

Wardle, Mr Charles
Debates etc.
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1274, 1294-7

Warning, Mr Robert N
Debates etc.
Passenger transport executives, Rate precepts (09:02:88) 318-20
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1237
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1195-6
Questions
Agency nurses, Merseyside 205w
Death, Elderly 697w
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 180
Health service staff, Liverpool Health Authority 354-6w
Health services finance, EC countries 204-6w

National Health Service Royal Commission 214w
NHS finance 176w
Nurses, Mersey Regional Health Authority 204w
Radiotherapy 782-4w
Social security benefits, Retail price index 779-80w

Warren, Mr Kenneth
Questions
Air safety 23

Warships
Overseas aid 32w

Waste disposal
Channel tunnel 741w
Dawdon 133w
Dawdon Colliery 237w
Durham 585-6w
Hazardous wastes 297w
Litter 666w
West Midlands 297w
West Yorkshire 296w

Water
Infant foods 571-2w
Wales (12:02:88) 677

"Water & Sewerage Law Consultation Paper" 459-61w

Water authorities
External financing limits 752-3w
Official engagements 296w, 669w
Water pollution 669w

Water charges 128w
Water pollution 288w
Water supply 288w
Welsh Water Authority (12:02:88) 677

Water pollution
EC law 380-1w
Southern Water Authority 379-80w
Water authorities 669w
Water charges 288w
Yorkshire Water Authority 379-80w

Water safety
Schools 158w

Water supply
Bradford 127w
Edinburgh 540w
Lead 540w
Nitrates 127-8w
Stoke-on-Trent 127-8w
Water charges 288w

Water supply disconnections 288w

Water supply industry
Privatisation 461w
Sewers 459-61w

Watts, Mr John
Debates etc.
Training (16:02:88) 833
Questions
Confederation of British Industry, Official engagements 338w
Hospital patients, Per capita costs 487w

WDA see Welsh Development Agency

Welfare milk
Dundee 65w

Welfare of Battery Hens Regulations 1987
Questions
726w

Wells, Mr Bowen
Debates etc.
Business statements (18:02:88) 1160
Hong Kong (10:02:88) 363-4
Questions
Business statements 510
Economic situation, Shares 647w
Examinations, Age 817
Retail trade 442w

Welsh, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 66-7
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 387
Self-employed (15:02:88) 719, 737, 746-8
Questions
Air safety, Transport of radioactive materials 23
Economic League, Employment schemes 415w
Economic League, Nationalised industries 415w
Extracurricular activities, University finance 372w
Languages education, Scotland 367-8w, 477w
Legal aid, Scotland 477w
Medical students, Parental contributions 372w
Medical students, Student grants 372w
Regional development grants, Scotland 483w
Social security payments, Retail price index 494w
Student grants, Index linking 372w, 475-6w
University finance, Special educational needs 373w

Welsh Arts Council
Official engagements 11

Welsh Development Agency 363-4w, 686-7w

Welsh Grand Committee
Press conferences 746w

Welsh language
Prisoners 701w

Welsh Office 11

Welsh Water Authority
Water charges (12:02:88) 677

Wessex Regional Health Authority 109w

West Bank
Textiles 377-8w

West Berlin 538-9w

West Dorset Health Authority
NHS administration 1147

West Germany
European fighter aircraft 84w
Ministers' visits abroad 164w
Research finance 582w

West Glamorgan
Industrial accidents 74w

West Mercia Police
Manpower 709w

West Midlands
"DTI the Department for Enterprise White Paper" 253w
Hospitals 628-9
Waste disposal 297w

West Yorkshire
Police 1134
Rain 238w
Waste disposal 296w

West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive
Rate precepts (09:02:88) 287-307

Western Europe
Nuclear weapons deployment 538w

Western European Union 183
NATO 424w
Persian Gulf 423w

Westminster Children's Hospital
Burglary 781w

Westminster pier
Planning permission 670w

WEU see Western European Union

Wheat
Common farm prices 679-80w
Intervention prices 680w
Prices 726w

Wheelchairs
Handicapped 290w

Wheeler, Mr John
Debates etc.
Nazi war crimes (08:02:88) 30
Questions
Health services finance, Health insurance 263-4w
Metropolitan Police, Expenditure 547w
Prescriptions, Costs 622-3w

White fronted geese
Islay 72-3w

Whitlam, Gough 46w

Whitmore, Clive 384-6w

Whitney, Mr Ray
Questions
Health services finance, OECD countries 179

Whooping cough 77-80w, 623w

Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Questions
Abortion, Hospitals 191-2w
Tax & price index 331w

Wigley, Mr Dafydd
Debates etc.
European Council (15:02:88) 713
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1171
Questions
Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, Defence research 82-3w
Board & lodging charges, Social security recipients 113w
Cervical cancer, Wales 12
Defence research, Educational institutions 82w
Firearms 38w
Further education colleges 217w
Handicap benefits, Social security reform 171-2
Homelessness, Wales 120-4w
Innovation, Government assistance to industry 260w
Local authority powers, Handicapped 290w
NHS finance, Wales 19-20
Official engagements 135w, 520w, 690w
Prisoners, Welsh language 701w
Residential care, Local government staff 696w
Residential care, Scotland 729-30w
Residential care, Wales 6886w
Science & technology research, Loughborough University 32-3w
Science & technology research, York University 32w
Social security reform 180-1
Speech therapy, Wales 518w
Unemployment, Pwllheli 10
Water authorities, Official engagements 296w

Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981
Questions
379w

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Questions
Congenital abnormalities, Heart diseases 463w
Dental charges, Wales 464w
Ophthalmic services, Waiting lists 463w
Public appointments, Wales 597-600w
Public expenditure, Wales 319w

Regional aid, Wales 3, 686-7w
Regional development grants, Wales 363w
Valleys initiative 6

Williams, Mr Alan W
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 565-8
Coal mine closures, Abernant Colliery (18:02:88) 1255-6
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 792-3
Questions
Fast reactors, Science & technology research 507w
Trawsfynydd power station, Testing 7

Wilshire, Mr David
Debates etc.
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1242
Questions
Charities, Legislation 138-9w
Heathrow Airport, Air traffic 453w
Unification Church, Charities 42w, 125-6w, 416w
Unification Church, Christianity 42w

Wilson, Mr Brian
Debates etc.
Air force (11:02:88) 529, 557-60, 593-4
House of Commons broadcasting, Television (09:02:88) 259
Housing (Houses in Multiple Occupation) Bill, 2R order read (12:02:88) 675
Questions
Business statements 515-6
Channel ferries, Hazardous wastes 5w
Fish farming, Chemicals 464w
Hazardous wastes, Import licensing 24w
Hazardous wastes, Imports 24w
Health services finance, EC countries 174w
Herald of Free Enterprise, Freight transport 4-5w
Herald of Free Enterprise, Hazardous wastes 42w, 57w
HMS Resolution, Naval Emergency Monitoring Organisation 756w
HMS Resolution, Nuclear submarines 756w
HMS Resolution, Radiation hazards 756-7w
Naval bases, River Clyde 737w
Nuclear submarines, River Clyde 737w
Tax allowances, Forestry 339w

Winchester bypass
Road accidents 356w

Wind power
Government assistance 689
Liberal Party 689
Wales 689

"Windshielding on the Dartford Bridge" 616w

Winnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
Birmingham Children's Hospital (16:02:88) 840
Birmingham Children's Hospital, Standing Order No 20 applications (11:02:88) 521-2
Business statements (18:02:88) 1162
Employment Bill, Rep (08:02:88) 41, 89-91, 125-7, 132
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 375-7, 385
Immigration Bill, Rep & 3R (16:02:88) 869-70, 878-9, 884, 890
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1173-4, 1176, 1180, 1182
Questions
Business statements 513-4
Community charge 976
NHS 174

Winter Warmth Line
Advisory services 170

Winterton, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (15:02:88) 784-5

Winterton, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Education Reform Bill, Allocation of time motion & Money res (17:02:88) 1099
Patent Office, Civil service dispersal (17:02:88) 1122-6, 1130
Questions
NHS 178
Paper industry, Patent Office 345
Patent Office 145-6w

WINvest 363-4w

Wise, Mrs Audrey
Debates etc.
Social Fund regulations (18:02:88) 1186, 1196-7
Questions
Miscarriages of justice, Court of appeal 705w

Wise, Claire (11:02:88) 519-20

Wolfson, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Rural areas (19:02:88) 1282, 1284-8, 1315

Wolston
Official engagements 518w

Wolverhampton
City technology colleges 574w

Women
Abseiling 131w
Average earnings 716-8w
Cancer 773w
Cervical cancer 773w
Employment by sector 733w
Pensions 625-6w
Retirement age 625-6w

Women's employment 718w
Scotland 733w

Wood, Mr Timothy
Debates etc.
High technology, Science & technology research (19:02:88) 1321-2
Questions
Pay, Married men 332w

Wool
Guaranteed prices 328w

Woolwich Polytechnic
Building repairs 753w

Work permits
Law reform 712w

Wormwood Scrubs
Prison medical services 302w

Worth house
Inquiries 494w

Worthing Borough Council
Planning appeals 19-20w

Worthington, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, Rep & 3R (10:02:88) 427-31, 436
Questions
Capital investment, Scotland 143-4w
Care proceedings, Scotland 143w
Child Care Law in Scotland Review Group 143w
Crime prevention 1143
Housing finance, Scotland 144w
Public expenditure 341w
Scottish Development Agency, Clydebank 480w

Wray, Mr Jimmy
Questions
Average earnings 716w
Average earnings, Manufacturing industries 232-4w
Average earnings, Women 716-8w
Cancer, Scotland 773w
Cervical cancer, Scotland 772-3w
Cervical cancer, Women 773w
Employment by sector, Scotland 733-4w
Food & Agriculture Organisation, USA 293w
General Certificate of Secondary Education, Examinations 163w
Manufacturing industries, Productivity 262-4w
Neonatal mortality, Scottish health boards 650-1w
Nicaragua, Overseas aid 428w
Women's employment 718w
Women's employment, Scotland 733w

Written questions
Knowles, Michael 767w
Speaker's rulings & statements (09:02:88) 188

Wylfa power station
Nuclear power stations 510w

Yeo, Mr Tim
Questions
AIDS Monitoring & Surveillance Committee 167w
Competition 254w
Empty housing, Duchy of Lancaster 33w
Inner London Education Authority 575w
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 703w, 705w
Profitability 330w
Public Accounts Commission, Expenditure 44w

York
Regional aid 534w
Unemployment 471-2w

York City Council Bill (HL) 1985/86
Debates etc.
2R order read (11:02:88) 485, (18:02:88) 1131

York District Hospital
Costs 190w

York University
Science & technology research 32w

Yorkshire Regional Health Authority
Costs 190w

Yorkshire Water Authority
Water pollution 379-80w

Young, Sir George
Debates etc.
Rate Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Rates) Order 1988 (18:02:88) 1220-3

Young offenders
Prison population 71w
Tayside 479w

Young people
Alcoholic drinks 37w, 710-1w
Community charge rebates 622w
Further education 46w
Homelessness 658-9w
Police custody 434-5w
Social security benefits 189-90w
Social security recipients 115w
Talkabout service (09:02:88) 329-36

Younger, Rt Hon George, Secretary of State for Defence
Questions
D notices 384-6w

Youth custody
Alternatives to prison 709w

Youth employment
Cheshire 231w

Youth employment schemes
Northern Ireland 717-8w
Republic of Ireland 717-8w

Youth training scheme 317w
Armed forces 735w
Deaf 717w
Dept of Employment 470w
Dundee 478-9w
Scotland 479w